

Dialect in Contemporary Scottish and Irish Fiction

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Abstract

There has to date been no attempt at a detailed comparative study of contemporary Irish and Scottish literature: this thesis constitutes an attempt to do so. Specifically, it looks at the significance of the dialect novel in writing after 1979. My claim is that the dialect novel must be read in terms of the crisis facing working-class communities at the end of the twentieth century. Despite certain attempts to declare class a redundant critical category, I argue that it is fundamental to our understanding of contemporary Irish and Scottish culture.

Chapter one traces the emergence of Irish-Scottish studies as an interdisciplinary field within the humanities. It also outlines the political and theoretical challenges confronting Marxism at the end of the twentieth century. Here I will introduce the work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Throughout this thesis Gramsci's ideas will underpin the discussion of specific literary texts. Chapter two looks at Scotland and the work of James Kelman. It examines attempts by nationalist critics to locate Kelman's work within the so-called 'Renaissance' of contemporary Scottish literature. Against this, I argue that Kelman's use of dialect belongs fundamentally to a class based politics, one that compels us to reconsider questions of nationalism. Chapter three looks at the Republic of Ireland and the work of Roddy Doyle. Focusing in *The Commitments* (1987) it examines the novel's contentious claim that the working-class are the niggers of Ireland. The conflation of class and race will be examined in detail. This is particularly relevant in light of James Kelman's coincidental insistence that his own work is part of a literature of de-colonisation. This issue forms a conduit to re-considering the Irish postcolonial debate that arose during the 1990s. Chapter four examines the wholly neglected issue of class within the post '69 conflict in Northern Ireland. It focuses on the role of dialect in Frances Molloy's *No Mate for the Magpie* (1985) and John Boyd's *Out of my Class* (1985). I argue that socio-economic roots of the Troubles have been systematically elided from mainstream perceptions of the North. Chapter five considers all three regions in a more concentrated form of analysis. It focuses on the critical endorsement of Richard Kearney's concept of postnationalism and the postmodern theory upon which it is predicated. Although popular among both Scottish and Irish critics, I contend that this is essentially a misguided critical enterprise. Postmodernism is read in terms of the enthronement of late capitalist values, producing a cultural discourse that reconfigures rather than redresses underlying issues of social inequality.

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I hereby declare that the following dissertation represents my own original work. It is the result of my own research and I have clearly cited all sources.

Matthew McGuire
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List of Abbreviations

James Kelman

D *A Disaffection*
BH *The Busconductor Hines*
HL *How Late it Was, How Late*
YH *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free*

Roddy Doyle

C *The Commitments*
S *The Snapper*
V *The Van*

Frances Molloy

NMM *No Mate for the Magpie*

John Boyd

OMC *Out of my Class*

John Morrow

N *Northern Myths*

Robert McLiam Wilson

RB *Ripley Bogle*
ES *Eureka Street*

Chapter One

Class Dismissed?

Literature is necessary to politics when it gives a voice to whatever is without a voice [...] especially to what the language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude.

- Italo Calvino, *The Literature Machine*¹

To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life.

- Ludwig Wittgenstein²

Every time the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national popular mass, in other words to reorganize the cultural hegemony.

- Antonio Gramsci³

¹ Italo Calvino, *The Literature Machine*, Paul Creagh, trans (London: Picador, 1992), 98.

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 80.

³ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, George Forgas and Geoffrey Nowell, trans and ed (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), 183-4.

The Rise of Irish-Scottish Studies

For centuries, there has been a constant flow of traffic between Scotland and Ireland. The water highways of pre-modern times united the two lands in the ancient kingdom of Dál Riata. Today, this shared history is celebrated annually through the Celtic Connections folk festival in Glasgow. In Glasgow we witness another aspect of the Irish-Scottish connection when every other Saturday, 50,000 Celtic fans sing ‘The Fields of Athenry’ on the terraces of Parkhead. Importantly though, the traffic has not all been one way. Irish history would be unrecognizable were it not for the plantation of Scots Presbyterians during the seventeenth century, or we might add, the influence of the Edinburgh-born socialist James Connolly. In this context, Edinburgh’s Hibernian F.C., who coincidentally play their games at Easter Road, call to mind another important cross-current. If Connolly and the game of football have certain symbolic class connotations, then this signals both the interest and intent of much of what follows.

As literary critics, Ireland and Scotland present us with no shortage of contact points either. In *The New Penguin Book of Scottish Verse* (2000) the very first poem is by an Irishman, St Columba (521-597).⁴ In more modern times, Ireland and Scotland have intermittently looked to one another in search of cultural and political inspiration. Yeats would invoke the most iconic of all Scottish poets when he praised Synge as, ‘truly a National writer, as Burns was when he wrote finely.’⁵ For Hugh MacDiarmid it was the cultural politics of the Irish Revival that underpinned the project of the 1920s Scottish Renaissance: ‘Scots steel tempered wi’ Irish fire, / is the weapon that I desire.’⁶ That other lasting voice of Scottish modernism, Edwin Muir, would conclude his condemnation of Scottish literature, *Scott and Scotland* (1936), by evoking Yeats as an example of what a truly national literature might achieve:

Irish nationality cannot be said to be any less intense than ours; but Ireland produced a national literature not by clinging to Irish dialect, but by adopting English and making it into a language fit for all its purposes. The poetry of Mr

⁴ Robert Crawford and Mick Imlah, eds, *The New Penguin Book of Scottish Verse* (London: Penguin, 2000), 2.

⁵ W.B. Yeats, *Explorations* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1962), 157.

⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Cathcart, 1993), 263.

Yeats belongs to English literature, but no one would deny that it belongs to Irish literature pre-eminently and essentially.⁷

More than just a critical precedent for this form of comparative analysis, it is Muir's concern with the politics of language that signals the specific direction of the following discussion.

Significantly, the Irish-Scottish context has not just been a point of interest for the iconic figures of literary modernism. In recent years, one of the most significant developments in the humanities has been renewed interest in the historical and cultural imbrication of both regions. The validity of attempting to make Irish-Scottish comparisons is explained by Ray Ryan and Liam McIlvanney:

As well being connected by patterns of migration, there have often been strong parallels and affinities in the historical experience of the two countries. Both are small nations involved in a frequently tense relationship with a much larger neighbour – England. Both societies have been defined by politico-cultural struggles between nationalism and unionism. Both have experience of religious sectarianism. Both societies have been shaped by large scale emigration. Both nations contain very strong and diverse religious identities. They share languages – not just Irish and Scottish Gaelic [...] but Scots and Ulster-Scots – and a common inheritance of traditional music, song and folklore.⁸

As a foundation for comparative analysis, these affinities offer us a number of meaningful points of contact. However, while similarities are significant, the following thesis will maintain that differences and discontinuities provide equally valid insight into each politico-cultural region. In light of this abundance of points of contact, it is necessary that we delineate our own specific interest. The constant thread running throughout this thesis is the contemporary dialect novel. For political/ideological reasons, which will be explained below, 'contemporary' refers to fiction written after 1979. Through scrutinizing the use of dialect in the work of James Kelman, Roddy Doyle and Frances Molloy, our aim is to trace how narratives of class have been

⁷ Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland: the predicament of the Scottish writer* (Edinburgh, Polygon, 1982), 111.

⁸ Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan, eds, *Ireland and Scotland: culture and society, 1700-2000* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 15.

reconfigured in Scotland, the Republic and the North of Ireland. Irish-Scottish Studies presents us with a unique opportunity to deconstruct the theoretical paradigms that have previously dominated both disciplines – what McIlvanney and Ryan refer to as ‘the politico-cultural struggles between nationalism and unionism’. Luke Gibbons explains:

Another way of negotiating identity through an exchange with the other is to make provision, not just for ‘vertical’ mobility from the periphery to the centre, but for ‘lateral’ journeys along the margins which short-circuit the colonial divide. [...] where there are borders to be crossed, unapproved roads might prove more beneficial in the long run than those patrolled by global powers.⁹

The central theme of this thesis, dialect and the politics of class, is an attempt to map one such unapproved road. This road is ‘unapproved’ in a double sense. Firstly, as Gibbons argues, in terms of redrawing the familiar postcolonial paradigms predicated on familiar core-periphery models of cultural encounter. And secondly with respect to recent assertions that Marxism is an inadequate critical discourse with which to explore the cultural politics of contemporary society.

Within the academy, there has been a concerted attempt to establish the field of Irish-Scottish Studies. 1995 witnessed the founding of the Irish Scottish Academic Initiative (ISAI), bringing together the University of Aberdeen, Strathclyde and Trinity College Dublin, with Queen’s University Belfast and Edinburgh joining in 1999 and 2002 respectively. ISAI’s purpose was, ‘to develop research in certain key areas; Irish and Scottish history; Irish literature in English and Scottish literature; and Irish and Scots Gaelic language and literature.’¹⁰ One of the most discernible effects has been a bi-annual series of conferences drawing together academics from a wide range of disciplines within Irish and Scottish Studies.¹¹ The dramatic level of funding this initiative

⁹ Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 180.

¹⁰ *Irish Scottish Academic Initiative*, The University of Aberdeen, 11 July 2006. <<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/isai/aims.html>>

¹¹ The proceedings from each of these conferences are available: T.M. Devine and J.F. McMillan, eds, *Celebrating Columba: Irish-Scottish connections, 597-1997* (Clo Ollscoil na Bariona: Belfast, 1997); Sean Duffy, Cathal O Hainle and Ian Campbell Ross, eds,

subsequently received is worth considering. In 1999 the Irish Government gave £400,000, its largest ever award in the humanities, to Trinity College Dublin to fund research in Irish-Scottish Studies. The same year, the University of Aberdeen established the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies (RIISS). The AHRB gave its enthusiastic endorsement of this enterprise to the tune of £870,000 in 2000, and then its largest ever single award, £1.34 million in 2005. As Willy Maley states: ‘what is evident from these institutional awards and innovations is that Irish-Scottish Studies has officially arrived as a new (inter)discipline.’¹²

Behind the headlines such sums of money inevitably generate, the actual research fostered by this investment deserves closer scrutiny. The mission statement of RIISS in Aberdeen declares:

It is a truism that Ireland and Scotland share much history in common. From earliest times the two countries united by the sea formed a single cultural, religious, linguistic and economic zone.¹³

As yet though, it is primarily the historic and linguistic rather than the cultural aspects of the connection that have received sustained critical attention. Historical research has built on earlier comparative studies which pre-date the renewed interest of the 1990s.¹⁴ An ability to trace patterns of migration, trade and economic development makes such historical comparisons relatively intuitive. A similar argument could be made in terms of linguistic studies. The presence of Gaelic in both countries, along with the recent interest in Ulster-Scots (more of which later), makes an obvious case for comparative forms of

Ireland and Scotland ? nation, region, identity: A record of the TCD conference September 2000 (Dublin: A. & A. Farmar, 2001); Eamon Hughes, Edna Longley and Des O’Rawe, eds, *Ireland (Ulster) Scotland: Concepts, Contexts, Comparisons* (Clo Ollscoil na Barrionna: Belfast, 2003).

¹² Willy Maley, ‘Ireland, versus, Scotland: crossing the (English) language barrier’, in Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth, eds, *Acorss the Margins: cultural identity and change in the Atlantic Archipelago* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 13-30, 13.

¹³ The University of Aberdeen, *The Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies*, 1 December 2005. <<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/context.shtml>>

¹⁴ See for example, T.M. Devine and David Dickinson, eds, *Ireland and Scotland 1600-1850* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983).

analysis.¹⁵ In contrast the cultural, and more specifically literary, cross-currents have yet to receive the same degree of critical examination. In part, of course, this reflects the embryonic nature of Irish-Scottish Studies as a formal discipline. Research inevitably operates at a time lag with respect to funding initiatives. Despite such caveats, a survey of the literary debate as it currently stands will help to contextualize our own discussion of dialect and class. It will help to illustrate why this topic makes a significant and necessary intervention in the field of Irish and Scottish Studies.

In 1999, the founder of RIISS at Aberdeen, Tom Devine observed: ‘such hugely important issues as religion, popular culture, politics, identity and emigration still await detailed comparative examination.’¹⁶ Almost seven years on, whilst politics and emigration have received a degree of attention, popular culture and literature remain wholly underdeveloped. In terms of literature, there simply isn’t a truly comparative body of research being conducted under the auspices of Irish-Scottish Studies. A closer look at the proceedings from the ISAI conference series demonstrates this point. In *Ireland (Ulster) Scotland: Concepts, Contexts, Comparisons* (2003), the proceedings from the conference at Queen’s in 2002, only five out of thirty-four papers attempted to consider how Irish and Scottish culture might overlap in a meaningful way. The majority of papers remained confined within the familiar boundaries offered by nationally specific disciplines. Irish-Scottish Studies could reasonably be accused of simply providing a forum for Irish scholars to talk about Ireland and Scottish scholars to talk about Scotland. In the introduction to *Across the Margins: Cultural identity and change in the Atlantic archipelago* (2002), Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth suggest a reason for this kind of critical reticence:

¹⁵ See for example the series of publications edited by John M. Kirk and Donall P. O’Baill: *Language and Politics: Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland* (Clo Ollscoil na Banriona: Belfast 2001); *Language Links: the Languages of Scotland and Ireland* (Clo Ollscoil na Banriona: Belfast 2001); *Linguistic Politics: Language Policies for Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland* (Clo Ollscoil na Banriona: Belfast 2001); *Language Planning and Education: Linguistic Issues in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland* (Clo Ollscoil na Banriona: Belfast 2002).

¹⁶ T.M. Devine, ‘Preface’ to T.M. Devine and J.F. McMillan, eds, *Celebrating Columba: Irish Scottish connections 597-1997* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1999), iv.

Many academics are reluctant to leave behind the comforting paradigms of national literatures and cultures, even more to abandon their own comforting places within those paradigms [...]. Writing our own chapter on fiction we were conscious of an ‘authority’ when each speculated on things Irish or Scottish. We were comfortable within our own ‘established’ national and disciplinary locations, but we also instinctively felt some (unspoken) right to a voice within these boundaries.¹⁷

In *Across the Margins*, a few articles – Willy Maley’s piece on language, Aileen Christianson’s on gender, Norquay and Smyth’s on the novel – engage with the nuances invoked by the Irish-Scottish paradigm. But it has only been in the short essay or conference paper that critics have felt comfortable broaching this new inter-disciplinary subject. If a criticism can be made it is that such truncated forms of analysis seem to halt proceedings before they ever truly get off the ground. Having said this, *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society 1700-2000* (2005) is a fine collection of essays. It contains contributions by distinguished scholars including Cairns Craig, Tom Devine, George Watson, Jim Smyth and Marilyn Reizbaum. Moreover, it addresses a variety of topics in a truly comparative manner: Celticism, gender, national literature, as well as several insightful essays on genre.

The only book length study of this topic to date is Ray Ryan’s *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation, 1996-2000* (2002). Here Ryan examines the work of William McIlvanney, Iain Crichton Smith, Dermot Bolger and Colm Tóibín. His aim is to compare how ideas of state and nation differ within each region. Whilst Ryan’s analysis is astute and for the most part pointed, *Ireland and Scotland* ultimately disappoints. It is primarily a book about the Republic of Ireland. Scotland provides a lens through which to re-examine the cultural landscape of the Republic, one that Ryan argues has historically been eclipsed by critical pre-occupations with the North. Here we have the most problematic aspect of Ryan’s book, namely its refusal to engage with the political and cultural specificity of the North. If anything the

¹⁷ Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth, eds, *Across the Margins: cultural identity and change in the Atlantic Archipelago* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 7.

religious, industrial and migratory history of the North makes it *the* fundamental reference point for any comparative analysis of Scotland and Ireland – a ‘cultural corridor’, as Edna Longley would have it.¹⁸ This thesis is an attempt to resolve this dilemma and offer an analysis that takes into account the political and cultural specificity of all three regions: Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. The obvious objection to this tri-partite structure is that it would validate the partition of Ireland, legitimating the existence of the six county state. This is not my intention. Instead my argument aims to take into account the different experiences – political, cultural and economic – that have characterized life on either side of the border in the late twentieth century. It cannot be denied that the Troubles in the North and, more recently, the emergence of the Celtic Tiger in the South, have made the border more obvious than many would appreciate. Having said this, the materialist point of view of the following thesis is a deliberate attempt to look beyond the border and its pervasive effect on the cultural politics of Irish criticism. Regarding the North, it will allow us to reconsider both the historical roots of the Troubles in issues of socio-economic inequality. In terms of the Republic, we will re-examine the Celtic Tiger, asking whether the embrace of global capitalism represents a meaningful alternative for Northern Ireland’s poorest citizens, the ones who have been most affected by the collapse of civil society during recent decades.

Significantly, the Irish-Scottish comparison has not just been of interest to academics and literary critics. Recent years have seen it appear within more mainstream modes of public discourse. Ray Ryan’s omission of the North is echoed in the partial vision of Scottish National Party leader Alex Salmond. Salmond is fond of invoking the Irish-Scottish comparison in order to illustrate the untapped potential of his own Scottish nation. In a newspaper article published on 1 May 1997 – the day of New Labour’s historic election victory that officially set Scotland on the road to devolution – Salmond commented:

¹⁸ Edna Longley, quoted in A. Pollak, ed, *A Citizens’ Enquiry – the Opsahl Report in Northern Ireland*, 340.

Looking across from Scotland we see what a small nation can achieve [...]. In Scotland we can only envy Ireland's international visibility, and all the advantages in tourism and investment – not to mention self respect – which go with it.¹⁹

We might describe Salmond's look toward Ireland as doubly green: it is both candid in its envy, whilst simultaneously reflecting Ireland's highly distinguishable cultural profile – the globally ubiquitous Irish green. However, as was the case with Ryan's book, Salmond's use of the term 'Ireland' is fundamentally problematic. It is a reference to the Republic of Ireland, one that would elide the cultural and political specificity of the North, effectively excluding it from any aspirational model of what Scotland might one day become. On the surface such ideological opportunism might seem entirely logical. The Republic represents the creation of a sovereign nation state, which is after all the SNP's *raison d'être*. However, we would do well to attend to the 'advantages in tourism and investment' that Salmond specifically identifies. During the 1990s, under the banner of the Celtic Tiger, the Republic radically altered its social and economic landscape, realigning itself with the forces of global capitalism. The result was a dramatic transformation from the economic sick man of Europe into one of its wealthiest nations. It is the unequivocal endorsement of such economic narratives that will be considered in the discussion that follows. In terms of class we will ask, would the realization of an independent Scotland as Salmond perceives it have any discernible effect on those who are most disenfranchised under current political arrangements?

Thinking about Irish-Scottish Studies from an Irish perspective generates a series of equally important questions. In terms of the Peace Process, Irish-Scottish Studies could be read in terms of a state sponsored form of cultural exchange. In view of the historic links between Ulster Protestantism and Scotland, this new (inter)discipline could be regarded as an attempt to allay Protestant fears, namely that they are being sold down the river into a United Ireland. In this sense Irish-Scottish Studies can be read as a case of Britishness by the back door, so to speak. The controversy surrounding the issue of Ulster-Scots is one particular manifestation of this narrative and will be addressed in

¹⁹ Alex Salmond, 'Irish Show Scots Road to Success', *Irish Times* (1 May 1997), 14.

chapter four. Of course, many Ulster Unionists are attempting to assert a kinship with a part of the United Kingdom that is itself in the process of moving toward greater independence. According to Edna Longley, 'Ulster Protestants will need to work at knowing a changing Scotland that may not want to know them.'²⁰ The socio-economic point of view that informs this thesis is made more necessary if we consider the kind of material narratives that underpin much of the Peace Process. John Bradley and Desmond Birnie neatly summarized this point when they ask in the title of their book, *Can the Celtic Tiger cross the Irish border?* (2001). In terms of Alex Salmond's comments, we might extend the metaphor and ask whether the tiger could also leap across the Irish Sea?

In a similar vein, a cynical reading of Irish-Scottish Studies might suggest a certain sense of academic opportunism. Could all this represent Scottish Studies attempting a kind of fame by association? It is interesting that leading Irish critics such as Declan Kiberd or Luke Gibbons have yet to engage with the Irish-Scottish question in any sustained way. In contrast, the whole enterprise has received close attention from the majority of Scotland's pre-eminent scholars of literature and history. Arguably, in the modern era Scotland has simply not produced the same caliber of writers that Ireland has. To the list of Yeats, Joyce and Beckett we can now presumably add the name of Heaney. Such literary heavyweights mean that Irish Literature must be included in any serious discussion of twentieth century literature. Scotland enjoys a much less visible global profile. However, with the recent emergence of writers like Alasdair Gray and James Kelman the literary profile of Scotland is on the rise. Irish scholars and others will do well to pay attention.

In view of the amount of government money invested in Irish-Scottish studies, we might return to an earlier metaphor and ask, exactly how 'unapproved' this road is after all? For the most part, and as the title of Ryan's book makes explicit, the debate has generally functioned within the familiar paradigms of state and nation. Scotland, as

²⁰ Edna Longley, 'Ulster Protestants and the question of "culture"', in Fran Brearton and Eamon Hughes, eds, *Last Before America: Irish and American Writing* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2001), 99-120, 112.

David McCrone informs us, is the paradigmatic stateless nation. The Republic, on the other hand, is the state that seems content to remain misaligned with the historic concept of the Irish nation.²¹ Through adopting a specifically materialist approach, the following thesis aims to steer the debate off such well signposted highways. Our challenge then is to find and map one of the unapproved roads that Gibbons regards as promissory. Through focusing on the politics of class, or more accurately the crisis within the politics of class, my aim is to acknowledge the cultural specificity of each region whilst also re-thinking the assumptions of such nation centred criticism. We will ask: does the nation provide a meaningful way of confronting the forces of global capitalism and their specific impact on working-class communities?

In their introduction to *Scotland in Theory* (2004), Gavin Miller and Eleanor Bell invoke Irish Studies to highlight the theoretical poverty of recent Scottish criticism:

It is time for Scottish studies to take some tentative steps toward the future. While a brief survey of contemporary Irish literary studies will reveal rich theoretical material, in Scottish literary studies there has so far been an absence of, and perhaps resistance to, newer forms of thinking. Where, for example, in Irish studies there are many books on topics such as postmodernism, postcolonialism, and feminist readings of nationalism and national identity, from a Scottish-studies perspective very little exists in print.²²

Scottish Studies *does* need to engage more theoretically with its subject matter. Arguably, postmodernism is not the most beneficial way of doing so. I argue that where Scotland can be most appropriately theorised is in terms of the recent reconfigurations within Marxism. This might not be the kind of sexy ‘new’ form of thinking that Bell and Miller have in mind. However, there is a compelling case to be made for such theoretical investigation. No other culture has experienced the pressure of industrialization, and more recently de-industrialization, with a greater degree of intensity than Scotland. Moreover, it will be argued that the so called renaissance in contemporary Scottish

²¹ David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: the Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

²² Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller, intro and eds, *Scotland in Theory* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 11.

literature is in fact a Glaswegian renaissance. It was been acutely inspired by a crisis within working-class identity and by writers' attempts to come to terms with this changing landscape. So, in a way, the following thesis aims to redress the critical imbalance *Scotland in Theory* highlights.

For all its apparent sophistication, Irish Studies has remained relatively uninterested in the cultural politics of Marxism. For example, in Tom Paulin's *A New Look at the Language Question* (1983), the linguistic landscape is a mixture of Gaelic, Hiberno-English and Ulster-Scots. As such, the language question in Ireland is, 'fundamentally [...] a question about nationhood and government.' Paulin continues:

Often a clash is felt between the intimacy of dialect – from which a non-standard accent is inseparable – and the demands of a wider professional world where standard speech and accent are the norm. For English people such tensions are invariably a product of the class system, but in Ireland they spring from more complex loyalties.²³

It is this assumption that more complex loyalties have eradicated narratives of class that we will specifically seek to re-consider. British Marxist Terry Eagleton reads the language question in Ireland in a similar vein. For him it is a conflict between Gaelic and English, one that does not account for the possibility of other voices interrupting and complicating familiar colonial paradigms.²⁴ The residual incompatibility of Irish studies with a more Marxist approach would seem to confirm James Connolly's pithy comment from almost one hundred years ago: 'I have spent a great portion of my life alternating between interpreting Socialism to the Irish, and interpreting the Irish to socialists.'²⁵ Consequently, Irish Studies can be seen to benefit from being placed in critical proximity with contemporary Scottish writing. In contrast to the mournful comparisons of Salmond and Miller/Bell, Colm Tóibín explains the vitality of contemporary Scottish literature and its potential lessons for Irish writers:

²³ Tom Paulin, *A New Look at the Language Question* (Derry: Field Day, 1983), 9,14.

²⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 263-272.

²⁵ James Connolly, *Collected Works* Vol.1 (Dublin: New Books, 1988), 349.

This new conservatism amongst fiction writers both north and south of the border is most clear when you compare the calmness of contemporary Irish writing with the wildness of contemporary Scottish writing. It is as though the legacy of Sterne and Swift, Joyce, Beckett and Flann O'Brien had taken the Larne-Stranraer ferry; in the writings of James Kelman, Alasdair Gray, Irvine Welsh, Janice Galloway and Alan Warner there is political anger, stylistic experiment and formal trickery.²⁶

Our own comparison may be aligned with Tóibín's argument for the vitality of contemporary Scottish Literature. Scotland need not always look with envy across the water. As a laboratory for re-imagining a committed literary politics, it has much to teach Ireland, both North and South.

The Great Moving Right Show

It will already be apparent that I aim to assume a certain materialist understanding of the literary text. The literary use of dialect will be considered in terms of the political and economic reality that informs the moment of its production. If the last decade has seen Irish-Scottish Studies emerge as one of the most *de rigueur* of critical contexts, then without doubt, among the most unfashionable issues of the day is class. As this theme forms background to the discussion of dialect, it requires some preliminary explication. Initially, class will be considered in two distinct contexts, what we might call the historical and the theoretical. In reality, and as one might expect from a materialist criticism, these contexts will be revealed to be fundamentally intertwined.

It is useful to begin with a straightforward question: why Marxism? Or perhaps a more accurate question would be, why Marxism now? Or for those of a more cynical disposition, why still Marxism? Recent transformations within Western society (we could say History itself) make such questions legitimate and somewhat inevitable. As intimated above, the contemporary crisis on the Left will be explained in two contexts. Firstly, in terms of certain political reconfigurations that characterised the Thatcherism within the UK. Secondly, in terms of a broader and more long-standing crisis within

²⁶ Colm Tóibín, ed, *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction* (London: Penguin, 2001), xxxii.

traditional forms of Marxist critical theory. The following discussion understands Thatcherism as both a historical event and a set of specific ideological assumptions – monetarism, the sanctity of the market, etc. This will lay the foundations for the discussion of Antonio Gramsci. Of particular interest will be Gramsci's attempts to re-think a meaningful progressive politics in light of the enduring resilience of capitalism during the early twentieth century. In the past a problematic reductionism has accompanied critical engagement with Gramsci's thought. *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* reduces him to a solitary concept: 'Antonio Gramsci (Italian political thinker, 1891-1937) see under HEGEMONY'.²⁷ In the discussion which follows, the concept of hegemony *will* inform our analysis of the dialect novel. However, this thesis will offer a wider engagement, rehabilitating key Gramscian concepts – the subaltern, the Organic Intellectual, the role of education – in order to enrich our understanding of specific literary texts.

The texts that I aim to consider address the crisis confronting working-class communities during the 1980s and 1990s. As such, it is necessary to outline the predominant narratives that define this historical moment. In terms of the global political context, by the end of the twentieth century Marxism appears to have been consigned to the ideological scrap heap. The Cold War ended in a decisive victory for the forces of free-market capitalism. Ultimately, the socialist project begun with the October 1917 revolution ended in failure. Rather than a classless utopia, the realisation of the Communist state was characterised by economic poverty, political despotism and the inhumanity of the gulag. In 1989, when the Berlin wall finally came crashing down, so too did the straining idealism of the Left. Once an iconic symbol of the Cold War, it became a tourist attraction, part of a global heritage industry. Russia, with its vast natural resources, now plays fast and loose on the free-market. Even China, with Tiananmen Square still fresh in the public imagination, is experiencing the irresistible allure of global consumer culture. The very words, 'Marxism', 'class', 'proletariat' have a decidedly anachronistic ring to them. Like flared trousers and free love, they are the hallmarks of a

²⁷ E.J. Hobsbawn, 'Introduction' in David Forgacs, ed, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader* (London: Laurence and Wishart, 1999), 10-13, 13.

bygone era. In the words of New Labour ideologue Anthony Giddens, 'we live in a world where there are no longer any alternatives to capitalism.'²⁸

If this is the global picture, then at a local level things appear equally altered. The daily lives of those living in Scotland and Ireland are acutely affected by the pressures of this new age and it is Margaret Thatcher that symbolises this historical moment more than any other. For those on the Right, she is the embodiment of individual freedom and a defender against the tyranny of mob rule. For embittered socialists, her decimation of working-class communities and progressive politics has been ruthless and decisive in equal measure. The political programme known as Thatcherism placed 1980s Britain at the vanguard of a shift in global political culture. It signalled a transformation in the political consensus established in the aftermath of the Second World War. Under Thatcher, the great project of the welfare state was deemed to have run its course. No longer would the government's primary responsibility lie in subsidising national industry, in maintaining full employment, in universal social provision. Referred to by Stuart Hall as 'The Great Moving Right Show', Thatcherism elevated the market as the primary force in determining the direction of government policy.²⁹ The government's agenda sought to create an enterprise culture within the UK. This meant a flexible and de-unionised labour force, a deregulated financial sector and a system of taxation that promoted the creation of wealth. The poor, so the theory goes, would be sustained as the wealth trickled down to the lower levels of society. As business grew, so too would investment and employment. If the theory seems reasonably scientific, then the practice was much more bloody. Severing Britain from its industrial past proved to be a gargantuan task. The closure of national industries had its greatest impact on working-class communities in the North of England, and in cities like Glasgow and Belfast. As a consequence, Thatcher is a hate figure for those on the Left and for many working-class people who saw their traditional livelihoods decimated overnight. However, it is a mistake to tie such changes to a single person. We must locate Thatcher within her wider

²⁸ Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 24.

²⁹ Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988), 39.

political and historical context. The monetarism of 1980s Britain was in actual fact the continuation of a policy begun under the Labour Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan. In 1976, with the country under severe financial pressure, Callaghan sent his Chancellor Denis Healey to the institutions of international capitalism – the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – to secure a loan to bail out the British economy. The loan was granted with the proviso that it was followed by severe cuts in public spending, the gradual dismantling of the Welfare State and the dramatic liberalisation of UK markets. Rather than reading Thatcherism in terms of an attack by the Right on the working-class, it is more accurately seen in terms of a wholesale shift within mainstream party politics. This era signalled the fundamental estrangement of the working-class from the official politics of the state. This was confirmed during the 1990s when New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair became the most evangelical proponent of what is euphemistically referred to as ‘modernisation’.

So how did this narrative manifest itself in Scotland and Ireland? In Scotland, with its strong manufacturing base and tradition of radical politics, Thatcherism was symptomatic of a British state ruling in favour of a southern elite. In fact, with almost no Conservative MPs in Scotland, the attack on Scottish livelihoods came from a Government with no electoral mandate north of the border. This was most clearly illustrated during the Poll Tax experiment which received its disastrous test run in Scotland. The poll tax was regarded by many as a tax on the poor. The result was a series of protests, riots and widespread refusal to pay. The death of the Tories in Scotland was accompanied by a growth in support for Scottish Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP. Notably, by the 1990s, all these parties were campaigning for another referendum following the devolution debacle of 1979.³⁰ The effects of Thatcherism can be read in the changing face of Scottish working-class fiction. A decisive shift occurred away from the traditional sites of working-class experience. The heroic struggle in the coal mines of William McIlvanney’s *Docherty* (1975) was

³⁰ For a discussion of the link between Thatcherism and the rise of Scottish nationalism during the 1980s and 1990s see T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (London: Penguin, 1999), 591-619.

gradually replaced by the desperation of the dole queue in the fiction of James Kelman. The decimation of manufacturing industries introduces a key problem that we will address below: in the absence of an industrial proletariat – the cornerstone of the Marxist revolution – how is a meaningful progressive politics possible?

In terms of Northern Ireland, the dramatic effect of Thatcherism remains a relatively unexamined aspect of the region's recent history. In the 1990s, there emerged a realisation amongst working-class Protestants that the IRA had not been the only imminent threat facing their community. At a 1994 forum on working-class Protestant identity, one individual commented: 'The IRA have been targeting economic targets here for years, but they haven't done as good a job as Thatcher and her cronies did across the water.'³¹ It is this acute experience of industrial decline that makes Northern Ireland crucial to an Irish-Scottish comparison of this kind. After all, the narratives outlined above are more apparent in cities like Belfast and Derry than they are in places like Dublin or Cork. Moreover, class is doubly important in understanding the North. The post '69 conflict was born out of social inequalities within an institutionally sectarian Protestant State. It is significant that opposition did not formulate itself around questions of nationalism until the intransigence of the Northern Irish state became apparent during the late 1960s. The Republic's role in this narrative of economic transformation belongs to the next stage of historical development, namely the consolidation of global consumer culture during the 1990s.

In a thesis specifically about language, the historicity of words provides a useful way of approaching the problems inherent in class analysis of contemporary society. If 'class' has become an anachronistic theoretical term, this is in part a consequence of the recent material transformations outlined above. The historical roots of the term lie in the industrial era of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As Raymond Williams explains:

³¹ Quoted in Michael Hall, *Ulster Working Class Protestants* (Newtownabbey: Island Publications, 1994), 15.

Development of class in its modern social sense, with relatively fixed names for particular classes, belongs essentially to the period between 1770 and 1840, which is also the period of the Industrial Revolution and its decisive reorganization of society.³²

It was also in this context that Marx developed his theory of material history and its tripartite division of society – land owners, bourgeoisie and the proletariat – based on peoples' relationship to the means of production. For Marx, the conflict between these three classes was the essential motor of historical change. In terms of contemporary Irish and Scottish society, if the kinds of manufacturing industries that fostered this taxonomy have all but disappeared, then we must re-evaluate the potential of such terms to accurately map our social reality.

If Thatcher successfully discontinued working-class industry during this period, then equally significant was her attempts to eradicate the very language of class from the mainstream political discourse. Class was 'a communist concept', and in what is perhaps her most famous decree, Thatcher declared: 'there is no such thing as society.'³³ In this context, we might usefully recall the role of 'Newspeak' in the dystopian world of George Orwell's *1984* (1949):

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words.³⁴

The mechanics of the Orwellian nightmare find their theoretical support in Ludwig Wittgenstein: 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.'³⁵ In *Class in Britain* (1998), David Cannadine traces how successive British Prime Ministers have

³² Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Flamingo, 1983), 61.

³³ Margaret Thatcher, 'Don't undo my work', *Newsweek* (27 April 1992), 37; Quoted in Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1994), 34.

³⁴ George Orwell, *1984* (London: Penguin, 1989), 312.

³⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 1961), 56.

sought to emulate Thatcher by seeking to discredit and eliminate the very language of class. In an ironic turn of phrase, Major would quote Marx in asserting his desire to transform Britain into a 'classless society' in the early 1990s.³⁶ One suspects though that the two men had very different ideas in mind. Moreover, Major's need to use of such terms would signal the failure of Thatcher's project and the enduring significance of such language. If, as argued above, a continuity can be drawn from Labour to Tory during the 1970s, then arguably Thatcher's greatest inheritor is not John Major, but Tony Blair and the project of New Labour. During the 1990s, a re-branded New Labour Party sought to shed the baggage of its socialist past and recapture the centre ground of modern politics. In 1997, the public school/Oxford educated Blair achieved an historic election victory on the back of an explicit rejection of the rhetoric and politics of class. Neo-liberal economics were repackaged as a 'Third Way', a new middle ground that made redundant the old divisions between Left and Right. In a remarkable parallel with Thatcher, Blair declared a determination to rid Labour of its 'Marxist intellectual analysis', with its 'false view of class' which was 'always out of kilter with the real world.'³⁷ Jon Sopel explains: 'As [Blair] stands before an audience of Labour activists and union fixers, the pre-eminent feeling is that he is not one of them.'³⁸ New Labour no longer relied on Trade Union funding, having developed alternative means of financial support.³⁹ It symbolically abolished Clause 4 which had maintained a party commitment to nationalized industry. However, similar to Major before him, Blair's need to address the issue of class would signal the enduring resilience of the concept. Is Marxism as irrelevant as the politicians would have us believe? In 2005, BBC Radio 4's 'In Our Time' program launched a survey to find out who was history's greatest philosopher. The overwhelming winner was Marx. He received 28% of the total number of votes. In second place with a mere 13% was David Hume, followed by Wittgenstein on 7%,

³⁶ David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 4.

³⁷ Anthony Blair, *New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country* (London: Forth Estate, 1996), 30, 38, 58-59;

³⁸ J. Sopel, *Tony Blair: The Moderniser* (London: Michael Joseph, 1995), 3.

³⁹ One such new method of fund raising has been the selling of peerages in the House of Lords, a scandal that haunts the Labour party in 2006 at the time of writing.

Nietzsche 6% and Plato on 5%.⁴⁰ It would seem that attempts to discredit this philosophical tradition have not been nearly as effective as the politicians would have liked.

Ironically, these attempts to eliminate the language of class from mainstream politics would coincide with a generation of writers increasingly interested in giving expression to working-class voices and culture. An incomplete list would include the poet Tony Harrison in England, and in Scotland writers like Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead, and James Kelman. In the Republic of Ireland we may think of Dermot Bolger and Roddy Doyle, and in Northern Ireland, Frances Molloy and playwrights like Martin Lynch and Christina Reid. It is this dynamic that lends the Italo Calvino quote in the epigraph its particular poignancy: what politics refuses, literature and culture provide. Having begun in such general terms, it is important not to homogenise a remarkably diverse body of writing. Just as there are similarities, so too are there significant differences in how each of these writers makes use of dialect. The following argument will not operate through unwieldy generalities, drawing a series of strained equivalences where they do not in actual fact exist. Our analysis of dialect is in no way exhaustive. Instead, my aim is to examine the work of key authors in terms of their specificity. Throughout this study I will maintain incongruities and explore them as vital points of instruction. For example, the mass appeal of Roddy Doyle will be examined alongside James Kelman whose work is arguably less widely read. Kelman's modernist aesthetic will be compared with Doyle's less combative style of writing. Through the work of Theodore Adorno, this contrast will allow us to consider the politics of the avant-garde: is Kelman's work truly a radical art form? Or does it merely re-enact the alienation of the unsophisticated masses within capitalist society? Treating the dialect novel as a material artefact through things like sales figures and the book's critical reception, will also inform this comparison.

⁴⁰ http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/greatest_philosopher_vote_result.shtml

So far, the Republic of Ireland has remained on the fringes of the debate. However, it is possible to detect a similar shift within its tectonic plates, particularly during the era of the Celtic Tiger. As Peadar Kirby explains:

In the wake of the Tiger, the terrain has changed, changed utterly. The economic agenda to which the party [Fianna Fáil] hitched its fortunes evokes little enthusiasm from people whose day to day experience is of collapsing social services, exorbitant prices for many staples, an orgy of conspicuous consumption side by side with callous disregard for so many vulnerable groups, and a society growing more stressed and violent.⁴¹

Echoing Cannadine's reading of a change in the specific rhetoric of politics, Kirby argues that the Celtic Tiger witnessed the conceptual take over of a 'market mentality'. The 1990s have seen economic analysis increasingly dominate sociological descriptions of the Republic. For Kirby, 'market fundamentalism' has been incorporated within the very fabric of Irish life. 'Competitiveness', 'growth' and 'entrepreneurialism' have become the watchwords of the day. Drawing on the work of Karl Polanyi, Kirby argues that this represents an essential distortion in terms of the mainstream perceptions of Irish society: 'the economistic outlook [constitutes] a philosophy of everyday life comprising criteria of commonsense behaviour, of reasonable risks, and of a workable morality [...] the seeds of the whole culture – with all its possibilities and limitations.'⁴² It will be argued that this ideological bias defines not just capitalist ideology, but traditional Marxism as well. As such, a narrow focus on material narratives offers an incomplete form of analysis. Gramsci maintained that it is through culture, in particular ideas of cultural value, that such deficiencies can be broached. It is in this light that the following discussion of the dialect novel will be offered.

⁴¹ Peadar Kirby, 'In the Wake of the Tiger: Mapping Anew the Social Terrain' *The Irish Review*, No.33 (2005), 40-50, 41; see also Peadar Kirby, *The Celtic Tiger in Distress: Growth with Inequality in Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002).

⁴² Karl Polanyi cited in Kirby, 'In the Wake of the Tiger: Mapping Anew the Social Terrain', 43.

What lends this thesis greater significance is that the events outlined above belong to a much larger narrative. They may be situated within what Noreena Hertz describes as ‘the silent takeover’ of global capitalism:

Propelled by government policies of privatisation, deregulation and trade liberalisation, and the advances in communication technologies of the past twenty years a power shift has taken place. The hundred largest multinational corporations now control about 20 per cent of global foreign assets; fifty-one of the biggest economies in the world are now corporations, only forty-nine are states [...] This is the world of the silent takeover, the world at the dawn of the new millennium. Governments’ hands appear tied and we are increasingly dependent on corporations. Business is in the driving seat, corporations determine the rules of the game, and governments have become referees, enforcing the rules laid down by others.⁴³

Hertz’s analysis displays remarkable resonance with the kind of economic development that fed the Celtic Tiger in the Republic of Ireland. The arrival of multi-nationals such as Motorola, Sun Microsystems and Siemens on Irish shores might be thus described:

‘Portable corporations are now moveable feasts and governments go to great lengths to attract or retain them on their shores.’⁴⁴ This power shift from democratically elected institutions to private corporations is also present in the stuttering nature of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland. The transformation of the Northern Irish landscape through regeneration projects like the Titanic Quarter in Belfast have continued apace, unaffected by any crisis within the political settlement of the 1998 Belfast ‘Good Friday’ Agreement.

Through eliding the language of class, the political establishment has sought to articulate and legitimate a transformed social reality. However, the sociological evidence in the wake of the 1980s is not nearly as conclusive. For the economist J.K. Galbraith, following the demise of traditional capital versus labour models of society, the terms of the debate have been reconfigured: ‘On the one side, there are now the rich, the comfortably endowed and those so aspiring, and on the other the economically less

⁴³ Noreena Hertz, *The Silent Takeover: Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy* (London: Arrow, 2002), 8-9.

⁴⁴ Hertz, *The Silent Takeover*, 9.

fortunate and the poor [...]. This is the economic and political alignment today.’⁴⁵

Galbraith’s redefinition would imply that the underlying inequality has not been resolved under the auspices of modernisation and late capitalism. The kind of inequality Galbraith outlines is evident throughout contemporary British and Irish society. *Dark Heart: the shocking truth about hidden Britain* (1997) by Nick Davies traces how after Thatcher, life on the social and economic margins in Britain, has only become more desperate. On the council estates across the UK, drugs and crime have taken hold of communities deprived of even a sense of hope. The ideological programme of the 1980s has led to a paradox where, despite increases in inequality, more people than ever now consider themselves to be middle class:

By the mid-1990s ‘Britain had become more unequal than at anytime since the ‘30s’. The widening gap between rich and poor has not resulted in a sharpening of class consciousness but, perversely, in a consensus that ‘we are all middle class now’: four out of the seven bands in the recently revised description of the social class issued by the National Statistics (1998) fall into this category.⁴⁶

This exacerbation of relative poverty has not been exclusively a British experience. Robert McLiam Wilson and Donovan Wylie’s *The Dispossessed* (1992) compares poverty in London with that in Glasgow, Belfast and Dublin. Desolation and despair form the *lingua franca* for those on the council estates and housing schemes in these major urban sprawls. In the Republic of Ireland, the 1990s were an era of unprecedented economic growth. However, beneath these triumphant celebrations lies another story: the rotten underbelly of the Celtic Tiger. According to Eurostat, Ireland now has the highest rate of relative poverty of all 25 members of the enlarged European Union.⁴⁷ In the Republic of Ireland 25% of households live on less than 136 euros a week. This makes a staggering comparison with Ireland’s 15,000 richest (3.5% of the total population), who are worth \$52 billion and face the lowest tax rates in Europe. Despite the problems within traditional forms of class analysis, such statistics evince the urgent need for a

⁴⁵ J.K. Galbraith, *The Good Society* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996), 7.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Gary Day, *Class* (London: Routledge, 2001), 200.

⁴⁷ Cited in Brian Harvey, ‘Poverty, social exclusion and the new member states’ *Action on Poverty Today* No.5 (Sum 2005), 2.

renewal of the debate. As Terry Eagleton explains, it is these enduring inequalities that make a committed criticism more important than ever:

[T]he [capitalist] system can be said to be currently victorious – but the word has something of a grotesque ring to it. For how can a globalized system which is at once the most productive history has ever witnessed, yet which needs to keep the great majority of men and women in a state of spiritual and material deprivation, possibly be described as successful?⁴⁸

One thing must be acknowledged: in what follows the term ‘working-class’ will be used to refer to this socio-economic group, although a term such as underclass would arguably be more appropriate. The fact that there exists no satisfactory term within our common parlance only emphasises the degree to which this community and its attendant needs have been discounted from the mainstream public imagination. Moreover, the fact that the working-class have not disappeared, but merely been re-located to Asia and other places, attests to the enduring need for a committed contemporary politics.

A Crisis in Theory

So far, we have dated this historical narrative – Thatcherism, the miners’ strike, Reaganomics – as beginning in the late 1970s. There is another sense though, in which this chronology is wholly insufficient. Far from signalling a decisive defeat for the Left, the Thatcherite questioning of class merely echoes the kinds of the self-reflection that have characterised Marxism throughout the twentieth century. The 1980s were not a sudden awakening to the ideological problems of the Left. As Eagleton explains: ‘Marxism was already in deep trouble long before the first brick of the Berlin wall had been loosened.’⁴⁹ In order to fully understand the contemporary crisis confronting the working-class, it is necessary that we lengthen our historical gaze. For example, Thatcherism was not just an attack on traditional working-class industries. It was a set of ideological assumptions that sought to overturn the very principals of the post-war

⁴⁸ Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne, eds, *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1996), 5.

⁴⁹ Eagleton and Milne, eds, *Marxist Literary Theory*, 1.

welfare state. The emphasis shifted from restraining the excesses of the market and compensating for its inadequacies to a more *laissez-faire* approach. Modern Government's key responsibility became one of enabling the free market to operate with maximum efficiency. This is important if we consider that the author's examined herein (with the obvious exception of Doyle) are all children of Bulter, Bevan and Beveridge. This point will be addressed in more detail below.

Raymond Williams' notion of historicity (class as a specifically industrial concept) provides a useful way of thinking about the contemporary crisis within Marxism. We should not be surprised that a one hundred and fifty year old theory would offer a blunted tool for mapping social relations in the digital age. Contemporary labour is more complex and stratified than Marx's tri-partite model of society previously allowed. Moreover, the de-industrialization of many Western economies and the migration of manufacturing to cheaper labour markets presents obvious problems. For the unemployed of Glasgow, Belfast and Dublin, seizing the means of production is all but impossible now that they have been moved to China! By the 1990s, Marxism was akin to a sinking ship, with many thinkers scrambling for the lifeboats. E.P. Thompson would himself declare: 'class is a concept long past its sell-by date.'⁵⁰ Thompson's use of the jargon of consumer culture would attest to the shifting ideological terrain that this current thesis is specifically interested in.

If we take a longer view, the Marxist analysis of history – class formation, class conflict and revolution – simply never happened in the way that had been predicted. The proletariat of other nations failed to follow the example of October 1917. By the mid 1920s, it had become increasingly clear that global capitalism had weathered the revolutionary storm. It was in this specific context that Antonio Gramsci first attempted to theorise the enduring resilience of capitalism and the inherent deficiencies of classic Marxist doctrine. For us at the dawn of the twenty-first century, with global capitalism more entrenched than ever, a Gramscian perspective is highly appropriate. Gramsci's work represents a paradigm shift within the history of Marxist thought. This can be most

⁵⁰ E.P. Thompson, 'The making of the ruling class', *Dissent* (Summer 1993), 380.

clearly understood in terms of the base-superstructure relationship within capitalist society. Before Gramsci, Marxism had argued that base determined the nature of the superstructure. The institutions of law, church and state, and culture in general, were regarded as merely epiphenomenal. Whilst culture may function to legitimate the capitalist system, revolutionary praxis lay in seizing the means of production, i.e. taking control of the economic base. The failure of global revolution in 1917 suggested to Gramsci that this model was in need of serious reconfiguration. It seemed that economic exploitation alone was not enough to guarantee the revolution that Marx predicted.

In the *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935), Gramsci set about diagnosing these problems and constructing an alternative, yet nonetheless committed politics. For Gramsci, classical Marxism possessed the same formal limitations that could be seen within the discourse of capitalism. Both theories maintained that the economic base was the determining factor within capitalist society. Classical Marxism neglected a whole series of cultural and institutional mechanisms that actively perpetuated the subordination of the lower classes. For Gramsci, the key to developing a coherent progressive politics lay in a more integrated approach to both the material and the immaterial forms of social bondage. The failure of the international proletariat to spontaneously rise up and seize the means of production indicated a lack of class consciousness. Whilst the working class may endure undeniable hardship, there was no guarantee they will make the association between this and the exploitation of the capitalist system. Through the concept of hegemony, Gramsci sought to interrogate the non-political means by which the lower orders have their consent induced by the ruling class. The OED defines 'hegemony' as leadership.⁵¹ For Gramsci, it referred to the way in which capitalist society maintains its control over the lower classes. The power of the ruling class does not just reside in the institutions of government, the law or the police. Instead, a whole series of beliefs and values ensure our obedience and continued participation within these systems. Of paramount importance to the hegemony of the ruling class was the whole field of culture. Having written over 200 articles as a theatre critic for the radical

⁵¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Online edition (Oxford University Press). 30 August 2006. <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50104209>>

newspaper *Avanti*, Gramsci was particularly well disposed to re-think the role of culture within capitalist society. In recent years this has led to something of a Gramsci industry within academia. Laurence Grossberg and Cary Nelson's collection of essays *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988) illustrate this point:

The rather broad title of this book, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, signals our belief in an emerging change in the discursive formations of contemporary intellectual life, a change that cuts across the humanities and the social sciences. It suggests that the proper horizon for interpretive activity, whatever its object and whatever its disciplinary base, is the entire field of cultural practices, all of which give meaning, texture, and structure to human life.⁵²

This paradigm shift becomes doubly important in light of the decline of manufacturing industry and the gradual disappearance of traditional forms of class politics – trade unions, collective bargaining, the mass strike action. For us it also raises the stakes in terms of literature. The literary text is no longer merely epiphenomenal, if indeed it ever was. It becomes the active enthronement, but also the immanent critique, of the political and economic system in which we live.

In terms of the current thesis, one of Gramsci's most significant contributions was challenge our understanding of the nature of class division. For Gramsci, the classic division of society into distinct classes was problematically based solely on people's relationship to the means of production. Traditional Marxism regarded a similarity in material circumstances as a sufficient means of securing class unity. Gramsci argued that material conditions were not enough. Collective identity must be predicated on a common program of aims, rather than just material equivalence. As Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe explain: 'For Gramsci, political subjects are not – strictly speaking – classes, but complex 'collective wills'; similarly, the ideological elements articulated by a hegemonic class do not have a necessary class belonging.'⁵³ In order to transform the state, a diverse range of interests must be incorporated within a wide ranging political agenda. In 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question', Gramsci argued that the industrial

⁵² Laurence Grossberg and Cary Nelson, eds, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1988), 1.

⁵³ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1995), 67.

proletariat in northern Italy needed to ally themselves with the rural peasantry in the south under a broad political and economic manifesto. This model adds to our understanding of the revolutionary potential within the concept of hegemony. Hegemony gives us a greatly expanded notion of power within capitalist society. It refers to the way in which the ruling classes control not only the realm of politics, but the moral, intellectual and cultural terrain of society.⁵⁴ In place of the October 1917 model of revolution, Gramsci argued that social change occurred through a 'war of position'. A successful program of reform cannot only address material questions. It must also gradually seize the social hegemony, the ideological leadership of society. In time, the values articulated by the subordinated classes would come to usurp those of the ruling elite. Crucially, in achieving the consent of the lower orders, the ruling elite do not ostensibly align themselves with any one particular class interest. Instead they promote what they describe as a universal set of values, ones that supposedly operate in the interest of society as a whole.⁵⁵ Gramsci's notion of hegemony gives us a greatly expanded notion of how power is constituted in the modern world. Political authority is seen to be embedded within the cultural fabric of society and not just the institutions of Government and industry. As Stuart Hall explains:

We cannot, after Gramsci, go back to the notion of mistaking electoral politics, or party politics in a narrow sense, or even the occupancy of state power, as constituting the ground of modern politics itself. Gramsci understands that politics is a much expanded field; that, especially in societies of our kind, the sites upon which power is constituted will be enormously varied. We are living through the proliferation of the sites of power and antagonism in modern society.⁵⁶

In terms of the disappearance of an industrial proletariat in the West, it is this greatly expanded notion of politics that makes Gramsci invaluable to the contemporary crisis facing the Left. Moreover, the political importance of culture lends our own theme, the literary representation of the working-class, an added sense of value.

⁵⁴ Forgacs, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 423.

⁵⁵ Paul Ransome, *Antonio Gramsci: A New Introduction* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 27.

⁵⁶ Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 168.

Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* were originally written 1929-1935. However, their translation and widespread availability in English after 1971 is significant. In the aftermath of Paris '68, the international Left was again in desperate need of a model with which to explain the sheer persistence and elasticity of global capitalism. One of the challenges facing traditional materialist criticism was the degree to which it failed to address a whole series of alternative politics. The 1960s had witnessed the dispersal of radical energies along a broad spectrum of issues such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity. It took the British Left in particular a long time to acknowledge and attempt to incorporate these transformations. In 1989, *A Manifesto for New Times* declared:

The social and democratic changes at the heart of the shift to the new times are fracturing many of the old collective sources of identity which the Left was founded upon. Class will be central to politics in the 1990's. But the character of the working class is changing. In addition, other sources of collective identity among women, black people, and other social groups will be central to progressive politics. Progressive politics has to realign itself to the changes in its potential constituencies of support.⁵⁷

In the wake of such changes, the challenge facing the Left is to construct a radical alternative premised on universal social values rather than one delineated by narrow class-based interest. The Gramscian tone of this project is quite clear. As Stuart Hall explains, Gramsci's grasp of the multi-dimensional nature of contemporary political culture is particularly relevant:

Gramsci looked at a world which was complexifying in front of his eyes. He saw the pluralization of modern cultural identities, emerging between the lines of uneven historical development, and asked the question: what are the political forms through which a new cultural order could be constructed out of this 'multiplicity of dispersed wills, these heterogeneous aims'?⁵⁸

The other most significant change during the 1960s was what we might call the linguistic turn of critical theory. Broadly speaking, this movement argued that class was not real, but merely one of a number of discourses with which to describe society. Class is not a

⁵⁷ Communist Party of Great Britain, *Manifesto for New Times: A Communist Party Strategy for the 1990s* (London: CPGB 1989), 13.

⁵⁸ Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 170.

historical reality, but is more accurately conceived as a product of language. The apotheosis of this development manifested itself in the rise of postmodernism and its celebration of political/moral relativity. As David Cannadine explains:

We now live in a post-modern era of decentered and deconstructed discourse in which the grand, traditional master narratives are no longer fashionable because they no longer seem credible. On the contrary they are now widely dismissed as being deeply and fatally flawed: too teleological, too anachronistic, too Whiggish, too reductionist, too masculinist, too all-encompassing, too over-determined, too simplistic.⁵⁹

In chapter five, we will examine postmodern theory, particularly its association with the concept of post-nationalism, as a meaningful description of our twenty-first century political reality.

One of the aims of the current thesis is to consider the relevance of Gramsci's work beyond the concept of hegemony. Gramsci was particularly interested in the role of the intellectual and this will feature in our discussion of the work of James Kelman. Gramsci's ideas about education will also be included. Kelman aligns himself with certain philosophical traditions identified by George Davie as the democratic orientation of Scottish education. In terms of literature, Gramsci maintained that, 'content cannot be considered abstractly, in separation from form.'⁶⁰ The following discussion is focused on the textual politics of representing vernacular speech. It will examine the means by which Kelman, Doyle and Molloy deploy dialect to disrupt orthodox narrative hierarchies, and challenge the cultural values they implicitly enshrine. Most famously, Gramsci's work has been taken up by post-colonial scholars in India under the banner of Subaltern Studies. This group has been interested in examining how systems of subordination can persist following the retreat of the colonial power, and the ascent of the independent nation state. In terms of the Republic of Ireland, the subaltern will be considered in terms of the work of Roddy Doyle and his exposé of inequalities within the modern consumer Republic. Alex Salmond's envious glance toward 'Ireland' is revealed as problematic in light of subaltern readings of the contemporary nation state. Moreover,

⁵⁹ Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 12.

⁶⁰ Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, 98.

it will be argued that the kind of class politics that characterises Kelman's work would remain unresolved if, as Salmond seems to be advocating, the Celtic Tiger were let loose in Scotland.

One of the most detailed attempts to re-theorize a radical alternative to Marxism has come from Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Drawing extensively on the work of Gramsci, they argued that we now live in what can be described as a 'post-Marxist' era:

We should state quite plainly that we are now situated in a post-Marxist terrain. It is no longer possible to maintain the conception of subjectivity and classes elaborated by Marxism, nor its vision of the historical course of capitalist development, nor, of course, the conception of communism as a transparent society from which antagonisms have disappeared.⁶¹

For Laclau and Mouffe, this is not a cause for dismay. It is through the Gramscian concept of hegemony that we might begin to refashion a meaningful alternative to the free-market ideology that defines our contemporary age. They argue that whilst 'class' may no longer be valid in the classical sense, the underlying issues of inequality, power and authority, which Marxism originally sought to map, continue to shape our everyday lives. Far from offering a reductive analysis in which all social grievances are subsumed within the grand narrative of class, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that hegemony allows a variety of struggles to be theorized in their specificity. Through this, one is able to concede the disappearance of the industrial proletariat in the West whilst at the same time arguing that exploitation has merely been reconfigured and remain ever present within contemporary society.

Overview

In chapter two we will examine the role of dialect in the work of James Kelman. We will begin with the controversy that accompanied Kelman's winning of the 1994 Booker Prize for his novel *How Late it Was, How Late*. The importance attached to issues of language at the time will be specifically highlighted. We will then examine attempts by certain

⁶¹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 4.

critics to locate Kelman's work within a particularly nationalist interpretive paradigm. These commentators contend the author's use of vernacular belongs to the familiar Anglo-centric model of cultural resistance. I will argue that this is a fundamental misdiagnosis of the author's work and illustrate my argument by looking at three of Kelman's novels. Kelman aims to not only include working-class dialect, but to employ it as a tool of literary levelling. His use of dialect is an attempt to expose and confront what he himself regards as the inherently elitist system of literary/cultural value. Gramsci's concept of the 'Organic Intellectual' will be used to examine Kelman's own artistic manifesto, 'To write and remain a member of my community.'⁶²

Chapter three will focus on the Republic of Ireland and the work of Roddy Doyle. Of particular interest will be Doyle's assertion in *The Commitments* (1987): 'The Irish are the niggers of Europe [...] An' the Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland [...] An' the northside Dubliners are the niggers o' Dublin'(C 13). We will ask, what has happened to the language of class that necessitates this reconfiguration within the discourse of race. Comparisons will be drawn with Kelman who has in the past claimed his work belonged to a literature of de-colonisation. The work of Russian Formalist Mikhail Bakhtin will be drawn on to analyse the linguistic politics of Doyle's work. Furthermore, *The Commitments'* use of race will be used as a conduit to thinking about the wider issue concerning the rise of postcolonialism as a dominant discourse within Irish Studies during the 1990s. Gramsci's use of the subaltern will be invoked in order to question the latent class politics of this critical program. Moreover, we will consider the emergence of postcolonial narratives at a moment when the Republic of Ireland was making its long overdue transformation from an impoverished European nation, into one of its wealthiest states.

Chapter four will address a similar set of themes in the context of Northern Ireland. Crucially though, it will argue that there is almost a complete absence of dialect writing within Northern Irish fiction. It will be argued that this is a consequence of the Troubles and its role in consolidating socio-political perceptions of the North in terms of

⁶² Kelman, 'Elitism and English Literature' in "...And the Judges Said...", 57-75, 63.

'two traditions' – Nationalist/Unionist, Catholic/Protestant, etc. The ubiquity of this politico-cultural model will be seen as a concerted attempt to elide the language of class from mainstream discourse of Northern Irish life. In this sense, developments within the North can be seen to prefigure what Thatcher, Major and Blair would later attempt to achieve with the language of class. At the same time, we will re-examine the nature of class within Northern Ireland and argue that it cannot be understood without the history of sectarianism, both at a local and institutional level. We will consider Frances Molloy's *No Mate for the Magpie* (1985), the only Northern Irish dialect novel produced during this period. It will be examined alongside *Out of my Class* (1985), the first volume of Belfast playwright John Boyd's memoirs. Their work – Molloy, a Derry Catholic and Boyd, a Belfast Protestant – allows us to examine the intertwined nature of religion and class within the North. It will be argued that any attempt to understand the post '69 conflict, and more recently the Peace Process itself, must take account of these narratives of class.

Chapter five will attempt to offer a more concentrated form of comparative analysis. It will examine all three regions within the context of a single chapter. The issue of postmodernism provides the grounds upon which the discussion will be focused. Working-class culture will be considered alongside the rise of global consumerism and a particular set of postmodern cultural values. Of particular interest will be Richard Kearney's concept of 'postnationalism'. This has been consistently invoked by critics on both sides of the Irish Sea as a way of theorising the political and cultural landscape of the twenty-first century. This issues raised by this debate will be explored by way of Roddy Doyle's *The Van* (1991), Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle* (1989) and *Eureka Street* (1996) and finally, James Kelman's latest novel, *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* (2004). Specifically, we will question the ability of such postmodern narratives to resolve the problems facing working-class communities, still reeling from the traumatic transformations of recent decades.

Chapter Two

Kelman, Dialect and the Organic Intellectual

Owing to the influx of Irish and foreign immigrants in the industrial area near Glasgow the dialect has become hopelessly corrupt.

-*Scottish National Dictionary*, 1936¹

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

- **James Kelman** - *How Late it Was, How Late*²

In Glasgow, we say "We are the people."

- **James Kelman**³

¹ Quoted in Tom Leonard, *Reports from the Present: Selected Work 1982-1994* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), 54.

² James Kelman, *How Late it Was, How Late* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994), 160.

³ Tom Toremans, 'An Interview with Alasdair Gray and James Kelman', *Contemporary Literature* Vol.44, No.4 (2003), 565-586, 586.

The following chapter will argue that language, in particular the issue of dialect, is fundamental to understanding the class politics of James Kelman's work. In his acceptance speech for the 1994 Booker Prize, the author declared: 'my language and my culture have a right to exist.'⁴ Elsewhere he has stated: 'language is your culture – if you lose your language you've lost your culture, so if you've lost the way your family talk, the way your friends talk, then you've lost your culture.'⁵ As their titles illustrate, Kelman's books have an acute appreciation for the virtuosity of everyday speech. *A Chancer* (1985) is a book about gambling – dog tracks, betting shops, poker tables and the metaphysics of chance. However, it is also a comment on the main character's irreverence for mainstream social values. In *Glaswegian*, he is what is affectionately known as 'a chancer'. Similarly, *How Late it Was How Late* (1994) evinces a specifically working-class semiotic. It is drawn from the image of a football fan, in the dying minutes of the game, with his team 1-0 down, looking at his watch and thinking, 'It's getting awfully late.' In what follows it will be argued that such references and the use of dialect in general, are inextricably bound up with the class politics of Kelman's work. They are part of the author's underlying wish to incorporate and validate working-class culture, making it a suitable subject matter for literary fiction.

Kelman's work represents one of the most sustained attempts to map the changing nature of class throughout the late twentieth century. It is acutely interested in the impact of industrial decline on the working-class communities of Glasgow, formerly the workshop of the British Empire. His fictions shun the traditional sites of working-class experience – the factory floor and the football terrace. They are instead situated in the dole office and the bookies, the new home of an ignored and abandoned community. Kelman's work is particularly interested in the failure of traditional forms of working-class politics – the Trade Union and the mass strike action. *The Busconductor Hines* (1984) concludes with the main character symbolically walking out on a proposed strike action over his own unfair dismissal. According to Laclau and Mouffe, a post-Marxist

⁴ James Kelman, 'Elitist slurs are racism by another name', *Scotland on Sunday* (16 Oct. 1994), *Spectrum*, 2.

⁵ Duncan McLean, 'An interview with James Kelman', *Edinburgh Review* 71 (1985), 66-79, 72.

politics requires that we reconfigure traditional class-based politics. We must widen the frame of reference and address the politics of gender and ethnicity. Only then can we achieve a sound theoretical foundation for a radical democratic politics. Kelman's fiction displays a similar type of awareness. It seeks to expose the misogyny and racism that are embedded within certain aspects of working-class culture. In terms of Gramsci and the theoretical crisis of the Left, Kelman's work is again particularly relevant. Gramsci is credited with greatly expanding our understanding of politics in advanced capitalist society. The inadequacy of traditional Marxism was seen to be an over-deterministic view of the base-superstructure relationship. To understand the enduring resilience of advanced capitalism a broader perspective is necessary, one that includes the role of culture in consolidating and advancing the interests of the ruling class. Kelman himself adopts a similar position. As we saw above, the author regards culture as *the* essential battleground where a committed radical politics must once again re-stake its claim.

Kelman has been described as, amongst other things, a Scottish author, an existential author, a Glaswegian author and a working-class author. The initial challenge here is to establish which of these appellations provides the most appropriate frame of reference for understanding the language and politics of the author's work. In approaching this issue of dialect, we will begin by examining the media furore that accompanied Kelman's Booker Prize victory in 1994 for *How Late it Was, How Late*. The outcry over the language, or so-called 'bad language', of the book will be especially relevant. We will then consider the tendency for certain critics to read Kelman's language within a particularly Scottish context. This becomes most problematic when it leads to dubious assertions of the nationalist credentials of the author's work. I will argue that Kelman's fiction *does* have valuable things to say about the state of modern Scotland. However, it is a fundamental error to reduce the political intent of his work to any narrow re-articulation of the national question. The language of Kelman's fiction foregrounds a politics of class that cannot be easily reconciled with calls for national independence. This will set up our analysis of three texts: the Booker novel *How Late it Was, How Late*, *The Busconductor Hines* (1984) and finally *A Disaffection* (1989). We are examining these novels out with the order in which they were written. This is a

deliberate move, one that enables a more thematic development of my argument. The Booker uproar, and its focus on the issue of language, will be seen to shine light back over Kelman's earlier work. I will argue that the use of dialect is crucial to the narrative technique of *How Late it Was, How Late*. It is in undermining the narrative conventions of classic realism that the novel's challenge toward cultural elitism is most apparent. Following on from this, through *The Busconductor Hines* and *A Disaffection* we will begin to theorise what a more committed representation of working-class culture might actually look like. Throughout the discussion, key concepts from Gramsci will be used to guide and enrich our understanding of the radical politics of Kelman's work.

'Literary vandalism' – tearing up the Booker

Kelman's act of cultural self-defence at the Booker was, in part, a response to the media outcry that had accompanied the short-listing of his novel. Written primarily in Glaswegian dialect, *How Late It Was, How Late* proved to be a controversial choice for the award. Rabbi Julia Neuberger famously resigned from the judging panel in protest, declaring Kelman's novel, 'a disgrace [...] just a drunken Scotsman railing against bureaucracy.'⁶ For Alan Clarke in the *Mail on Sunday*, Kelman's novel was a humiliating insult to Scottish culture: 'compiled? Scripted? I am trying to avoid the word "written" – by a Glaswegian [...] it seems unfair on real authors to call him an "author".'⁷ Whilst for Gerald Warner in *The Sunday Times*, what Kelman calls his culture, 'in reality [...] is not properly a "culture", but the primeval vortex of underdevelopment that precedes culture.'⁸ These comments are all the more interesting in light of the critical acclaim that accompanied Roddy Doyle's Booker victory the previous year for *Paddy Clarke ha ha ha* (1993), itself a Dublin dialect novel. This comparison will be returned to in more detail below. Meanwhile, these comments demonstrate that for certain critics,

⁶ Quoted in Stuart Wavell, 'Scots bewail 4,000-expletive blot on national character', *Sunday Times* (16 October 1994), 5.

⁷ Alan Clarke, 'A Prize insult to the courage of Scotland's finest', *Mail on Sunday* (23 Oct. 1994), 10.

⁸ Gerald Warner, 'Time for a disaffection from literary slumming', *Sunday Times* (25 Sept. 1994), 7.

Kelman's work belonged firmly out with anything we might want to refer to as either 'literature' or 'culture'. These vitriolic outbursts are all the more striking when compared to the heady praise that Kelman's work received elsewhere at the time. *The Scotsman* declared: 'James Kelman is a major European writer', belonging to a tradition that includes writers like Beckett, Camus and Zola.⁹ The chief literary critic of *The Guardian* agreed, adding the name of James Joyce to Kelman's literary antecedents.¹⁰ Ironically then, for these critics, Kelman's work is amongst the *most* 'literary', and *most* highly 'cultural', of the contemporary writing scene. Such remarkable disagreement cannot help but warrant further scrutiny.

Throughout the public debate surrounding the Booker Prize, criticism continually focused on the issue of language within Kelman's novel. Of particular concern was the amount of swearing, or 'bad language', that the book contained. In a stunning display of pedantry, the editor of the *Independent on Sunday* actually counted the number of times the 'Anglo Saxon expletive' – i.e. the word 'fuck' – appeared in the text; apparently it was 4,000.¹¹ For the 'back to Victorian values' brigade, the Booker decision merely confirmed what they already knew: the irretrievable decline of contemporary moral standards.¹² What makes these kinds of criticism particularly ironic is that *How Late it Was, How Late* is itself a novel about the politics of language. The first scene of the book sees the central protagonist, Sammy Samuels, blinded following a beating at the hands of the police. Through this cunning narrative device, we are presented with a text that is interested, not in how Sammy sees the world, but in how he hears it. The landscape of the novel is dramatically transfigured. Similar to the mechanics of the literary text, Sammy's experience of the world is almost entirely mediated through language. This remarkable coincidence had apparently escaped the notice of certain critics.

⁹ Catherine Lockerbie, 'Lighting up Kelman', *The Scotsman* (19 March 1994), Weekend, 2.

¹⁰ James Wood, 'BOOKS: IN DEFENCE OF KELMAN', *The Guardian* (25 Oct. 1994), 9.

¹¹ Simon Jenkins, 'An Expletive of a Winner', *The Times* (15 October 1994), 20.

¹² Colin MacFarlane, 'Sammy in F-words Rammy', *Daily Record* (1 April 1994), 35; David Harrison, 'CURSES! WHAT THE *****S GOING ON?', *The Observer* (16 October 1994), 9.

The idea that the language of Kelman's novel was 'bad' is a judgment that rewards close inspection. For some the term 'bad' was an aesthetic judgment, symptomatic of the novel's underlying artistic poverty. What made Kelman's language 'bad' was the sheer monotonous repetition of the word 'fuck'.¹³ In 'Swearing Blind: Kelman and the Curse of the Working Classes' (1996), Willy Maley offers a convincing rebuttal of this argument. Maley denies any clumsy deployment of profanity and instead, traces a varied use of swearing for deliberate artistic effect. Such questions, regarding the issue of swearing, are both interesting and instructive. However, when the author says 'my language and my culture have a right to exist', he is, of course, talking about much more than the right to swear. The linguistic politics of Kelman's work are broader and more complex than any narrow discussion of the word 'fuck' would inevitably allow.

Other critics argued that what made Kelman's language 'bad' related to questions of authenticity. For Denis Canavan, Labour M.P. for Falkirk West, *How Late It Was, How Late* was a contrived and essentially unrealistic use of language: 'I think he goes over the top with the f-word. Nobody in Scotland or anywhere else uses so many.'¹⁴ However, at the time several letters in the press would seem to recommend the verisimilitude of the novel's language: 'I did think that with so many expletives it had to be stretching belief for him to say that he was recording the authentic voice of the working class of Scotland. But then on Saturday afternoon I was at Tynecastle in Edinburgh for the visit of Celtic, and lo and behold, I was wrong in thinking as I did, and Mr Kelman was (and is) right.'¹⁵ But is dialect writing merely an attempt to offer a realistic transcription of everyday speech? Kelman himself would adamantly disagree:

[T]he gist of the argument amounts to the following, that vernaculars, patois, slangs, dialects, gutter-languages etc might well have a place in the realms of comedy (and the frequent references to Billy Connolly or Rab C Nesbitt substantiate this) but they are inferior linguistic forms and have no place in

¹³ See for example Jenkins, 'An Expletive of a Winner', 20.

¹⁴ Quoted in Wavell, 'Scots bewail 4,000-expletive blot on national character', 5.

¹⁵ Alex Good, *The Scotsman* (20 October 1994), Letters Page, 14.

See also James Wilson, *The Scotsman* (18 October 1994), Letters Page, 16.

literature. And a priori any writer who engages in the use of such so-called language is not really engaged in literature at all. It's common to find well-meaning critics suffering the same burden, while they strive to be kind they still cannot bring themselves to operate within a literary perspective; not only do they approach the work as though it were an oral text, they somehow assume it to be a literal transcription of recorded speech.¹⁶

Such condemnations, regarding the issue of swearing and the purported realism of Kelman's language, are symptomatic of a form of critical reductionism. They are an attempt to dismiss the need for a more detailed and intelligent engagement with the linguistic politics of the author's work.

Kelman – 'the chronicler of the nation'?

The other issue that possesses a gravitational effect on the critical interpretation of Kelman's work is, of course, Scotland. In the press conference immediately following Booker, the very first question Kelman was asked was: 'Why do you hate the English?'¹⁷ Such critics would seek to dismiss Kelman, depicting him as the clichéd Scot, complete with a massive chip on his shoulder. More significantly though, such nation-centred readings have dominated much of the serious and adulatory criticism devoted to the author's work. Nicola Pitchford's 'How Late it was for England: James Kelman's Scottish Booker Prize' (2000), is one such case in point: 'Kelman's Scottishness – and, more strikingly, the Scottishness of his novel – brings to the fore the foundational confusions between "Britain" and "England".'¹⁸ This perspective echoes the only full length study of the author's work to date, Dietmar Bohnke's *Kelman Writes Back: Literary Politics in the Work of a Scottish Writer* (1999). Of particular interest to us is Bohnke's argument that it is through language that we are able to locate Kelman's work within a Scottish nationalist tradition. Kelman is described as 'the chronicler of the nation':

¹⁶ James Kelman, 'Elitist slurs are racism by another name', 2.

¹⁷ Toremans, 'An Interview with Alasdair Gray and James Kelman', 581.

¹⁸ Nicola Pitchford, 'How Late it was for England: James Kelman's Scottish Booker Prize' *Contemporary Literature*, V.41 No.4 (Win 2000), 693-725, 700.

His 'Scottishness' is best seen in his character types and above all in his language [...] Scottish nationalism can generally be seen to be cultural and above all literary in its nature rather than political [...] it is the writers who secured the continuity of a distinct Scottish culture.¹⁹

However, such nationalist readings would ignore the feelings of many Scots at the time of the Booker; namely, that Kelman was somehow letting the side down. We may recall Alan Clarke's comment that the award was 'an insult to *Scottish* culture' (my emphasis). Similarly, for Stuart Wavell in the *Sunday Times*, the novel was a '4,000-expletive blot on the national character.' And for Kathleen Monroe of the Saltire Society: 'It's an unfortunate portrayal of Scotland. I am afraid we are our own worst enemy sometimes.'²⁰ This contradiction necessitates that we re-examine the supposedly nationalist credentials of Kelman's work and in particular, his use of dialect.

The nationalist perspectives outlined above are indicative of what the critic Laurence Nicoll has referred to as, 'an exegetical deficiency within the secondary literature devoted to Kelman, which can simply be described as an inability to think out with a critical taxonomy, the parameters of which are set by the concepts of 'nation' and 'nationalism'.²¹ Reading Kelman's work within such national paradigms is part of a more general trend within recent Scottish Studies. In recent times critics have increasingly sought to theorise the apparent rebirth of nationalism during the 1980s and 1990s, a development that, of course, ended in a 'yes' vote for Scottish devolution. For Catherine Lockerbie, Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, devolution marked a decisive turning point in the nation's literary imagination:

Now that devolution has been achieved, people don't have to prove they are Scottish writers anymore [...] I think we have moved on from the days of the stereotypical writer. Young writers today don't have to write those quasi-political novels.²²

¹⁹ Bohnke, *Kelman Writes Back*, 19, 26-27.

²⁰ Quoted in Wavell, 'Scots bewail 4,000-expletive blot on national character', 5.

²¹ Laurence Nicoll, 'This is not a nationalist position: James Kelman's existential voice' *Edinburgh Review* No.103 (2000), 79-84, 79.

²² Quoted in Alex Massie, 'Sir Walter's Scoterati', *Scotland on Sunday* (16 Jun. 2002), 1.

Lockerbie's description of recent Scottish writing as 'quasi-political' is both pejorative and highly problematic. Her comment would devalue and homogenize all pre-devolutionary Scottish writing, implying it possessed some kind of adolescent obsession with the questions of national identity. Devolution and the restoration of the Scottish Parliament mean that this retarded literature can, at last, begin to fully mature. This simplistic equation –writing from Scotland = writing about Scotland – echoes the theoretical assumptions of a book like *Kelman Writes Back*: 'This recent development [devolution] and what will follow from it can be regarded as an – at least indirect – outcome of the more confident mood in Scottish culture and especially the literature of the past decades.'²³

Historian T.M. Devine provides a detailed account of what he too regards as the cultural enablement of Scotland's national rebirth:

Novelists such as James Kelman, Alasdair Gray and William McEwan, Ian Banks, and later Irvine Welsh enjoyed enormous international success with works grounded in the gritty realities of urban Scotland often written in the working-class vernacular... there was a new vitality in many aspects of Scottish culture which helped to underpin the growing interest in Home Rule. Culture provided a "Quiet Revolution" [...] which helped to heal some of the breaches in the community and enabled a more unified movement towards self determination [...] In fields like literature at least the revival was part of a vibrant and continuing tradition that stretched back to the era of MacDiarmid and the 'Scottish Renaissance' of the 1920s.²⁴

For Devine, Kelman's work was part of a more confident mood within Scottish culture. As such it would fit well with Gramsci's expanded notion of politics, one that is embedded within a wider series of cultural issues. However, in reading contemporary Scottish culture, it is vital that we do not to generalize what might be referred to as the Braveheart effect. When Scottish history was given the Hollywood treatment in 1995, many nationalist were quick to catch the wave of patriotism that inevitably followed. The Scottish National Party (SNP) for one handed out leaflets advocating independence, at the film's premier in Stirling. Mel Gibson/William Wallace's romantic call to arms –

²³ Bohnke, *Kelman Writes Back*, 7.

²⁴ T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation, 1700-2000*, 609.

‘they may take our lives, but they’ll never take our freedom’ – is, however, undercut by another iconic Scottish voice of 1990s cinema: Mark Renton. *Trainspotting* was of course adapted from the novel by Irvine Welsh, where Renton offers his own angry indictment of modern Scotland:

Fuckin failures in a country ay failures [...] the lowest of the low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation, Ah don’t hate the English. They just get on wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots.²⁵

Renton’s vitriolic outburst necessitates that we re-consider any narrative, which would describe the 1990s in terms of a rediscovered national self-confidence. The supposedly nationalist credentials of Kelman’s fiction can be re-assessed if we compare the 1990s with that original attempt at cultural revival, the 1920s Scottish Renaissance.

Led by Hugh MacDiarmid, the Renaissance was an attempt to legitimate demands for independence through the reassertion of a distinctly Scottish cultural identity. If there is a link between MacDiarmid and Kelman, it lies in their mutual interest in language as a tool for cultural validation. One could quite easily imagine the Scottish poet boldly declaring: ‘my language and my culture have a right to exist’. Arguably though, ‘my language’ and ‘my culture’ would refer different things for each writer. The synthetic Scots of MacDiarmid’s poetry, most famously evinced in ‘A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle’ (1926), was a fusion of contemporary vernacular and the language of the fifteenth century Makars, as collected in Jameson’s *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808). As a result, MacDiarmid’s Lallans was markedly different from the urban dialect that Kelman himself would later employ. As we saw in the epigraph, in 1936 the *Scottish National Dictionary* would itself draw an explicit distinction between Scots and the modern urban dialect, as spoken in Glasgow. Kelman would regard his own language out with anything that might be narrowly termed Scots. His autobiographical introduction to the collection *Three Glasgow Writers* (1976) reads:

My language is English
I write

²⁵ Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1993), 93.

In my writings the accent is in Glasgow
I am always from Glasgow and I speak English
Always with this Glasgow accent.²⁶

This distinction would resurface during the Booker controversy through Simon Jenkins' excoriation of Kelman's work: '[It] is not Older Scottish, or Scots English, or Lallans, or any dialect of Burns's "Guid Scots Tongue".'²⁷ However, the fact that the language of a contemporary Glasgow novel differs from fifteenth century court poetry, or eighteenth century verse of Burns, hardly seems the most relevant grounds for dissent. Jenkins referred to Kelman's Booker as an act of 'literary vandalism'. This was an extremely ironic comment if we consider that vandalism is something that one normally does to a piece of property. It is a description that perhaps says more about Jenkins' own bourgeois concept of literature than it does about the value of the author's work.

For Kelman, the linguistic politics of his work are definitively socio-economic in character:

There is nothing about the language used by folk in and around Glasgow or London or Liverpool or Belfast or Swansea that makes it generally distinct from any other city in the sense that it is a language composed of all sorts of particular influences, the usual industrial or post-industrial situation where different cultures have intermingled for a great number of years.²⁸

Moreover, Kelman is highly suspicious that nationalism could accommodate the type of radical politics that he is interested in: 'This idea that the interest of the country at large can be expressed irregardless of political and economic difference is very suspect indeed.'²⁹ So, although Kelman is not a nationalist, the juxtaposition with MacDiarmid is not altogether redundant. There is, of course, a more meaningful comparison that Jenkins failed to recognize. Whilst Synthetic Scots was an ornate and complex language, capable

²⁶ Quoted in Peter Kravitz, ed, *The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Fiction* (London: Picador, 1997), xxix.

²⁷ Jenkins, 'An Expletive of a Winner', 20.

²⁸ James Kelman, 'The Importance of Glasgow in my Work' in *Some Recent Attacks* (Stirling: A.K. Press, 1992), 78-84, 84.

²⁹ James Kelman, 'Fighting for Survival: the Steel industry in Scotland' in "...And the Judges Said..." (London: Vintage, 2000), 120-135, 127.

of sublime poetical expression and sophisticated intellectual thought, it was inaccessible to the majority of Scots in the 1920s. This kind of cultural elitism was inimical to the radical politics MacDiarmid hoped his work enshrined. Later he would acknowledge this compromise in his poem 'Second Hymn to Lenin' (1932):

Are my poems spoken in the factories and fields,
In the streets o' the toon?
Gin they're no', then I'm failin' to dae
What I ocht to ha' dune.³⁰

The tension, between the desire for political revival and a truly effective art form, can be read as a question of language. This awareness of the relationship between the work of art, its subject matter and its audience is central to the linguistic politics of Kelman's work. The author himself has commented: 'I wanted to write and remain a member of my own community.'³¹ So whilst Kelman does employ language as a tool of cultural validation, unlike MacDiarmid, his work cannot be aligned with exclusively nationalist ends. Instead, his work challenges the kind of cultural elitism that, however unintentional it may have been, MacDiarmid's poetry nevertheless engendered.

If contemporary Scottish literature can be considered opposite the 1920s, then it must surely be in terms of 'The "real" Scottish renaissance', a phrase first coined by Douglas Gifford back in 1990. For Gifford, 'real' signaled a crucial difference between the cultural dynamic of both periods. In the original renaissance, 'poetry and fiction offered folk epics and Scottish mythology to remind us of our roots and ancient separateness.' In contrast, contemporary cultural developments signal, 'a revival which by and large is deeply critical of the very Scotland it "celebrates" [...]. A new breed arrived which felt utterly confident writing *from* Scotland, perhaps *about* Scotland, but by no means limited at all to Scotland.'³² Gifford's argument compliments our own interpretation of class, both in Kelman's work and in terms of this thesis in general. Kelman's fiction does address the state of modern Scotland and Britain for that matter.

³⁰ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 1994), 152.

³¹ Kelman, 'Elitism and English Literature', 63.

³² Douglas Gifford, 'At last- the Real Scottish Renaissance?', *Books in Scotland* 38 (1990), 1-4, 1, 2.

However, it is a mistake to limit the scope of his work in this way. His work's interest in questions of power and resistance resonate far beyond a purely Scottish/British context.

The idea that the linguistic politics of Kelman's work might equally apply to places as diverse as Belfast or Liverpool compels us to rethink any exclusively nation-centred reading. In his insightful essay 'Resisting Arrest: James Kelman' (1993), Cairns Craig argues that the language of Kelman's fiction bypasses the nation and belongs fundamentally, to the discourse of class: '[Language] is not rendered in terms of an ideal of the Scottish working-class as maintainers of a distinctive Scots language.'³³ This approach, affording primacy to the socio-economic over the geographic, is endorsed by fellow Glaswegian writer Tom Leonard:

There are basically two ways of speaking in Britain: one which lets the listener know that one paid for one's education, the other which lets the listener know that one didn't [...]. To have created, or at least preserved, a particular mode of pronunciation on a strictly economic base, cannot but have very deep repercussions in a society, and in the literature of that society.³⁴

This linguistic difference, based on class rather than region, necessitates the transcendence of any narrow interpretation, based on the perceived Scottishness of Kelman's work.

If Kelman's work has been mis-appropriated by certain cultural nationalists, there is also a sense in which very term 'contemporary Scottish Renaissance' is a complete misnomer. The writer most often evoked alongside Kelman at the vanguard of this so-called Renaissance, Alasdair Gray, comments:

Rather than a sudden explosion of literary creativity in the early eighties, the 'Scottish Renaissance' in truth denoted a change in publication policy and adjusted the critical view of Scottish writers: the proliferation of Scottish works

³³ Cairns Craig, 'Resisting Arrest: James Kelman', *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace, eds, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 99-114, 102.

³⁴ Tom Leonard, *Intimate Voices: Selected Works 1965-1983* (Devonshire: Etruscan, 2003), p.104.

on the literary market had more to do with changes in the market than with a sudden emergence of literary talent and/or cultural self-awareness.³⁵

The idea of a cultural self-confidence emerging as reaction to the debacle of 1979, becomes all the more tenuous if we consider that Gray's masterpiece *Lanark* (1981). Tom Leonard dismissed claims of a Renaissance, commenting that in Scotland there aren't any Sistine chapels to boast of. However, we might usefully recall the young Duncan Thaw in *Lanark* who suggestively paints his own epic mural on the ceiling of a church. An often quoted scene from the novel signals the direction in which we must re-orientate the idea of a contemporary Scottish Renaissance:

"Glasgow is a magnificent city," said McAlpin. "Why do we hardly ever notice that?" "Because nobody imagines living here," said Thaw. McAlpin lit a cigarette and said, "If you want to explain that I'll certainly listen." "Then think of Florence, Paris, London, New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he's already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films. But if a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively. [...] Imaginatively Glasgow exists as a music hall song and a few bad novels. That's all we've given to the world outside. It's all we've given to ourselves."³⁶

It was this challenge, to imagine living there, that characterized the emergence of what was predominantly a generation of Glasgow writers. In the wake of Kelman and Gray, came writers like Liz Lochhead, Janice Galloway and Agnes Owens. Predating, but equally coming into their own in this period, were Glasgow poets, Edwin Morgan and Tom Leonard. In this sense, the Scottish Renaissance would in fact be better described as the Glasgow Renaissance. As Drew Milne argues, 'It is the city not the nation that is the key analytic category.'³⁷ Similarly, in his introduction to *The History of Scottish Literature Vol. 4* (1987), Cairns Craig suggests that the writing in Glasgow dialect is part of a critical distancing from the ideological hegemony of the nation.³⁸ Moreover, the

³⁵ Toremans, 'An Interview with Alasdair Gray and James Kelman', 569.

³⁶ Alasdair Gray, *Lanark* (London: Picador, 1994), 243.

³⁷ Drew Milne, 'James Kelman: dialectics of urbanity', in J. Davies, ed, *Writing Region and Nation* (Swansea: University of Wales, 1994), 393-407, 399.

³⁸ 'In the cities, many Scots saw the real Scotland in terms of a proletariat whose identity was with other proletarians around the world, rather than with a "people" or a nation in

chronology of a specifically post '79 reawakening of the Scottish imagination is problematic in light of the lengthy pregnancy of Gray's landmark novel. Although published in 1981, the book was first submitted to Canongate in 1977. In fact *Lanark* had been twenty-four years in the making, with individual chapters of the book published in 1958, 1969 and 1974.³⁹ The protracted gestation period that *Lanark* enjoyed renders the idea of a literary reaction to the failure of 1979 extremely problematic.

If the Scottish Renaissance was in actual fact a Glasgow Renaissance, then there is another very real sense in which it could also be termed a Working-Class Renaissance. The work of the writers listed above is all indebted to a specifically urban form of working class experience. In *Lanark*, Thaw's reaction to a post-war capitalist society is one of outright protest: 'Half the folk on this planet die of malnutrition before they're thirty [...] Nothing decent lasts. All that lasts is this mess of fighting and pain and I object to it! I object! I object!'⁴⁰ Moreover, if Thatcherism represented a challenge to the foundational principles of the welfare state, it is worth remembering that Kelman (b.1946), Lochhead (b.1947) and Leonard (b.1944) are very much the children of Butler, Beveridge and Bevan.⁴¹ Rather than a reawakened sense of a specifically Scottish sense of identity, the road to devolution is better understood through its class dynamics. The context of Devine's assertion of a more confident Scottish culture is worth reconsidering. It forms only a single paragraph in the final chapter of his book *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (1999). The rest of the chapter details the effects of the social and economic transformations that accompanied the Thatcher years. Scotland felt the force of these changes more acutely than the rest of the UK. From 1979-1986 when employment levels fell by 3% in the UK, they fell by 8% in Scotland. Working-class communities were the most severely affected. During the 1980s, the total number of workers employed in manufacturing, agriculture and fishing throughout Scotland fell by nearly half.

which the industrial city happened to be situated.' Cairns Crain, ed, *The History of Scottish Literature Vol. 4* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), 6.

³⁹ Kravitz, ed, *The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Fiction*, xiv. The date and place of previously published chapters appear on the inside cover of *Lanark* (1994).

⁴⁰ Gray, *Lanark*, 297.

⁴¹ Gray himself has made specific reference to this point. See Toremans, 'An Interview with Alasdair Gray and James Kelman', 275.

Moreover, the dismantling of heavy industry and the rolling back of the welfare state were pursued by a Tory government that had almost no electoral mandate north of the border.⁴² Increasingly, Thatcherism came to be perceived as an attack on the working-class communities of Scotland. It was indicative of a southern administration acting in the narrow interests of a southern elite. The gathering momentum of devolution could be seen to adhere to Tom Nairn's description:

In the Scottish case [...] this is overwhelmingly a politically orientated separatism, rather exaggeratedly concerned with problems of state and power, and frequently indifferent to the themes of race and cultural ancestry.⁴³

Devolution belongs to a specifically class-based narrative rather than anything that can be easily aligned with narratives of national cultural revival. It is this argument that obliges us to consider the politics of Kelman's work in terms of their class content over and above anything we might identify in terms of nationalism.

How Late it Was, How Late – dialect and the politics of form

Attesting to the residual value of Scottish-Irish comparisons, the first frame of critical reference for Kelman's aesthetic is provided by Joyce.⁴⁴ Literary form and style are always political issues, and what a text presents can never be separated from how it is presented. In *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1978), Colin MacCabe contrasts the radical technique of Joyce with that of George Eliot. His aim is to challenge the formal conservatism of the classic realist text. My intention is to transpose this discussion, comparing Kelman's narrative technique with that of another working-class Scottish novel, William McIlvanney's *Docherty* (1975).

⁴² Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*, 591-599.

⁴³ Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: crisis and neo-nationalism* (London: NLB, 1977), 71.

⁴⁴ In light of the outrage over Kelman's use of swearing, it is worth pointing out that the OED cites *Ulysses* (1922) as the first modern text to use the word 'fuck' in this non-sexual, emphatic way. *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), 26 Aug 2006. <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50090565>>

Docherty is the story of a working-class family living in the fictional Scottish town of Graithnock at the dawn of the twentieth century. Formally it employs the realist narrative conventions that McCabe identifies in his comparison of Eliot and Joyce. The voice of the narrator is distinguished from that of the characters' by way of inverted commas, but also, more significantly, through a linguistic difference. Unlike the characters who speak a form of vernacular Scots, the omniscient third person narrator is represented by a Standard English orthography. A crucial scene of the novel involves an altercation between Docherty's youngest son, Conn, and his schoolmaster Mr Pirrie. Conn has grazed his face whilst playing outside:

'Ah fell an'bumped ma heid in the sheuch, sur'
'I beg your pardon?'
In the pause Conn understands the nature of the choice, trembling, compulsively, makes it.
'Ah fell an'bumped ma heid in the sheuch, sur'
The blow is instant. His ear seems to enlarge, is muffed in numbness.⁴⁵

The choice Conn is forced to make is between speaking English, in Pirrie's terms 'the mother tongue', and Scots, ironically the language spoken by his own 'mither'. The Scots word 'sheuch' translates as 'gutter', the place where the schoolmaster feels that Conn and his working-class Scots vernacular undoubtedly belong. Mr Pirrie's blow is symbolic of a linguistic violence that the 1872 Scottish Education Act imposed upon a generation of Scottish children. The Act, passed by the British Parliament, outlawed the use of Scots in the classroom. 1872 marks a decisive moment in the linguistic history of Scotland. It formalized a linguistic transformation that can be traced back to the Act of Union (1707), if not the Union of the Crowns (1603) some hundred years before. With the political and economic centres of power firmly established in London, it was English that became the *lingua franca* for ambitious, middle-class Scots.⁴⁶ In the context of the Scottish Enlightenment, the language of the hearth (Scots) was regarded as unfit to be the language of the head (English). David Hume famously declared:

⁴⁵ William McIlvanney, *Docherty* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975), 114.

⁴⁶ For a full discussion of this see Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 16-45.

Notwithstanding all the Pains, which I have taken in the Study of English Language, I am still jealous of my Pen. As to my tongue, you have seen, that I regard it as totally desperat and irreclaimable.⁴⁷

This aside, it is the class character of the 1872 Scottish Education Act that is of particular interest. With a school system forced to teach in English, Scots increasingly became the language of the uneducated – the working class. It is this which allows some commentators to argue the working class as the keepers of a distinctly Scottish form of linguistic identity.⁴⁸ Undoubtedly, Scottish nationalism does have a strongly working-class element. However, as we saw above with the contemporary Scottish Renaissance, such arguments could be accused of appropriating working-class politics merely to bolster claims for independence.

There is another, more subtle, violence at work in the formal structure of McIlvanney's text. The demotic Scots speech of the working-class characters is framed by the omniscient, Standard English narrative. The narrator assumes a position of authority, interpreting and explaining the lives of the working class characters in the text: 'Conn understands the nature of the choice, trembling, compulsively, makes it.' Formally, McIlvanney's novel can be seen to enact an aesthetic violence, reproducing the very same linguistic hierarchy that Mr Pirrie brutally enforces.⁴⁹ As Barbara Finlay has argued: 'proletarian writers who worked in the form of the realistic novel ended up confirming the very world order that they originally set out to oppose.'⁵⁰ In diagnosing the effect of this narrative structure Colin McCabe asserts: 'The existence of a meta-

⁴⁷ Quoted in Arthur Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment: the Scottish Invention of the Modern World* (London: Forth Estate, 2003), 100.

⁴⁸ See for example Billy Kay, *Scots: the Mither Tongue* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Press, 1986).

⁴⁹ McIlvanney himself was aware of this issue in writing *Docherty* acknowledging that it was a book written about people, most of whom would never read it. His intention was not to demean the lives of the working class characters through the use of a Standard English narrator, but rather to invest their existence with greater significance than they themselves would be able to articulate in themselves. See William McIlvanney, 'A Shield Against the Gorgon', *Surviving the Shipwreck* (Mainstream: Edinburgh, 1991), 219-235.

⁵⁰ Barbara Finlay, 'Generic and Doctrinal Politics in the Proletarian Bildungsroman' in James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, ed, *Understanding Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State, 1994), 43-64, 48.



language within the text allows the reader (and critic) to read from a position of dominance.⁵¹ The classic realist text does not depict reality in any meaningfully objective sense. Instead, it attempts to naturalize a specifically bourgeois view of the world, depicting the class-based society as the organically inevitable structure of the modern world. Kelman himself has commented on the formal politics of this mode of writing:

[T]he standard third party one, the one that most people don't think of as a 'voice' at all – except maybe the voice of God – and they take for granted that it is unbiased and objective. But it's no such thing. Getting rid of that standard third party narrative voice is getting rid of a whole value system.⁵²

In Gramsci's terms, the naturalization of this formal narrative as somehow 'real', is indicative of a wider process. It belongs to the cultural hegemony of the ruling class, one which seeks to render itself invisible, becoming part of a universal belief structure about the underlying nature of the world.

How Late It Was, How Late denies the kind of formal conservatism we witness in McIlvanney's text. The novel opens:

Ye wake in a corner and stay there hoping yer body will disappear, the thoughts smothering ye; these thoughts; but ye want to remember and face up to things, just something keeps ye from doing it, why can ye no do it; the words filling yer head: then the other words; there's something wrong; there's something far far wrong; ye're no a good man, ye're just no a good man. Edging back into awareness, of where ye are: here, slumped in this corner, with these thoughts filling ye. And oh Christ his back was sore; stiff, and the head pounding. He shivered and hunched up his shoulders, shut his eyes, rubbed into the corners with his fingertips; seeing all kinds of spots and lights. Where in the name of fuck...
(HL 1)

The text is devoid of the Standard English, third person narrative voice. Rather than limit vernacular to the speech of working class characters, it is the idiomatic voice of Sammy that propels the narrative, interpreting and explaining the world of the text. The reading

⁵¹ Colin McCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 25.

⁵² Kirsty McNeill, 'An Interview with James Kelman' *Chapman* No.57 (1989), 2-12, 5.

experience echoes that of the main character as we both edge into awareness, forbidden any authoritative view point over the world of the text. Similar to Joyce, Kelman's work refuses to employ inverted commas to distinguish the narrative voice from that of the characters.⁵³ As a result, the conspiracy between reader and narrator in terms of a position of epistemological privilege is fundamentally denied. Drew Milne highlights this tactical use of indirect narrative: '[Kelman's work] offers neither a representation of speech as speech, nor an authoritative written register which might distinguish author from character. The absence of a position from which to view or judge the 'narrated' subverts the narrative itself.'⁵⁴ In contrast to the classic realist text, which assumed a position of bourgeois authority over its subject matter, Kelman's texts locate themselves within the linguistic community that they write about. The refusal of narrative authority allows Cairns Craig to define the author's work as fundamentally 'resisting arrest'.

The formal politics of *How Late It Was, How Late* mirror the content of the novel which depicts the blinded Sammy Samuels navigating the labyrinthine systems of power that underpin life on the social and economic margins of post-industrial society. The linguistic prejudice outlined above is something which Sammy himself alludes to in his description of the police: 'these sodjers man if ye're no a fucking millionaire or talk with the right voice, they don't give a fuck.' (HL 4) Similarly, as he confronts various representatives of the state, a Doctor and a DSS worker, Sammy's blindness foregrounds the ubiquity of this linguistic/class prejudice. The Doctor disguises his essential lack of empathy behind a pompous official-speak: 'Well I dare say that if a claim in respect of a found dysfunction is allowed then an application in respect of a customer's wants that may be consistent with the found dysfunction becomes open to discharge by the appropriate charitable agency.' (HL 224) Unsurprisingly, the meeting ends rather abruptly:

Mister Samuels, I have people waiting to see me.
Christ sake!
I find your language offensive.
Do ye. Ah well fuck ye then. Fuck ye! (HL 225)

⁵³ Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.353.

⁵⁴ Milne, 'James Kelman: dialectics of urbanity', p.395.

Echoing the media outcry over the Booker award, it is Sammy's language in particular that the Doctor identifies as most offensive. Significantly, this episode draws on a particularly recent working-class issue. That Sammy must have his blindness validated by a representative of the state, mirrors the experience of many men in Glasgow attempting to claim for compensation over asbestos poisoning. Before any financial recompense is awarded by the state, the men had to have a Doctor, also on the payroll of the state, verify their illness. In seeking to 'write and remain a member of my community', Kelman's work includes many such references that might bypass those on the outside of this working-class milieu.

Throughout the novel Sammy's demotic speech is continually juxtaposed with the middle-class accents of the state authority figures. When he meets the DSS woman Sammy comments:

She had one of these mental ding dong middle-class accents ye get in Glasgow that go up and down all the time and have these big long sounds. Eh just an appointment, said Sammy, for Monday morning.
An appoointment? For Monday mawwwring! (*HL* 123)

Kelman forces us to re-consider the conventions that govern textual representation of the spoken word. Traditionally, it is the working-class demotic that is given a non-standard (often read as 'sub-standard') spelling: e.g. 'tae' and 'doesnay'. The result is an interpretation of working-class speech as an aberration, evinced by normative commands to 'speak properly'. What Kelman's text illustrates is the equal perversity of a specifically bourgeois accent. When recorded phonetically, the Received Pronunciation of middle-class speech is no closer to Standard English than working-class dialect. Moreover, the middle-class *Glaswegian* accent prevents the linguistic politics of the novel being readily codified within a nationalist framework, one that would diagnose the fundamental difference between English and Scots. Building on earlier comment about talking with the right voice, we are again reminded of Sammy's acute sensitivity regarding the politics of language. Sammy is not the passive object of the classic realist text, interpreted and explained by an omniscient narrator. He continually code shifts,

adopting and adapting the speech patterns of those around him to expose their latent prejudice. The subversive potential of this type of action will be returned to in more detail below.

Later in the novel Sammy registers his injury with the Independent Medical Officer at the police station:

You're asserting ye were subject to a physical beating by members of the police department?

What?

...

What d'ye say?

They gave ye a doing?

They gave me a doing?

That's what's entered here.

Well I don't like the way it sounds.

I'm only reading out what ye told the Preliminary Officer; he entered the phrase in quotation marks to indicate these were your very own words ...

But it's a colloquialism and not everyone who deals with your claim will understand what it means. I felt that it was fair to use physical beating by way of an exposition.... (HL 103)

Like the main character himself, Sammy's language can be seen to suffer a 'doing' at the hands of the authorities. For the IMO, Sammy's language is incapable of adequately representing his own experience. One cannot know or describe reality using dialect; vernacular clouds meaning, whereas Standard English is a clear conduit through which it shines unadulterated. The middle-class speaker knows reality; the working-class experience is only a warped version of it. Like the classic realist text, the interviewer places Sammy's speech in quotation marks, and proceeds to re-interpret his words in the language of the official discourse. Ultimately though, Sammy's language resists such attempts at schematic codification. When the police are typing his statement, he is told, 'Don't use the word 'cunts' again, it doesn't fit in the computer' (HL 160). The police cannot textualise and subsequently fix what Sammy says. Fix, of course, in the double sense of both correcting and securing its position. If language resists authority in this way, then the inevitable consequence is to attempt to silence it.

We have already seen how realist narrative convention would formally deny working-class characters the ability to explain and interpret the world for themselves. Similar to Sammy, Kelman's novel is highly self-reflexive and seeks to interrogate its own relationship to the working-class community it purports to represent. At the Doctor's surgery an individual introduces himself to Sammy and offers to assist him in his case for compensation. The man, whose name is Ally, puts himself forward to 'rep' Sammy in his claim. Their relationship highlights the difficulties experienced by the literary author in his role as representative (and ally?) to the working-class subject matter of his fiction.

Throughout the novel Ally continually refers to 'reading' Sammy's situation. This suggests that he perhaps belongs to a more literary culture than Sammy. Similar to the realist narrative, we observe Ally attempt to edit and qualify Sammy's experience:

If I can stop ye there.

What?

I'm no meaning to be cheeky. But it's best if I ask you questions and you give me answers. A lot of what ye're gony tell me is nay material and with respect it's best if I don't hear it. (*HL* 233)

Moreover, Ally assumes a position of authority, claiming to know more about Sammy's case than he himself does. At one stage he sarcastically comments: 'once ye win the diagnosis question and get yer sightloss registration ye'll drop a couple of quid on the full-function capacity [...]. Ye knew that already but eh?' (*HL* 228). And, like the media during the Booker and the other authority figures in the novel, Ally attempts to police the more colourful aspects of Sammy's language:

Right ... look eh pardon me; just one thing, ye're gony have to watch yer language; sorry, but every second word's fuck. If ye listen to me you'll see I try to keep an eye on the aul words. (*HL* 238)

Evoking Kelman's own critical defiance, Sammy rejects the offer of assistance in his own idiomatic style: 'I don't need a rep, thanks very much. Fuck off' (*HL* 215). The suspicion that Ally might actually be *allied* to the state is fuelled when Sammy's son reports a phone call from the 'rep': 'He sounded funny [...] I thought he was a polis' (*HL* 342). So

how should we situate Kelman, in terms of the Ally/Sammy relationship that the novel portrays? Kelman himself is clearly bilingual, fluent in both the language of literature and that of the Glasgow street. Kelman may be differentiated from Ally through his attempts to construct a literature of resistance. By transgressing the narrative boundaries of classic realism, Kelman challenges a system of literary value that would seek to invalidate working-class experience.

In *How Late It Was, How Late* we witness Sammy's reluctance to have anyone 'repping' him in his claim for compensation. This idea of 'representation' provides a way of theorising how Kelman's work would resist elitist notions of cultural value. For us, there is both a political and an aesthetic resonance to the idea of representation. Marx himself addressed this issue in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852):

[The working class] are incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them.⁵⁵

This would help to explain how a novel like *Docherty* could adapt a narrative form to the classic realist text, and yet still attempt to offer a committed working-class politics. In this quote from Marx, 'representation' refers to a political relationship. However, we might also read it in terms of Kelman's desire 'to write and remain a member of my own community.' In direct contrast to Marx, Kelman would deny the inevitability of such class estrangement.

In his acceptance speech for the Booker Prize, Kelman used the language of post-colonialism in order to describe the class elitism that he writes about:

There is a literary tradition to which I hope my own work belongs, I see it as part of a much wider process - or movement - toward decolonisation and self-determination: it is a tradition that assumes two things: 1) the validity of indigenous culture; and 2) the right to defend in the face of attack.

⁵⁵ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in *Selected Writings of Karl Marx*, David McLellan, ed, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 318.

It is a tradition premised on a rejection of the cultural values of imperial or colonial authority, offering a defence against cultural assimilation, in particular an imposed assimilation.⁵⁶

We might read this conflation of class and colonialism in a negative way. Devoid of its ideological credibility, the discourse of class must find a new mode of expression and so appropriates the language of imperialism. Alternatively, we might approach this through Laclau and Mouffe and their insistence on the need for a more expansive radical politics, one that will simultaneously include the politics of class, race and gender. The conflation of class and race will be returned to in our discussion of Roddy Doyle and the claim made by *The Commitments* (1987) that working-class Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. In the meantime it provides us with a useful way of theorising the relationship between the artist/intellectual and the working class. The Subaltern Studies group in India were particularly interested in this issue. They argued that the post-colonial nation state signaled the reconfiguration of a specifically bourgeois hegemony. In the wake of independence, native elites assumed the reigns of power, only to continue the subordination of the majority of the population. This group was known as the subaltern class.⁵⁷ Although the subaltern is generally associated with this field of criticism, it is originally a term coined by Gramsci. In 'Notes on Italian History' he explains: 'The historical unity of the ruling class is realised in the State, and their history is essentially the history of States and of groups of States.' In contrast, 'the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic.'⁵⁸ The subaltern describes a group whose history is not included within the narrative of the nation. As such, Scottish devolution might be read in one of two ways. It can be seen as a movement of the subaltern class, progressing toward seizing control of the state. At the same time, Subaltern Studies reminds us of the false promise that has often attended the ascension to national independence in other states.

⁵⁶ Kelman, 'Elitist slurs are racism by another name', 2.

⁵⁷ Colin Graham, *Deconstructing Ireland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 81-101.

⁵⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 52, 55.

How does all this relate to Kelman's novel? The politics of representation, evinced through the Sammy/Ally relationship, resonate with the theme of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential essay, 'Can the subaltern speak?'⁵⁹ Spivak is interested in the role of the post-colonial intellectual and his attempts to recover the silenced voice of the subaltern class. Whilst sympathetic to the underlying ethics, Spivak argues that such a project is fundamentally flawed. In representing the subaltern, the postcolonial intellectual is guilty of repeating a certain imperial epistemology. To label and identify the colonial other, to fix it within language formed a key part in the control and administration of the native population. We might recall the attempts by the police to fix Sammy's language. Also relevant would be the IMO's efforts to translate his experience into the language of official discourse. For Spivak, Subaltern Studies is guilty of repeating a similar type of epistemic violence. The postcolonial intellectual presents himself as the transparent mediator of the subaltern consciousness. In doing so he forgets his own place within a Western intellectual tradition, one that is complicit with specifically Western interests. Ultimately, the subaltern's view cannot be represented; it is 'no more than a theoretical fiction to entitle the project of reading.'⁶⁰ So Spivak would maintain the division between intellectual and the working class that we witnessed earlier in Marx. It is dialect and the use of indirect narrative that allow Kelman to dispute this conclusion. *How Late it Was, How Late* refuses any position of stability, from which to view the events of the text. It is the fluidity and the volatility that allows Kelman to write and remain a member of his community. As Tom Leonard explains: 'How can you own something if it is constantly changing and extending itself beyond your grasp? [...] Enter the critic: possession is irretrievably bound up with categorization, and the function of the critic is to categorize, that the bourgeoisie might safely possess.'⁶¹ Ultimately, *How Late It Was, How Late* disrupt any attempts to fix Sammy's experience within the discourses of power, to continually extend itself beyond any authoritarian 'grasp'. The novel ends

⁵⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?' in Cary Nelson and Laurence Grossberg, eds, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1988), 271-313.

⁶⁰ Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in Ranajit Guha, ed, *Subaltern Studies Vol. IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 330-363, 358.

⁶¹ Leonard: *Reports from the Present*, 66.

idiosyncratically with Sammy finally escaping from even our own readerly surveillance: 'The driver had opened the door. Sammy slung in the bag and stepped inside, then the door slammed shut and that was him, out of sight' (*HL* 374).

Kelman's work forces us to rethink how we understand the idea of the intellectual. It challenges the kinds of segregation that Marx, and more recently Spivak, wished to assert. Again it is Gramsci who provides a theoretical model of this conceptual re-alignment, offering us a greatly expanded notion of the intellectual:

There is no activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: homo faber (man the tool bearer) cannot be separated from homo sapiens (man the thinker). Each man finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a "philosopher", an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world.⁶²

It is the use of dialect and the narrative technique of *How Late it Was, How Late* that embodies this Gramscian redefinition. Unlike the dialect speaker in the classic realist novel, Sammy is acutely conscious. He explains, interprets and attempts to resist the systems of power than would attempt to control him. Eschewing the traditional language of head (English), in his own terms Sammy can be seen to possess his own philosophical conception of the world. A drunken Scotsman railing against bureaucracy? More like an existential thinker, unmasking the systemic nature of authority in late capitalist society.

***The Busconductor Hines* and the 'Organic Intellectual'**

Earlier we discussed the sense of abandonment and redundancy experienced by many working-class communities during the Thatcher era. These themes are keenly realised in Kelman's debut novel. Rab Hines is a soon to be extinct bus conductor. The Glasgow bus system on which he works is on the verge of converting to the more economically efficient one man buses. Like the wider working class, Hines is quite literally a dying species. Reminiscent of Gramsci's view of a fragmented subaltern history, the novel features a series of disconnected scenes, devoid of any obvious plot or teleology. Hines

⁶² Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 9.

spends day after day, endlessly criss-crossing the city, never getting off, never actually arriving anywhere. The buses reach their terminus only to turn around and retrace the same journey all over again. It is a metaphor for the cyclical nature of history as outlined by Walter Benjamin. As human beings we are doomed to the continued repetition of what has gone before. Narratives of progress and amelioration are themselves part of the mystificatory processes of capitalism.⁶³ The reality of life on the buses is an endless experience of repetition, which fosters an automatic and instrumental existence in those who work there. The Inspector's continual obsession with time emphasizes this sense of mechanised regularity. Hines's habitual lateness can be read as an unconscious resistance, a refusal to conform to this temporal regimentation. Evoking the distinction between the intellectual and the non-intellectual above, the buses have a particular effect on the mental life of both conductors and drivers. We are told, 'It has never been acutely necessary to think. Hines can board the bus and all will transpire' (*BH* 154). The job of the driver is also marked with a similar sense of catatonia:

Hines tries never to speak without first making his presence known. People can be in deep reverie. Some drivers have no idea where they are at certain points on the road. They say, Christ I don't even remember driving that last couple of miles! And these miles can embrace peak-hour city centre streets. (*BH* 155)

The buses eradicate the need for any sustained level of intellectual activity. It slowly tortures Hines who is seen to plead for the comforting oblivion of mindlessness: 'Dear god up there in the nether regions please make me unconscious' (*BH* 23).

This comatose state contrasts sharply with the men's wit and their potential for abstract philosophical thought. At the pub during a discussion about the death of a colleague, the men acknowledge Hines' atheism as an added reason to fear the end. The juxtaposition between the working and non-working lives of Hines signals the reductive nature of the term 'working-class' as a definition of his experience. It would identify Hines narrowly with his labour role. We may recall Gramsci's critique of the inherent weakness in narrow conceptions of society, based on purely economic/materialist

⁶³ Graeme Gilloch, *Myths and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 1-12.

narratives. Furthermore, the term 'working-class' would eradicate Hines' individuality, reducing him to no more than a type or 'class' of persons. The title of the novel, *The Busconductor Hines*, gestures toward this inevitable tension: the individual existence signaled by the definite article contrasting with the false homogenization of Hines' labour based identity. As such, whilst maintaining an underlying commitment, Kelman's work can be seen to re-examine the very terms of the traditional class debate. For Kelman, literature can be seen to conspire in the kind of reductive reading of working-class experience outlined above:

Whenever I did find somebody from my background in English Literature they were confined to the margins, kept in their place, stuck in the dialogue. You only ever saw them or heard them. You never got into their mind. You did find them in the narrative but from the outside, never from the inside, always they were 'the other'.⁶⁴

The realist narrative offers an inherently elliptical version of working-class experience. Like the label 'working-class', it is a truncation: the uniformed existence becomes problematically, an uninformed existence.

In *How Late it Was, How Late*, the indirect narrative continually oscillates between the internal and external world, between objective reality and Sammy's subjective perception of it. In *The Busconductor Hines* a similar transgression is evident, albeit in a more protracted way. The first half of the novel mimics the conventional opposition of Standard English narrative and dialogue speaking characters. Gradually though, the narrative moves towards greater interiority. An early scene sees Hines out for a drink with the bus drivers:

Hines licked the gummed edge of the rice-paper and stuck the rolled cigarette in his mouth, and lighted it. Anyway, he went on, it doesn't really concern me about roofs over the head, I've got to pick up the wean from the nursery shortly. (*BH* 11)

The use of 'wean' distinguishes Hines's speech from the Standard English of the narrative. As the novel progresses this opposition signifies a narrative slippage, as the

⁶⁴ James Kelman, 'Elitism and English Literature', 63.

text moves within Hines' head, from where it directly represents his own private thoughts. The first episode of this occurs when Hines is working on the buses. The narrative describes him talking to the driver who gets distracted from the road and has to brake suddenly:

The driver nodded, turning his head but then returning it at once and he was hitting the footbrake...Knew he was going to do that, stupid fucking...He shook his head, and he glanced back to Hines. (BH 78)

The change in narrative perspective is signaled by the change in the linguistic code. The Standard English is interrupted by the idiomatic voice, characteristic of Hines's earlier banter with Reilly and the other drivers. It is this ability of Kelman's prose to code shift that enables the narrative to operate in this way.

Importantly, dialect is not merely offered as an authentic representation of everyday speech. It is an integral part of the formal politics of the novel. This kind of technique can be read as a solution to Spivak's problem with the intellectual and the unrecoverable consciousness of the subaltern subject. In *The Busconductor Hines* the narrative offers an extended, direct representation of Hines' internal consciousness. Whole episodes are devoid of external narration. Once we have access to the mental life of Rab Hines, we become aware of a richness and diversity that remained hidden by the formal conventions of the realist narrative. Hines' thoughts cover topics ranging from Freudian psychoanalysis and the first principles of education, to gender politics and existential philosophy. Dialect is key to this narrative technique. It grants us access to a specifically working-class consciousness, one that is otherwise refused by the formal constraints of traditional realism.

In *The Busconductor Hines* dialect is not offered as a way of fixing some essentialist working class identity. Like Sammy Samuels, Hines demonstrates a remarkable sensitivity to the politics of language. Crucially, Hines is not limited or restricted to an essential identity caused by a fixed or determined linguistic habit. In fact, it is a certain verbal dexterity that allows him to expose and challenge the hegemonic

values of late capitalist society. When he arrives home from work and Sandra asks how his day has been, Hines replies:

Mine was ebsilutely mervillous; a continual round of tactillian supprises, one minute I'm getting battered by shopping bags then barked at by mangy mongrels, attacked at by sexy office girls. (BH 23)

Similar to 'An appoiointment? For Monday mawwwring!', 'ebsilutely mervillous' mimics a specifically bourgeois accent and its concurrent value system. According to Homi Bhabha:

Mimicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire. It is the process of the fixation of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge within an interdictory discourse, and therefore necessarily raises the question of the authorization of colonial representations.⁶⁵

Again, it is a sense of fluidity that characterises the resistance of Kelman's text. In contrast to the numbing reality of bus conducting, middle-class labour is capable of providing both stimulation and fulfillment. '[B]attered by shopping bags then barked at by mangy mongrels' exposes a fundamental disjuncture between working and middle-class experiences of work. This point will be returned to in more detail in our discussion of post-industrial labour in chapter five. For the moment, Hines' mimicry is indicative of a sophisticated awareness of a specifically bourgeois ideology present in the most casual conversation. Similarly, in recounting the first time he met Sandra's parents, Hines parodies their speech patterns and the kind of values they belie:

Their only son, having secured a fine situation within an established group of civil engineers and married an upstanding young lady, has now contrived to appropriate a variety of snug objects. Little wonder they should be so dumbfounded to learn of their only daughter's curious infatuation with a lowly member of the transport experience. (BH 95)

Far from a mindless automaton, Hines displays a verbal and mental dexterity which defies any narrow class stereotype. Through language he is able to recognise and dismiss

⁶⁵ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 90.

these middle-class values and their denigration of his existence. Gramsci's concept of the 'Organic Intellectual' provides a useful way of understanding the mental life of Hines. For Gramsci, the 'Organic Intellectual' can be differentiated from the traditional intellectual not by the nature of their mental activity, but rather through the class interest in which they act. Under the guise of advancing objective knowledge, the traditional intellectual acts as functionary for the ruling class. In contrast, the Organic Intellectual, as part of the working-class, applies his mental labour with the goal of challenging the status quo and establishing a specifically working-class hegemony.⁶⁶ In contrast with the civil engineer and his variety of snug objects, Hines's mental life – and the novel itself – is involved in undermining the dominant ideology and exposing the contradictions of late capitalist society.

Just as *The Busconductor Hines* resists affixing a definitive identity based on membership to a closed linguistic community, it also reconfigures our understanding of working-class masculinity. In *Docherty*, the main character Tam Docherty is the epitome of working-class masculinity. He is ready and capable with his fists should the cause be justified. This form of masculinity is borne out of the sheer physicality of traditional industrial labour. Crucially in the novel, Tam works down the pit as a miner. Thus we are told, 'wherever he stood he established a territory.'⁶⁷ In contrast, *The Busconductor Hines* evinces a transformed notion of working-class masculinity, one that is expressive of a specifically post-industrial economy. As the male dominated heavy industries were dismantled during the 1980s, women's participation in the work force steadily increased, especially in the white collar sector. Whilst giving women an unprecedented level of financial freedom, such developments are not unequivocally positive. Many of these jobs are often part-time and de-unionised with female workers receiving a significantly lower wage than their male counterparts in similar roles.⁶⁸ In the novel, Hines gently mocks

⁶⁶ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 7-9.

⁶⁷ McIlvanney, *Docherty*, 5.

⁶⁸ Figures vary, however *The Guardian* reported in 1990 that, on average, women earn 65% of the salary that male colleagues do in the same role. Moreover, these kinds of disparity are more pronounced at the lower end of the pay scale. See Martin Whitfield, 'Ineffective legislation to undergo change' *The Guardian* (25 August 1990), 6.

Sandra as she rushes out of the house for work, ‘These feminist career women! No time to kiss their weans properly! Don’t worry wee man, just call me mummy from now on’(BH 67). He shares the cooking and parental responsibilities for the family. He also volunteers at Paul’s nursery when Sandra forgets that it is her turn to help out. The fact he is the only father at the nursery emphasizes the novel’s attempt to question traditional working-class notions of gender. The labour dispute at the climax of the novel sees Hines being told he cannot take his son with him into the meeting with the management. A concept of masculinity narrowly constructed around labour identity makes no significant allowance for the role of fatherhood.

The novel’s re-examination of working-class politics climaxes with a labour dispute at the end of the novel. On his day off, Hines calls to the depot to collect his wages. He learns he has been summoned to head office to receive an official warning for his terminal lateness. He is ordered to go home and put on his uniform, and then go to the company’s headquarters to receive his disciplinary action. Hines refuses, arguing logically that he isn’t being paid so why should he spend his day complying with company orders. The insistence that he be in uniform echoes the reductive discourse outlined above. The company refuses to acknowledge Hines’s individuality and can only engage with him by first diminishing him to a type – making him uniform. Their refusal to recognise his argument is consistent with the false perception of the absence of a working-class intellect. When the union becomes involved in the dispute, we are invited to reassess the traditional expression of working class politics – the organised mass strike action. The novel concludes with Hines walking out, both on his job and on this type of outmoded political action. By the end of novel, we have become aware of the illusory quality of such working-class unity. From the opening scene we have witnessed drivers arguing with conductors over wage differences. The advent of the one man buses will see an increase for drivers at the expense of redundancy for the conductors. Far from depicting a unified working class, the novel portrays a group of people clambering over each other for the scraps that trickle down the economic system.

In contrast to this failed collective action, the fundamental politics of Kelman's work are to be located in the existential quality of his art. As the author explains: 'There is nothing more crucial and potentially subversive, than gaining a full understanding of how the lives of ordinary people are lived from moment to moment.'⁶⁹ As such, Kelman's work may be aligned with the initial project of the Subaltern Studies group, articulated by way of Michel Foucault:

[T]o make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which has hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognised as having any moral, aesthetic or historical value.⁷⁰

The Busconductor Hines' reconstitution of traditional class politics also provides a barometer for the changing climate of post-industrial Britain. The dismantling of heavy industry has entailed the fundamental disempowerment of mass forms of collective bargaining. The possibility for meaningful political change within the parameters of conventional reformism has vanished, if indeed it ever really existed. A proper understanding of the existential experience of the working-class individual is a pre-requisite diagnosis to the possibility for emancipation. In this way, dialect is less about articulating the communal voice of a subjugated class. Rather, it exposes and confronts a system of cultural hegemony that would enable and naturalise societal inequality. Dialect speakers are shown to be more articulate in their own terms and more intellectually aware than the traditional discourses of authority would permit.

Education, hegemony and *A Disaffection*

The role of the intellectual and Kelman's declared loyalty to working-class culture inform our reading of *A Disaffection*. Kelman's central protagonists normally occupy a position on the margins of a dissolving working-class community. Hines is the fated bus conductor. Sammy is an unemployed wanderer. *A Disaffection* can also be defined by the

⁶⁹ James Kelman, 'Alex LaGuma (1925-1985)' in "...*And the Judges Said...*", 95-103, 100.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern speak?', Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 27

theme of alienation, but in a markedly different way. The novel centres on Patrick Doyle, a school teacher who, as the opening line tells us, has gradually become sickened by it. Unlike Hines and Sammy, Doyle's sense of estrangement is derived from the working-class community he was born into. He is the only member of his family to ever attend university. As a salaried professional he ostensibly belongs to a more bourgeois class than either his unemployed brother or his father who works as a machine setter. Doyle is in many ways a product of the post-war welfare state whereby many working-class children became educated and upwardly mobile. The novel interrogates the inevitable tension in this historical narrative. We might also read Doyle's class mobility in terms of the 1980s. Epitomised by the 'Right to Buy' scheme of Thatcher, the 1980s witnessed many working-class communities destabilised from within. Through generous Government subsidy many working-class people became home owners for the first time. Instead of inducing a greater sense of communal responsibility, this policy actually had the opposite effect. It fostered a sense of individualism within a community that had once been more cohesive. Many simply sold up and moved elsewhere. It also led eventually to a shortage of public housing for those on the economic margins of society. It is a sense of disillusionment regarding such aspirational narratives that characterises *A Disaffection*.

The conflict between class and the role of the education system has, of course, been addressed already. In *Docherty* it was the school teacher, Mr Pirrie, that primarily enforced an alien linguistic and cultural value system. Another Glasgow novel, George Friel's *Mr Alfred M.A.* (1972) addressed a similar set of issues and provides a useful point of departure for our discussion of *A Disaffection*. *Mr Alfred M.A.* depicts an aging school teacher, struggling to teach the working-class children of Glasgow's housing schemes. It portrays the lives of these children as increasingly governed by violence and petty acts of inter-communal hostility. In this way the text is reminiscent of *No Mean City* (1935), the novel that mythologized the Glasgow slums and their inhabitants' propensity for knife fighting. Structurally, Friel's novel employs the familiar juxtaposition of a dialect speaking character and a Standard English narrator. It depicts a working-class community in crisis where children rob the elderly and throw bricks

he is located. One of the most important aspects of Doyle's disaffection is related to his role as an authority figure over his pupils:

During the past while he had become close to overwhelmed by the darkest of feelings over the influence he could have with pupils. Each and every single relationship he had with each and every pupil seemed totally unhealthy, each and every one of them, girls and boys, they were all the same.

The Teacher!!

The Great Man!! (D 6)

In order to counter this 'unhealthy' influence Doyle's lessons become explicit condemnations of the state and its educational control of the working class:

Now, all of yous, all you wee first-yearers, cause that's what you are, wee first-yearers. You are here being fenced in by us the teachers at the behest of the government at the behest of the government in explicit simulation of your parents viz. the suppressed poor. Repeat after me: We are being fenced in by the teachers

We are being fenced in by the teachers
at the behest of a dictatorship government
at the behest of a dictatorship government
in explicit simulation of our fucking parents the silly bastards
in explicit simulation of our fucking parents the silly bastards
Laughter. (D 25)

The formal aspects of this scene are significant. Pat's use of rote learning can be seen to parody traditional forms of learning. The repetition is suggestive of a formal indoctrination that he accuses the state education of enacting. Like the classic realist novel, its formal politics are naturalised. They are rendered invisible through a process of repetition. Moreover, Pat's insistence on swearing would explicitly place him in opposition to the kinds of bourgeois outrage that we witnessed earlier with Kelman's Booker.

Gramsci provides a theoretical framework for understanding *A Disaffection's* scathing critique of the classroom. Similar to his distinction between the traditional and 'Organic Intellectual', Gramsci's theory of education is bound up with its role in capitalist society: '[education is divided into the] vocational school for the instrumental classes, [and] the classical school for the dominant classes and intellectuals [...] The

tendency today is to abolish every type of schooling that is “disinterested” (not serving immediate interests).⁷³ For Gramsci, the fundamental role of education in capitalist society is to maintain and advance the interests of the ruling elite. It is an integral part of the hegemony of the ruling class, part of its moral and intellectual leadership, working in conjunction with more overt means of social control. Kelman’s novel makes continual reference to such Gramscian readings of the politically conservative function of the education system. The gates of the school are patrolled by two police officers who nod conspiratorially to Doyle as he leaves on his lunch break. Doyle remarks to his sister-in-law Nicola at the novel’s climax: ‘I’m sick of doing my bit to suppress the weans, not unless the headmaster starts letting me wear a polis uniform’ (*D* 317). The teachers’ nickname for the deputy head, ‘MI6’, has similar poignant resonance.

As we have argued elsewhere in relation to Kelman’s work, in the school system the issue of control is indelibly linked to questions of language. Similar to the form of the classic realist text, the novel represents Pat’s authority as a meta-discourse, one which circumscribes the language of the children.

He smiled at the class: they were that fucking wee! I’m so much bigger than you, he said, these are my terms. My terms are the ones that enclose you. You are all enclosed. But you all know that already! (*D* 26)

It is against an education system that would ideologically condition the children that Doyle specifically rails. He tells his sister-in-law Nicola: ‘What I try to do, he said, in the classroom I mean, is just make the weans angry’ (*D* 320). This conception of education, developing a critical function and a knowledge of the capitalist hegemony, echoes Gramsci’s theory of an emancipatory education system. The specialized school system produces instrumental functionaries with varying levels of competence in order to satisfy the demands of the labour market. In contrast, Gramsci calls for a system of common schooling whereby all individuals are given the ability to critically evaluate the external world:

The first, primary grade should not last longer than 3 or 4 years, and in addition to imparting the first “instrumental” notions of schooling— reading, writing, sums,

⁷³ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 26-27.

geography, history— ought in particular to deal with an aspect of education now neglected— i.e. with “rights” and “duties”.⁷⁴

Earlier we argued that Kelman was not a nationalist. However, the issue of education provides a place to trace a particularly Scottish concept within his work. In *The Democratic Intellect* (1961), George Davie outlined a Scottish tradition of education that stretched back as far as the Enlightenment. This model has specific resonances with the Gramscian prioritization of “rights” and “duties”. Historically, higher education in Scotland involved the compulsory study of philosophy in conjunction with other subjects such as mathematics, engineering or physics. Alongside this adherence to first principles, students were given a generalist education, taking subjects across a broad range of disciplines. The result was an educational tradition that actively resisted the division of society into intellectuals and non-intellectuals, the very problem that Marx, Gramsci and Spivak all addressed. As Davie comments:

A society spiritually split between over-specialised boffins on the one hand and unthinking proles on the other is not merely repellent from a moral point of view, because of its tolerating or even encouraging the intellectual backwardness of the masses, but at the same time is also inherently an unstable basis for the material progress it seeks to sustain [and] the stultification of the majority [will] affect the mental balance of society as a whole.⁷⁵

We are reminded of Kelman’s desire to write and remain a member of his own community. This educational tradition has more recently been manifest in the theories of another Scottish philosopher, John Anderson (1893-1962). Anderson rejects any instrumental view of learning. The role of education is not merely to enable individuals to become more efficient participants within a commercial environment. Instead, it should enable people to develop critical, evaluative and conceptual skills that equip them to make ethical decisions about the world and their place within it.⁷⁶ Significantly, the tradition that Davie traces historically denied the distinction between English and Scots,

⁷⁴ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 30.

⁷⁵ George E. Davie, ‘The Scottish Enlightenment’, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 1991), 58. Kelman himself wrote the introduction to this re-print of Davie’s work in 1991.

⁷⁶ See entry under “Anderson, John (1893-1962)” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (online edition), 28 August 2006. <www.abd.online.anu.au/biogs.A070060b.htm>

as respectively the language of the head and the language of the heart.⁷⁷ Again, this has particular resonance with the linguistic politics of Kelman's work and his aim to render dialect as a meaningful part of literature.

As we saw above, narrative form is vital to the politics of Kelman's work. In *A Disaffection* also, the text oscillates between a third person narrative and a direct representation of Doyle's inner thoughts. However unlike the other two novels, in *A Disaffection* we witness these voices directly confronting one another. From time to time Doyle can be seen to argue with the framing narrative of the text. For example, when he is driving indecisively around Glasgow one Friday night:

Now then: if Patrick were to make a left turn at this corner it would lead him to a pub across the bridge of the Forth and Clyde canal into which he used to go with numerous frequency. Into what? The forth and Clyde canal or the bloody damn fucking pub! Just shut up and drive. Just shut up and drive to there. (*D* 63)

We can read this as a more overt manifestation of Kelman's desire to confront the Standard third party narrative voice. However, another way of reading these antagonistic voices is as a portrait of the fractured personality of Doyle, the divided self that his social climb has engendered. On the one hand we have a distinctly middle-class voice attempting to articulate a purpose and a narrative to Doyle's existence. In conflict with this is a residual working-class voice. As such, the schizoid nature of Doyle's character is indicative of the wider contradictions within late capitalist society. The social hierarchy does not peaceably accommodate these different classes. Instead, they exist in a state of perpetual conflict with one group always maintaining and another always resisting the dominant cultural hegemony.

As we have seen already, Kelman's work is continually wary of romanticizing the working-class culture to which he belongs. The Trade Union credentials of Doyle's father – 'A polis battered him over the fucking head with a cricket bat the naughty picket' – does not provoke nostalgia for some lost era of working-class militancy.

⁷⁷ George E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961), 214-221.

Instead, in his head, Doyle harangues the daily passive acceptance of the working-class: 'Dad! How are ye doing! How is your drying hand? Okay? Good, that's good. And have you wiped your gaffer's arse recently? Last week? Fine' (*D*119). Doyle's decision to leave teaching receives little sympathy from Gavin, his unemployed brother: 'He's got a job and he should look after it. We've no got a job. More than half of Scotland's no got a job. So you don't start treating it with impunity if you're lucky enough to have one' (*D* 255). For Doyle, Gavin's view that the working-class should be grateful to just have a job is part of the ideological webbing that sustains their disenfranchisement. He remarks on his role as a teacher: 'Bloody job! It's a joke too! It's a joke-job. Most working-class jobs are the same, they're jokes. Joke-jobs. Just a fucking joke!' (*D* 320)

There is a marked contrast in the different ways that Doyle and his brother's working-class friends engage with radical politics:

What do you think of Marx? Asked Arthur.
Fucking great.
Aye. Arthur smiled.
Some things ye just cannot take away from him. No matter how hard they fucking try!
Gavin said, I'll always agree with ye there brother. He was for the workers and that's that, end of story. (*D* 274)

Gavin and his friends do not engage with Marx or his ideas beyond the simple assertion that he was 'for the workers'. In contrast, Doyle continually ruminates over the political import of the world that he finds himself in. The text would argue that it is Doyle who has attained a higher level of class consciousness even if this has involved alienation from his working-class roots. Gavin and his friends can be read in light of Gramsci's understanding of an education system that ejects people into certain levels of the economy in order to perpetuate the status quo. They have been denied the intellectual rigour and critical skills to re-evaluate the reality of post-industrial politics. Instead, they hold onto Marx dogmatically, unable to see beyond their own class conviction.

Far from depicting an idealized working-class culture, Kelman's work addresses the contradictions that halted the Left in recent theoretical arguments. When he attends a

local football match Doyle is alarmed by the misogynist and racist chants of his fellow fans:

Look at the fucking poof! Heh you Hen Broon, ya fucking dickie ye! Your maw's a fucking shagbag, she's a darkie ya cunt! Beautiful cries from the heart. Gone ya fucking dumpling ye ya cunt ye couldni score in a barrel of fannies! A what? A barrel of fannies. A barrel of fannies? What in the name of Christ! (*D* 101)

Similarly, Pat takes exception to his brother's report of a child being run over outside the flat, specifically his mention of the fact that the driver was a 'paki' (*D* 304). The novel foregrounds the problems inherent in such socially accepted forms of discrimination and their locus within certain parts of working-class culture. The football match recalls *The Busconductor Hines*' challenge to the dubious gender politics of traditional ideas about working-class masculinity. This is personified by one driver's story of an altercation with a prostitute:

Fuck sake I mean I wouldn't take that kind of patter off the wife never mind a clatty auld cunt like her man I mean – heh I says down you go before I put one on your chin. (*BH* 84)

Similarly, when Rab and Sandra go out for a drink with the drivers and their wives, the men sit exclusively at one table whilst the women sit at another. Hines later apologises to Sandra signaling his own discomfort with this type of automatic segregation. It is the pejorative argument which says men talk about football and women talk about shopping, and never the twain shall meet. As we saw above, in contrast to these episodes, Hines continually subverts such gender stereotypes. Kelman's loyalty to working-class culture is neither blind nor unquestioning. In *A Disaffection* Doyle's artistic hero is Goya. It is 'Goya's unblinkingness, that steady hand and honest vision' that the school teacher most envies (*D* 47). Goya's black paintings in particular continually provide a reference point within Doyle's interpretation of the world. He lingers over Goya's 'Fighting with Cudgels', a painting that shows two men fighting with sticks as they both slowly sink into quick sand. The men are so preoccupied with destroying each other that they do not notice their mutual impending doom. This offers a poignant metaphor for the internal and self-destruction that can be seen within certain aspects of working-class culture.

In contrast to the traditional forms of working class politics, Doyle looks toward art as a possible form of redemption. The novel can be seen interrogates the possibility for protest in a landscape where the traditional politics of protest have been essentially disabled. As such *A Disaffection* can be seen to engage with the theoretical deficiencies of Marxism that Gramsci identified. The novel opens with Doyle finding a pair of discarded electrician's pipes out the back of the arts centre whilst going to the toilet. He takes the pipes home and turns them into musical instruments. The important aspect of this scene is that it takes place *outside* the arts centre. Doyle attempts to create something of worth from the discarded objects of industry. The parallels with Kelman's own artistic manifesto are obvious. Similar to the Booker Prize, it is the argument over being inside or outside official ideas about art that is significant. When Doyle eventually plays the pipes it is their potential for making pure sound, free from the constraints of conceptualisation and language, that is their specific appeal: 'He was going to take his pair of electrician's pipes and create harmony' (*D* 10). In this context harmony signals the transcendence of the kinds of categories outlined above which would delimit and contain experience: 'Theoretical webs, dirty webs, fusty webs; old and shrivelling away into nothingness, a fine dust. Who needs that kind of stuff. Far far better getting out into the open air and doing it, actually doing it, something solid and concrete and unconceptualisable' (*D* 10).

Chapter Three

Class and Race in Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*

What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?' The 'committed' writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change.

John-Paul Sartre – *What is Literature?*¹

The Ireland I will be representing is a new Ireland, open, tolerant, inclusive. Many of you who voted for me did so without sharing all my views. This, I believe, is a significant signal of change, a sign, however modest, that we have past the threshold to a new, pluralist Ireland.

Mary Robinson – Presidential inauguration speech (1990)²

The Irish are the niggers of Europe [...] An' the Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland [...] An' the northside Dubliners are the niggers o' Dublin. – Say it loud, I'm black an' I'm proud.

Roddy Doyle - *The Commitments*³

¹ John-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (Routledge: London, 2001), 14.

² Extracts from 'The Inaugural Speech' in K. Donovan, A.N. Jeffares and B. Kenelly, eds, *Ireland's Women: Writings Past and Present* (London: Kyle Cathie Ltd, 1994), 253-4.

³ Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments* in *The Barrytown Trilogy* (London: Minerva, 1992), 13.

There are two primary contexts that delineate the discussion of dialect in Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*: class and race. On the 26 October 1993 at the Guildhall in London, Doyle was awarded the Booker Prize for his novel *Paddy Clarke ha ha ha*. The first Irish writer to win the award, the Booker crowned Doyle's transformation from self-financing, part time author to what one commentator described as a 'publishing phenomenon'.⁴ In Doyle's native Republic of Ireland people momentarily switched TV channels from an international football match to watch 'one of their own' reach the dizzy heights of literary stardom.⁵ In his acceptance speech the author made reference to a newspaper article a few days earlier, bemoaning the lack of British writers contending for the prize, and duly apologised for being yet another 'foreigner' to win the award. The evening of the 1993 Booker was significant for another reason. Whilst Doyle was accepting his £20,000 prize, outside the Guildhall eighty-nine low-paid mushroom pickers from a subsidiary of Booker Plc were staging a protest. They had been sacked earlier that year following a refusal to work weekends without appropriate overtime pay - their normal rate being only £3.74 per hour. Some of the protestors dressed up as slaves seeking to highlight Booker's historic links with slavery in the Carribean plantations. On his way into the Guildhall, Doyle, who has made a career from writing about this economic underclass, paused to demonstrate his solidarity with the protestors, declaring: 'I support them fully in what they are doing. I hope they get what they want.'⁶ Far from seeking to legitimate discussion Doyle's work by leaning on the Booker's implicit assertion of critical value, this moment of literary history provides a conduit to the main themes the following chapter will address – economics and colonialism, class and race.

Let us begin with the mushroom pickers dressed as plantation slaves. Such political opportunism points toward a broader ideological debate, one that is embedded within the very form of the Booker itself. Each year the Booker judging panel select the

⁴ Joseph O'Connor, *The Secret World of the Irish Male* (London: Minerva, 1995), 138.

⁵ Karen Sbrockey, 'Something of a Hero: an interview with Roddy Doyle' *The Literary Review* V.42, No.4 (Sum 1999), 537-552, 539.

⁶ Quoted in Alison Roberts, 'Doyle takes Booker', *The Times* (27 Oct 1993), 5.

best novel written in English by an author from the British Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland. The award is adjudicated and administered from the metropolitan centre of the former Empire, London. Moreover, it does not consider writing in the indigenous languages from any of these regions (e.g. Maori, Urdu, Gaelic). As such, the Booker can be seen to reconfigure a specifically Anglo-centric system of cultural values. As Luke Strongman argues: ‘The Booker Prize is a crucial award in that it is perceived as one which, from a (former) imperial centre, confers literary recognition on novels that reflect and portray the state of culture after empire.’⁷ So, how does this relate to the discussion of class in contemporary Irish fiction? One clue lies in the readiness with which Doyle himself would don the mask of imperial outsider, by referring to himself, albeit jokingly, as another ‘foreigner’. More significant is the extended use of race within Doyle’s debut novel *The Commitments* (1987). Similar to the mushroom pickers, the novel appropriates the language of colonialism in order to foreground contemporary social inequality. At one point Jimmy Rabbitte boldly declares: ‘The Irish are the niggers of Europe [...]. An’ the Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland [...]. An’ the northside Dubliners are the niggers o’ Dublin. – Say it loud, I’m black an’ I’m proud’ (C 13). We have already outlined above, the crisis confronting working-class identity and the specifically the language of class at this moment in history. The following chapter will explore Doyle’s sustained use of dialect as an antidote to such cultural erasure. Moreover, it will explore this phenomenon whereby the politics of class came to be articulated in overtly racial terms. It will ask, what are the problems inherent in this mode of ideological conflation? Does such code shifting clarify or merely confuse the issue? Does it distil or distort our understanding of class in the contemporary Republic of Ireland? We will compare this with Kelman’s own use of de-colonisation as a critical term for describing the class politics of his work.

There is a definite critical context which informs the subsequent discussion of Doyle’s work. In the decade following the publication of *The Commitments*, Irish Studies took a discernible turn toward questions of postcolonialism. Leading critics

⁷ Luke Strongman, *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), ix.

became increasingly interested in the contested nature of Ireland's place within this most *de rigueur* of academic fields.⁸ This is not to suggest a *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* mode of analysis: after Doyle, therefore because of Doyle. Neither is it an attempt to offer an exhaustive account of this extended phase of critical development. My purpose is much more limited: to open up a dialogue between *The Commitments* and the Irish postcolonial debate. My aim is to create a framework in which to interrogate the nature of class within the Republic of Ireland at the end of the twentieth century. Throughout my argument, postcolonial theory will not only function as an analytic tool, but will itself be revealed as a site of ideological contestation. As with the discussion of Kelman, the usefulness of Antonio Gramsci will again become apparent. His idea of the subaltern, much favoured within recent reconsiderations of postcolonial theory, will provide a valuable concept with which to analyse and untangle the issues of class and race.

The Commitments can be usefully thought of as a period piece. By this I mean it diagnoses a specific moment in Irish history, with the country on the cusp of a free-market economic revolution. In chapter five, we will examine the specific challenges to working-class identity posed by the consumer culture that has accompanied the era of the Celtic Tiger. In many ways, the meteoric rise of Doyle's literary star mirrors both the velocity and trajectory of the Celtic Tiger. The image of the 1993 Booker again indexes several pertinent themes. If the Booker is particularly susceptible to a form of postcolonial deconstruction, then its other urgent context is consumerism. Since its inception in 1969, the Booker has been regarded as supplying an annual injection in the arm of the British publishing industry. Since then, several changes have been made in order to specifically increase its impact on the literary marketplace. A pre-released short-list, a nationally televised final and the creation of betting odds are all such cases in

⁸ 'Field Day's analysis of the Irish situation derives from the conviction that it is, above all else, a colonial crisis' - Seamus Deane, ed, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 6; 'In a fashion not unfamiliar in other postcolonial locations, Irish culture is marked by a self-estrangement.' - David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), 1.

point.⁹ Financially speaking, of course, the £20,000 cheque that Doyle received on the night was merely the tip of the iceberg. For most novelists winning the Booker generates a phenomenal level of publicity that translates directly into book sales. In this sense *Paddy Clarke ha ha ha* can be seen as the Booker novel *par excellence*. It was the most commercially successful winner of the award to date. It sold over 700,000 copies in its first year alone, and has been translated into 19 different languages.¹⁰ By the end of 1995, it was estimated that Doyle received over £400,000 in royalties for this novel alone.¹¹ In this light, the author's sympathy for the protesting mushroom pickers seems, to say the least, a little ironic. It is not my intention to engage in a tabloid discussion of Doyle's artistic integrity. Instead, the more interesting question is to ask whether such residual tensions are manifest in the work itself. Is there something circumspect in the way Doyle chooses to write about working-class experience? Are the inhabitants of Barrytown part of a meaningful validation of working-class culture? Are they merely being noted and ignored, prey to yet another disabling mode of cultural exploitation, the latest fashionable commodity to capture the literary imagination?

In terms of the Irish-Scottish comparison the Booker offers a series of meaningful contrasts between Doyle and Kelman. Kelman, as we saw, won the award the following year, in 1994, for his novel *How Late It Was, How Late*. Admittedly there are remarkable similarities between Kelman and Doyle's work. Both employ a sustained use of dialect to write about people that have traditionally been silenced within mainstream culture. Both authors have been located at the vanguard of a literary renaissance in each of their respective countries.¹² However, more interesting than such coincidences are the deeply different reactions that each writer's Booker success provoked. We have already

⁹ In light of the current discussion, the concept of having betting odds on a literary prize may also be regarded as an attempt to dubiously imbue the Booker with a certain degree of working-class kudos.

¹⁰ Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions: the Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 20.

¹¹ Todd, *Consuming Fictions: the Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*, 119.

¹² Douglas Gifford, 'At last- the Real Scottish Renaissance?' *Books in Scotland* 38, (1990), 1-4; Ferdia MacAnna 'The Dublin Renaissance: An essay on modern Dublin and Dublin Writers', *The Irish Review*, No.10, (Spring 1991), 14-31.

discussed Kelman's critical excoriation by Jenkins, Neuberger et al. In marked contrast to Doyle, the Booker did little to bolster what was a distressingly lacklustre level of retail sales for Kelman's novel. In fact, *How Late It Was, How Late* was deemed a catastrophic flop, becoming the least commercially successful winner of the award since 1980.¹³ At the ceremony itself, Kelman would also invoke the rhetoric of anti-imperialism, albeit in a more overtly combative manner. The author declared:

There is a literary tradition to which I hope my own work belongs, I see it as part of a much wider process - or movement - toward decolonisation and self-determination: it is a tradition that assumes two things: 1) the validity of indigenous culture; and 2) the right to defend in the face of attack. It is a tradition premised on a rejection of the cultural values of imperial or colonial authority, offering a defence against cultural assimilation, in particular an imposed assimilation.¹⁴

What made Doyle's novel so alluring whilst Kelman's remained anathema to the book buying public? What would make a Dublin dialect novel so much so more palatable than one set in Glasgow? The location of each author with respect to the working-class culture they write about provides us with some vital clues. We may recall Kelman's unequivocal desire, 'to write and remain a member of my community.'¹⁵ In contrast, Doyle has spoken of being something of an outsider with regards the working-class subjects that people his fiction. Doyle admits to enjoying a decidedly middle-class upbringing, using his experience as a school teacher in estates like Kilbarrack as the source for much of his material.¹⁶ The self-involved and self loathing teacher of Kelman's *A Disaffection* is, of course, Patrick Doyle: a pure coincidence, but one that is nonetheless stimulating. We will explore whether or not such distinctions are relevant in understanding the different ways that each author writes about working-class culture? Is this an important factor in considering the relative popularity of their work? Whilst this chapter focuses primarily on the work of Doyle, Kelman nonetheless hovers in the background and will from time to time be included in the discussion.

¹³ Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions: the Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*, 20.

¹⁴ James Kelman, 'Elitist slurs are racism by another name', 2.

¹⁵ James Kelman, 'Elitism and English Literature', 63.

¹⁶ Zoe Heller, 'Sticking with the Masses', *The Independent* (6 Jun 1993), 2.

A critical re-evaluation of Doyle's work becomes all the more urgent if we survey the secondary literature it has so far amassed. Again the juxtaposition with Kelman is particularly fruitful. Amongst Kelman's supporters there is a tendency to invoke a relatively high-brow frame of literary reference. Comparisons with Kafka, Beckett and Dostoevsky sit alongside post-structuralism and existential philosophy in critical evaluations of his work. In contrast, readings of Doyle's fiction seem reluctant to offer the same level of theoretical sophistication. In fact Doyle is often read as a counterpoint to what is seen as an elitist tendency within the Irish literary tradition. For Ferdia MacAnna, Doyle's work has wrestled Dublin back from a small coterie of academics, enthralled by post-structuralist theory and willfully abstruse readings of Joyce.¹⁷ Gerry Smyth agrees and sees Doyle's work as marking a radical break with the past: 'Along with certain other modern Dublin writers, Doyle depicts a side of Irish life that had never found its voice in the nation's fiction.'¹⁸ Such readings find support in the author's own comments about the oppressive weight of Joyce as a literary forbearer. In the past, Doyle has described *Ulysses* as overrated, overblown and in need of a good editor.¹⁹ In terms of his own style he explains: 'I don't like clever writers and I'd never claim meself [*sic*] as a clever writer.'²⁰ Displaying a severe lack of scepticism regarding authorial intention, perhaps an overly post-structuralist vice as well, some critics have been remarkably willing to take Doyle at his word. For many his work evinces an unequivocal defence of the disenfranchised masses. Ruth Dudley Edwards claims: 'Though Rich and Famous He Still Cares.'²¹ Whilst for Zoe Heller, despite prolific commercial success Doyle is, 'sticking with the masses [...] still an ordinary chap writing about ordinary people.'²² Such interpretations, particularly the opposition with Joyce, are far too simplistic. We

¹⁷ MacAnna, 'The Dublin Renaissance: An essay on modern Dublin and Dublin Writers'.

¹⁸ Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation: studies in the new Irish fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 69.

¹⁹ John Mullan, 'How to read this book' *The Guardian* (11 February 2004), Features, 4.

²⁰ Quoted in Heller, 'Sticking with the Masses', 2.

²¹ Ruth Dudley Edwards, 'Though Rich and Famous He Still Cares' *Literary Review* No.255 (Sept 1999), 47-48, 47.

²² Heller, 'Sticking with the Masses', 2. Heller's phrase 'ordinary chap' would suggest its own class affiliation, one that perhaps undermines her subsequent ideas about what working-class loyalty might actually look like.

might only recall Joyce's literary debut *Dubliners* (1914) and its preoccupation with creating an art form out of the lives of ordinary people. In the author's own words: 'I think out of the dreary sameness of existence, a measure of dramatic life may be drawn. Even the most commonplace, the deadest among the living, may play a part in a great drama.'²³ The aim of the following chapter is to re-consider this type of easy opposition. It will scrutinise the unqualified endorsement of Doyle as the champion of the working class. We will argue that Doyle's work is open to the kind of formal theorization it has so far eluded. Furthermore, it is the question of language, and in particular dialect, that facilitates such an exegesis. Drawing on the work of Russian Formalist Mikhail Bakhtin, our primary task will be to theorize Doyle's use of dialect, re-examining what has for the most part been assumed as the radical politics of his work. The formalist approach espoused by Bakhtin also helps to counterbalance the personality cult surrounding Doyle, one which has obscured a more detailed analysis of textual politics of his work. Having considered these questions, the second half of the chapter will address the relationship between class and race, concluding with a discussion of the Irish postcolonial question.

***The Commitments* – a subversive linguistic politics?**

Set on the fictional Barrytown estate on the outskirts of Dublin, *The Commitments* follows a group of working-class teenagers who form a soul band in order to alleviate the boredom and despair of their everyday lives. With all the Marxist resonance the word entails, the novel itself is essentially a story about commitment: the band members' commitment to each other, their commitment to their local working-class community, and their commitment to the radical politics of their music. The question of commitment conditions our own examination of Doyle's work. As discussed above, the author's sympathy for the cultural marginalization of the working-class has been well documented. Doyle himself explains:

²³ Richard Ellman and Ellsworth Mason, eds, *The Critical Writings of James Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 45.

They [the working class] live in a society [...] that has no interest in them whatsoever [...]. They live on the periphery. They look for themselves on the television and they're not there, so culturally they don't exist.²⁴

He continues: 'It's an extraordinary writing of history that allows one class of people to give their version. It is inevitable. But for years in Ireland the other versions of history weren't there and, in fact, still aren't.'²⁵ As Sartre stated in our epigraph, the task of the committed writer is to reveal an undisclosed aspect of the world, and by revealing it to change it. It is against this prescriptive judgment that we will measure the textual politics of Doyle's work.

In understanding *The Commitments* it is particularly appropriate to begin with the question of language. As Denis Donoghue rightly confirms: '[Doyle] doesn't deal in landscapes, cityscapes, backgrounds, or settings. His sole context is whatever is enforced by dialogue and a short communal memory.'²⁶ From the outset *The Commitments* foregrounds the demotic speech patterns of the working-class Dubliners that populate the text. The novel opens:

- We'll ask Jimmy, said Outspan. – Jimmy'll know.
Jimmy Rabbitte knew his music. He knew his stuff alright. You'd never see Jimmy coming home from town without a new album or a 12-inch or at least a 7-inch single. Jimmy ate Melody Maker and the NME every week and Hot Press every two weeks. He listened to Dave Fanning and John Peel. He even read his sisters' Jackie when there was no one looking. So Jimmy knew his stuff. (C 7)

Expressions like 'Jimmy ate Melody Maker' and the use of nicknames immediately locate the narrative within the working-class community of Barrytown. Doyle himself has commented: 'when I was writing *The Commitments* [...] I didn't want there to be too big a division between the narrative and the dialogue.'²⁷ For Gerry Smyth, this is part of

²⁴ Quoted in Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes, *Roddy Doyle: the essential guide* (London: Vintage, 2004), 25.

²⁵ Quoted in Reynolds and Noakes, *Roddy Doyle: the essential guide*, 27.

²⁶ Denis Donoghue, 'Another Country' *New York Review of Books* Vol.41, No.3 (3 Feb 1994), 3.

²⁷ Karen Sbrockey, 'Something of a Hero: an interview with Roddy Doyle' *The Literary Review* Vol.42, No.4 (Sum 1999), 540-552, 547.

the democratic vision that pervades the Barrytown trilogy.²⁸ The novel's use of dialect deliberately distorts the boundaries between character, narrator and reader. The narrative assumes that we as readers also know our stuff, that we have an intimate knowledge of this world and its culturally specific references – NME, Hot Press, etc. The idea of the band offers a metaphor for understanding the narrative politics of the novel. In the context of the rampant individualism of consumer culture, the soul group sees the Barrytown teenagers attempt to articulate some form of a communal harmony. The classic realist text, with the juxtaposition (discord?) of Standard English narrator and vernacular speaking character, is interrupted by *The Commitments*' insistence on primacy of demotic speech. The novel shifts the balance of power. Whereas the realist text would marginalize the voices of the working class, *The Commitments* places it centre stage. The climax of the novel sees the forgotten kids of Barrytown momentarily taking centre stage and performing in the spotlight. The narrative inversion of *The Commitments* resonates with the formal analysis of Kelman's work that we discussed in the previous chapter. We recall that for Kelman the mere inclusion of working-class voices was not enough. The Standard English, third person narrative was indicative of a formal elitism that sought to naturalise the social hierarchy. In this context, the popular categorization of Doyle's work as a version of Realism – 'Northside Realism', 'Dublin Realism' - can be seen as a critical misnomer, one that would belie the formal innovation of his work. Part of this critical tendency derives from a misreading of dialect writing, which describes it simplistically in terms of an authentic representation of everyday speech. Kelman makes a similar point about the literary use of dialect:

[A] priori any writer who engages in the use of such so-called language is not really engaged in literature at all. It is common to find well-meaning critics suffering the same burden, while they strive to be kind they cannot bring themselves to operate within a literary perspective; not only do they approach the work as though it were an oral text, they somehow assume it to be a literal transcription of recorded speech.²⁹

²⁸ Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, 67-69.

²⁹ James Kelman, 'Elitist slurs are racism by another name', 2.

Despite Kelman's protestations, such descriptions of social realism coincide with György Lukaács' theory of the committed literary text. According to Lukaács, for whom Walter Scott was the benchmark, the writer's obligation was to offer a realistic representation of the world. Only then could the novel expose the underlying contradictions of the capitalist system and enable a meaningful social change.³⁰ If we follow Kelman's lead and read the formal politics of *The Commitments* as deliberately subversive, Gerry Smyth's view of Doyle as a truly 'new' departure in Irish writing becomes somewhat problematic. Terry Eagleton's argument about realism and the Irish literary tradition clarifies this point:

There may, however, be rather more particular reasons why the *realist* novel thrived less robustly in Ireland than in Britain. For literary realism requires certain cultural preconditions, few of which were available in Ireland. The realist novel is the form par excellence of settlement and stability, gathering individual lives into an integrated whole; and social conditions in Ireland hardly lent themselves to any such sanguine recollection.³¹

For Eagleton, the traditional form of the Irish novel, from Edgeworth to Joyce to O'Brien, is quintessentially anti-realist. In this way, the role of dialect in *The Commitments* cuts across the opposition of Doyle and Joyce that we saw above. Both writers' work frustrates easy classification and as such remind us of the need for renewed critical scrutiny.

Bakhtin, heteroglossia, carnivalesque

The strategic correspondences between Doyle and Kelman's work reiterate the underlying value in Irish-Scottish comparisons. Recently Mikhail Bakhtin has become increasingly popular in theorizing the polyphonic nature of Scottish Literature.³² In

³⁰ György Lukaács, *The Historical Novel* (London: Merlin Press, 1962), 19-63.

³¹ Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hinger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 146-7.

³² See for example Robert Crawford, 'Bakhtin and Scotlands', *Scotlands*, No.1 (1994), 55-65; Roderick Watson, 'Speaking in Tongues: Reflections after Bakhtin on the Scots Literary Tradition and Contemporary Writing' in Alastair Renfrew, ed, *Exploiting Bakhtin*, Strathclyde Modern Language Studies, New Series, no.2 (1997), 1-14.

contrast, Irish criticism has remained relatively uninterested in the type of critical readings that Bakhtin enables. The language question within Irish literature has generally been read in terms of the relationship between English and Gaelic.³³ By transplanting Bakhtin's work across the Irish Sea, and applying it to Doyle's novel, we are able to uncover a series of issues that are elided by the familiar binaries of English/Gaelic, British/Irish, coloniser/colonised. According to Bakhtin, 'Characteristic for the novel as a genre is not the image of a man in his own right, but a man who is precisely the image of a language.'³⁴ Bakhtin asks us to undergo a paradigm shift in how we think about the novel as a literary text. Rather than presenting us with a world similar to our own the novel presents us first and foremost with 'the image of a language'. It is then, through this language, that we subsequently construct the world of the text. Bakhtin's sociological conception of language generates what he calls the heteroglossic nature of the novel:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages [...] this internal stratification present in any given language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite of the novel as a genre. The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of its objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types.³⁵

The existential aspect of dialect writing can be explained by way of Bakhtin's assertion: '[It is] impossible to reveal, through a character's acts and through these acts alone, his ideological position and the ideological world at its heart, without representing his discourse.'³⁶ Bakhtin's theorization reminds us of the point made by Kelman earlier: 'Language is the culture - if you lose your language you've lost your culture, so if you've

³³ See for example Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*, 263-272.

³⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, Michael Holquist, ed, and Caryl Emerson, trans, (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1981), 335.

³⁵ Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', 263-4.

³⁶ Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', 336.

lost the way your family talk, the way your friends talk, then you've lost your culture'.³⁷

In this sense Doyle's use of dialect is part of an aesthetics of cultural validation.

Furthermore, it is a mode of writing that disrupts the language of multi-cultural pluralism, with which President Mary Robinson (quoted in the epigraph) would define this 'new Ireland'. Bakhtin reminds us that in a class based society, cultures do not exist peaceably alongside one another. As a result questions about power cannot be easily accommodated within the postmodern rhetoric of multi-culturalism, a point that will be picked up on again in chapter five.

The formal politics of *The Commitments* reverberates throughout the story as the band attempt to resist a political and cultural hegemony that would invalidate their existence. The decision to form a soul band comes from their manager, the precocious Jimmy Rabbitte, and his heightened sense of political injustice:

- Soul is the rhythm of the people. Jimmy said again. – The Labour Party doesn't have soul. Fianna fuckin' Fail doesn't have soul. The Worker's Party ain't got soul. The Irish people – no. – The Dublin people – fuck the rest o' them. – The people o' Dublin, our people, remember need soul. (C 38)

For Jimmy soul outlines the internal fragmentation of Irish society. It negates any loyalty to an overriding sense of national destiny. Soul is offered as a counterpoint to the official politics of the state from which the working-class have become fundamentally estranged. In *The Snapper* Jimmy's pregnant sister Sharon is forced to visit her local Doctor and complains about having to wait for so long. The Doctor apologises and suggests she write to her local T.D. (S 214). Later in the pub, Sharon and her friends mock the Doctor ('the stupid bitch') and her naive belief that the working-class have any recourse within the official mechanisms of the state. Significantly, the inclusion of the Workers Party in Jimmy's vitriolic outburst would support the point made in the introduction, namely that the politics of the Left have ceased to correlate with the reality of working-class experience. Against this backdrop Jimmy constructs an identity for the band, moulded from a specifically working-class iconography. Their self-stylization as 'The Hardest

³⁷ James Kelman, 'An Interview with Duncan McLean', *Edinburgh Review* 71 (1985), 72.

Working Band in the World' is an attempt to align themselves with a working-class notion of dignity through labour. The lone reporter at the band's first real gig is told: 'We're a band with a mission... we're bringing soul to Dublin, Brother, he said. – We are bringing the music, the Soul back to the people. – The proletariat. – That's p,r,o,l,e,t,a,r,i,a,t' (C98). The need to spell 'proletariat' for the bemused journalist is a subtle indictment of the public discourses of Irish life and their unfamiliarity with the language of radical politics. To emphasize this point, the journalist is reminded that 'Guerrillas of Soul' is spelt with a 'u' and not an 'o'. As discussed in the introduction, *The Commitments* evinces not only a crisis within working-class identity, but the evaporation of the very language of class from mainstream public life.

As one might imagine the aesthetic politics of the novel are more complex and contradictory than Jimmy's impassioned rhetoric would seem to suggest. The band's precarious journey towards musical stardom becomes a laboratory for examining the very possibility of social commitment in the modern Republic. The radical politics Jimmy mythologizes to the press are undercut from the outset by the teenagers' real reasons for wanting to join the group. At the pub Jimmy tells them:

- Yis want to be different, isn't tha' it? Yis want to do somethin' with yourselves, isn't tha' it?
- Sort of, said Outspan.
- Yis don't want to end up like (he nodded his head back) – these tossers here. Amn't I righ'?' Jimmy was getting passionate now. The lads enjoyed watching him.
- Yis want to get up there an' shout I'm Outspan fuckin' Foster. He looked at Derek.
- An' I'm Derek fuckin' Scully, an' I'm not a tosser. Isn't tha; righ'? That's why yis're doin' it. Amn't I righ'? (C 11)

Paradoxically *The Commitments* offer themselves as spokesperson for the disenfranchised, whilst simultaneously wishing to differentiate themselves from this very same working-class community. 'You don't want to end up like these tossers' evinces a working-class that speak the dominant values of Irish society which, as we discussed above, would seek to invalidate their very existence. The heady rhetoric of empowerment is comically undercut by Derek and Outspan's admission that they are

more interested in getting 'the odd ride now an' again' (C 11). The aging trumpet player Joey the Lips, having played with a host of soul legends embodies this myth, bedding all three female backing singers during the course of the novel. Jimmy's own political commitment must also be scrutinized. His advertisement for musicians in *Hot Press* magazine declares: 'Have you got Soul? If yes, The World's Hardest Working Band is looking for you. Contact J. Rabbitte, 118, Chestnut Ave., Dublin 21. Rednecks and southsiders need not apply.' (C15) When his mother confronts him about the pretentious 'J. Rabbitte' he replies: '- It's for business reasons, ma... - J. sounds better. Yeh never heard of a millionaire bein' called Jimmy' (C 23). Behind Jimmy's anti-establishment rhetoric lies a careful sense of commercial awareness – he speaks of the huge market for songs about sex, sung in the everyday language that people actually use (C13). At one their rehearsals, Joey the Lips gives all the kids stage names - Derek The Meatman Scully, Billy The Animal Moody, James The Soul Surgeon Clifford. This renaming is significant. A positive reading would argue that it signals a transformation, that through attaining a certain political consciousness The Commitments are reborn. A more cynical view might argue that in stepping onto the stage the teenagers are merely enacting their desire to distinguish themselves and to shed their working-class identity. This re-christening is part of this process. These contradictions are also apparent within the linguistic terrain of the text. In a novel alert to the politics of speech, Jimmy's urging of the backing singers to suppress their normal accents is highly conspicuous: 'It's Walking in the Rain, not Walkin' In De Rayen' (C 34). Moreover, as the band gradually becomes more successful they leave behind the local community centre and begin performing in bars on the wealthy Southside of Dublin. This geography is indicative of a spiritual journey away from the community they initially sought to represent. The Commitments are a remnant of a bygone era, an attempt to match popular entertainment with a sense of political protest. At the same time, they are very much of their moment. Like the image of Che Guevara that now sells everything from t-shirts to cigarettes, the band wrap themselves in the language of radical politics, only to turn it into a cultural commodity, music for the bourgeois masses on the wrong side of the Liffy.³⁸

³⁸ Ironically, the commodification of revolution can be traced back to Irish artist, Jim Fitzpatrick, who transformed Alberto Korda's photograph of Che Guevara into the stencil

The form and content of *The Commitments*, its ostensible radicalism, may be theorized by way of Bakhtin's concept of the 'carnavalesque'. This epistemological category was most fully articulated by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World* (1968). For Bakhtin, what distinguished Rabelais from canonical figures of the Renaissance was his interest in popular culture, in the non-literary, in folk-humour, and the use of profane and provincial language. Rabelais' work was based on an imagery of the grotesque, one that was simultaneous humorous and disarming. For Bakhtin, the idea of the medieval carnival was the key to understanding the nonconformist aspects of Rabelais' work. The carnival was characterised by the persistent inversion of 'high' and 'low' culture: the deliberate mockery of establishment figures, the singing of bawdy songs, the use of prohibited language and the symbolic transgression of sexual and cultural norms. For Bakhtin this served a specific ideological purpose: 'In the world of the carnival the awareness of the people's immortality is combined with the realisation that established authority and truth are relative.'³⁹ He continues:

As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order; it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal.⁴⁰

Recently, the 'carnavalesque' has become a particularly fashionable way of theorizing strategies of resistance within a variety of cultural texts.⁴¹ *The Commitments* itself is conducive to being read in this way. We have already mentioned its displacement of Standard English narrative through its extensive use of dialect speech. Alongside these, one might point toward the liberal use of swearing, the importance of non-literary culture and the iconoclastic humour that pervades the text. On the surface *The Commitments* seems to be an intentionally irreverent novel. The heroic traditions of Irish nationalism are both invoked and undercut by Joey the Lips: 'Ed told me to go back to Ireland and

version that is seen everywhere today.

³⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), 10.

⁴⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 109.

⁴¹ For discussion of this see 'Introduction' in Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), 1-27.

blow some soul into the Irish Brothers. The Brothers wouldn't be shooting the asses off each other if they had soul' (C 27). Earlier soul was used to expose the mismatch between the needs of the working-class and the rhetoric of party politics - 'The Labour Party doesn't have soul. Fianna fuckin' Fail doesn't have soul'. In the Northern Irish context, there is also a sense that the official discourse has ceased to address the real problems facing ordinary people. This point will be addressed in detail in chapter four. Doyle himself has commented on the politically pointed use of humour within his work: 'Comedy, to my mind, is an extremely serious business; it's never casual, it has to be precise, it has to have a point.'⁴² Joey the Lips' role, as serious soul-man, is comically undercut when Jimmy introduces himself as 'Jimmy the Bollix Rabbitte' (C25). At an anti-drugs concert in the community centre the banner is misspelled and comically reads: 'HEROINE KILLS'. Such episodes are indicative of what Bakhtin describes as 'carnavalesque laughter.'⁴³ Imbued with a philosophical and utopian character, the point of such laughter was to reveal the true nature of the world, 'its droll aspect... its gay relativity', in order to disrupt the established discourses of authority.⁴⁴

The endorsement of a subversive 'carnavalesque' has figured prominently in the critical use of Bakhtin's thought.⁴⁵ However, such unmediated enthusiasm requires careful consideration. Returning to the quotation from Bakhtin, it is significant that the carnival only celebrates a 'temporary liberation' from the prevailing truth of the established order. When the carnival packs up and leaves town, the social hierarchy remains completely intact. As such, the 'carnavalesque' is revealed to be a fully sanctioned, licensed and neutered form of political critique.⁴⁶ Under such circumstances, any inversion of the established order is purely performative and ultimately stripped of its political efficacy. This question of performativity will reappear in our discussion of the

⁴² James Drewitt, 'An interview with Roddy Doyle' *Irish Studies Review* Vol. 11, No. 3 (2003), 337-351, 349.

⁴³ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', 11.

⁴⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', 11-12.

⁴⁵ See discussion in Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 6-15.

⁴⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 1981), 148-9.

novel's appropriation of race politics below. In terms of a Marxist aesthetic the temporary nature of the 'carnavalesque' is fundamentally problematic. After all, as Marxism has always maintained, the point of materialist analysis is not just to describe the world, but to change it. In this light, the rich comic interplay of *The Commitments* as a subversive trope becomes inevitably diluted. Carmine White supports this reading of the Barrytown trilogy: 'Doyle uses comedy to smooth over many uncomfortable, jagged edges. For instance, *The Commitments*' demise is almost forgotten in the subsequent riotous comedic scenes, and Sharon's rape in *The Snapper* similarly gets glossed over.'⁴⁷ Shaun Richards is similarly cautious regarding the radical credentials of the Barrytown novels: 'What is now receiving a high profile is an urban reality as partial in its representation as was Yeats' Celtic Twilight – rendered the subject of comic indulgence rather than critical concern.'⁴⁸ Undoubtedly, part of Doyle's popular appeal is the sharp sense of humour that pervades his work. However, there is another sense in which by representing the Irish working-class in this way *The Commitments* is perpetuating some of the worst stereotypes of the Victorian stage. I am thinking in particular of its portrait of the Irish fool. Notably, James Kelman has offered similar comments in terms of the acceptability of Glasgow speech, so long as it comes in comedic form - Billy Connolly, Rab C. Nesbit, etc.⁴⁹

Is it possible to rescue Bakhtin's notion of the 'carnavalesque' and *The Commitments* from this kind of criticism? The purely performative nature of such dissidence and the inevitable return of the status quo cannot be completely dismissed. If conceptual resuscitation is possible then it lies in transgressing the boundaries between high and low culture, the art gallery and the housing estate, RP English and the language of the street. Regardless of their impermanence such carnivalesque inversions reveal the interdependency of one category on the other. In doing so, they expose the arbitrary

⁴⁷ Quoted in Reynolds and Noakes, *Roddy Doyle: the essential guide*, 213.

⁴⁸ Shaun Richards, 'Northside Realism and the Twilight's Last Gleaming', *Irish Studies Review* No.2 (Win 1992), 18-20, 19.

⁴⁹ Kelman, 'Elitist slurs are racism by another name', 2.

nature of cultural value, and the potential for reversing such formal hierarchy.⁵⁰ Rather than offering a flawed solution to the problems of social and cultural elitism, *The Commitments* is perhaps better considered in terms of the questions it forces us to confront: Why shouldn't a working-class voice narrate a story about working-class characters? Where are the other working-class voices within Irish literature/history? Can the language of the streets offer a sophisticated critique of modern Irish society? What effect does this language have on how we read, understand and derive meaning from the text? If the novel does not always provide us with ready answers, its value lies in raising these issues in the first place.

One of the ways in which the inversion of high and low culture is manifest in *The Commitments* is through the juxtaposition of jazz and soul. At one stage the band's saxophone player Dean attempts to incorporate a jazz solo into his performance. Joey the Lips sharply rebukes him:

Jazz is the antithesis of soul... Soul is the people's music. Ordinary people making music for ordinary people. – Simple music. Any Brother can play it [...]

- An' what's wrong with jazz? Jimmy asked.

- Intellectual music, said Joey the Lips. – It's anti-people music. It's abstract.

- It's cold an' emotionless, amn't I righ? said Mickah.

- You are. --- It's got no soul. It is sound for the sake of sound. It has no meaning. --- It's musical wanking, Brother. (C 108)

This critique of jazz suggests a reductive notion of soul as a metaphor for working-class culture. It implies an anti-intellectual reading of working-class life, which becomes the antithesis of sophisticated or abstract thought. As discussed in chapter two, this is in marked contrast to Antonio Gramsci's reading of the intellectual life of the working-class. For Gramsci, every individual possesses his own philosophical conception of the world. Traditional notions of intellectuals and non-intellectuals merely signal another form class distinction, one that advances the interest of the ruling elite. Such reductions would contradict *The Commitments*' acute mindfulness, evinced through their adoption

⁵⁰ Stuart Hall, 'Metaphors of Transformation' in Allon White, *Carnival Hysterian and Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1-26, p.8.

and adaptation of soul lyrics to make them sound 'more Dubliney'. Arguably, The Commitments' status as a cover band would render their own performance the very sort of 'musical wanking' that Joey the Lips condemns. After all, they do not produce any new material of their own and merely recycle other people's music. Outspan highlights the limited nature of this enterprise when he comments: 'It's a pity we don't do anny songs of our own, isn't it?' (C73). For Joey the Lips, jazz functions as the epitome of selfishness, a thing that disrupts the collective harmony of the group. Dean's sax solo is criticised:

- Dean's solo didn't have corners. It didn't fit. It spiralled. It wasn't part of the song. – It wasn't part of anything. It was a real solo. Washington D.C.'s drumming wasn't there as far as it was concerned. – That's jazz, Brother. That's what jazz does. It makes the man selfish. He doesn't give a fuck about his Brothers. That's what jazz is doing to Dean, said Joey the Lips. – Poor Dean. (C115)

The thematic resonance of jazz becomes all the more ironic if we consider it in terms of some of Doyle's more recent work. Seventeen years after *The Commitments* was first published *Oh Play That Thing* (2004) celebrates jazz as metaphor for the diversity of modern American culture. The main character Henry Smart becomes a jazz lover after working as a bodyguard to the trumpet impresario Louis Armstrong in 1930s Chicago. The ironic nature of Doyle's support for the mushroom pickers at the 1993 Booker would echo this recycled and transformed metaphor. Beyond such contradictions, a conversation between Jimmy and Dean extends the high / low dichotomy to a more general comment about the nature of art. When Dean tells Jimmy he finds jazz more artistically creative Jimmy rebukes him:

- Watchin' Channel fuckin' 4. Art! Me arse!
- Slag away. Sticks an' stones.
- Art! Said Jimmy. (Art was an option he'd done in school because there was no room for him in metal work and there was no way they would let him get into home economics. That's what art was.) – Cop on, Dean, will yeh. (C 122)

Art is something which has nothing to do with the lives of working-class people: they are not the subject, nor are they the practitioners of it. This kind of elitism has succeeded in

achieving what is the goal of all ideology, to become naturalised and invisible to those most affected by it.

One of *The Commitments* most deliberate attempt to subvert cultural boundaries is through its use of soul as a metaphor for working class disempowerment. As mentioned above the band adopts an iconoclastic attitude, reconfiguring the lyrics of soul classics to make them sound 'more Dubliney'. The song 'Night Train' is re-written in a local context and describes a train dropping its passengers off in the housing estates on the periphery of Dublin:

- THE NIGH' TRAIN -
CARRIES ME HOME -
SHO' NUFF IT DOES -
...STARTING OFF IN CONNOLLY
MOVI' ON OU' TO KILLESTER
HARMONSTOWN RAHENEY -
AN' DON'T FORGET KILBARRACK (C126)

A positive reading of this episode might suggest it points toward the band's refusal to remain passively fixed within an authoritarian discourse. Instead, they seize control of language, manipulating it in order to make it account for the specificity of their experience. In this sense, making the lyrics 'more Dubliney' echoes Doyle's own attempts to incorporate working-class speech within the pages of literary fiction. When the audience sings along, we glimpse the momentary possibility of collective harmony. It offers us a counterpoint to the prevailing ethos of the era – consumerism, individualism, etc. However, there is another, more ominous, meaning beneath such lyrical reconfigurations. Connolly is of course Connolly Station, named after the 1916 martyr and figurehead of Irish socialism. As such, the image of the working-class Dubliners taking the night train out of and away from Connolly enacts the very crisis identified above: namely, the mass desertion of social discourse in the late twentieth century. 'Night train' becomes the band's most popular hit. Audiences continually request it and proceed to sing along. The song acts as a portent for the abandonment of social values

that attended the arrival of the Celtic Tiger and its consolidation of consumer culture in the Republic of Ireland.

The Commitments foregrounds the difficulty of maintaining a radical politics in a society that is increasingly in thrall to the forces of global capitalism. The seeds of the band's failure are sown from the start of the novel, at Jimmy's initial meeting with Outspan and Derek in the pub. *The Commitments* climaxes with Jimmy negotiating a contract for their first single. At the same time that the band is in the process of splitting up. Like the band itself, commitment it would seem is a fragile commodity in the contemporary Republic. The lead singer Deco's rampant ego is finally too much for the others to bear. The novel records continual fights over his proprietorial references to the group as 'my band'. After the break-up, Joey the Lips tells Jimmy that he has gotten a call from Joe Tex in America who wants him to go tour with him again. After he hangs up the phone, Jimmy suddenly remembers that Joe Tex has been dead since 1982. We are left to ponder not only the dubious nature of Joey's history, but by proxy, the musical politics he preached to The Commitments. It is ironic that the novel ends with Jimmy, Mickah, Derek and Outspan deciding to give things another go and form another band. There would be one crucial difference: 'no fuckin politics this time either'(C 139). This kind of apoliticism is in actual fact deeply political. A seemingly innocuous episode sees Outspan peeling a Woody Guthrie sticker off his brother's acoustic guitar: 'This guitar kills fascists' (C 8). It is the kind of committed politics that Guthrie symbolizes that the novel witnesses peeling off late twentieth century Irish society. The book ends with the characters trapped in an eternal return, doomed to repeat a performance of futile resistance, in a society where such actions are fated before they are even begun.

This Bakhtinian reading of *The Commitments* compels us to revisit and rethink the critical paradigms outlined above. For Ferdia MacAnna, the democratic aesthetic of *The Commitments* offered a foil to the literary elitism of Joyceanism: '[*Ulysses*] put Dublin into a literary black hole run by deconstructionists and Professors for the benefit of serious students of High Art who would one day themselves go on to become deconstructionists. *Ulysses*, you could say, is a nightmare from which Dublin is trying to

awake.’⁵¹ In a similar vein Gerry Smyth commented that Doyle, ‘seems to shy away from the specifically literary aspects of writing - the Barrytown novels do not contain identifiable chapters and there are no long sentences, abstractions or pieces of narrative explication.’⁵² And, for Brian Donnelly, Doyle represented a radical departure from the thematic concerns of previous Irish fiction:

From the start Roddy Doyle’s career as a novelist has run counter to the prevailing preoccupations and conventions of Irish writing. The historic concerns with nationality, language and religion that had engaged Irish writers since the days of Thomas Davis and *The Nation* are remarkable by their absence.⁵³

Through a Bakhtinian reading of *The Commitments*’ use of dialect we can revise and qualify such binary oppositions. It is worth recalling that the earlier discussion of Kelman’s technique was drawn from Colin MacCabe’s study, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the World* (1978). For MacCabe, Joyce’s radical aesthetic was predicated on undermining authoritarian discourse in its many guises – Imperialism, Nationalism, Catholicism. Joyce incorporated the language of the Dublin streets and embraced its potential to be a tool of literary leveling. He proudly declared: ‘I have put all the great talkers of Dublin into my book. They – and the things that they forgot.’⁵⁴ The narrator of the Cyclops chapter in *Ulysses*, with his penchant for Dublin slang, is an obvious case in point. It would be obtuse to deny the substantial differences between Joyce and Doyle’s respective portraits of Dublin life. Nonetheless, there are also significant similarities. Both authors’ refuse inverted (‘perverted’) commas to signify speech within the text. Just as with Doyle, Joyce’s work is also open to a Bakhtinian form of analysis. As Allon White comments: ‘The hybridization of voices in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, the parodying and deflation of the language of authority by low languages, is a fundamental feature in Joyce’s work. The Catholic Mass, the Lord’s prayer, the high language of aesthetics, philosophy, and politics, find themselves pulverized by ‘common’ forms of

⁵¹ MacAnna, ‘The Dublin Renaissance: An essay on modern Dublin and Dublin Writers’, 18.

⁵² Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, 69.

⁵³ Brian Donnelly, ‘From Barrytown to the GPO’, *Irish University Review* Vol.20, No1. (Spr/Sum 2000), 17-31, 18.

⁵⁴ Djuna Barnes, ‘James Joyce’ *Vanity Fair* XVIII (April 1922), 65.

language – the language of the pub, the gutter press, the brothel, of Dublin working-class life, the marketplace, and the bedroom.⁵⁵ Such similarities do not, of course, suggest that Doyle merely offers a reiteration of the Joycean Dublin. The relocation of the working-class to peripheral estates like Barrytown in the 1960s, the importance of American pop culture, and perhaps most strikingly, the symbolic role of art, dramatically differentiates the work of these writers. My aim has been to illustrate the tension inherent in the kinds of euphoric adulation that has accompanied Doyle's work in the past. Just as *Ulysses* is not a piece of obsolete elitism, so too must we be wary of *The Commitments*' supposed egalitarian credentials.

'Blacking up' the working class

The Commitments' use of dialect has so far been read as a form of cultural compensation, a counterpoint to the elision of working-class experience within the official discourse of Irish life. Significantly though, the novel is not content with merely re-articulating a distinctly working-class voice. Soul music functions as part of a broader theme which sees the novel attempt to rearticulate class politics in the language of racism. In characteristic soap-box style, Jimmy Rabbitte proclaims:

- Not songs abou' Fianna fuckin' Fail or annythin' like tha'. Real politics. (They weren't with him.)
- Where are yis from? (He answered the question himself.)
- Dublin. (He asked another one.) –What part o' Dublin? Barrytown. Wha' class are yis? Workin' class. Are yis proud of it? Yeah, yis are. (Then a practical question.) – Who buys the most records? The workin' class. Are yis with me? (Not really.) – Your music should be abou' where you're from an' the sort o' people yeh come from. [...]
- They were stunned by what came next.
- The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads.
- They nearly gasped: it was so true.

⁵⁵ White, *Carnival, Hysteria and Writing*, 145. See also V.V. Ivanov, 'The significance of Bakhtin's ideas on sign, utterance and dialogue for modern semiotics', quoted in Stallybrass and White, *The politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 12: 'One cannot help seeing the profound likeness between novelistic regularities discovered by Bakhtin and the structure of such twentieth century works as Joyce's *Ulysses*.'

-An' the Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. The culchies have fuckin'everythin'. An' the northside Dubliners are the niggers o' Dublin. -----Say it loud, I'm black an' I'm proud. (C13)

The imaginative leap, from performing music 'abou' where you're from', to 1960s America and black soul music, demands closer scrutiny. What is at stake in such explicit ideological conflation? Are the Irish really the niggers of Europe? And likewise, can we realistically refer to working-class Dubliners as the niggers of Ireland? In light of the redundant discourse of the Left *The Commitments* would suggest that only through appropriating the language of race can the working class can fully articulate their sense of social exclusion. In many ways this appropriation evinces the crisis within the identity politics and discourse of class that we identified above. Deprived of a meaningful form of expression the band and the novel are forced to adopt the language of race. Moreover, it is interesting that Kelman would also argue for a similar sense of affinity. This is most clearly illustrated in his acceptance speech for the Booker:

This sort of [class] prejudice, in one guise or another, has been around for a very long time and for the sake of clarity we are better employing the contemporary label, which is racism. A fine line can exist between elitism and racism and on matters concerning language and culture the distinction can sometimes cease to exist altogether.

It is important to stress here that I'm not the only writer who is subject to this form of backhanded compliment. There are quite a few of us around. Linton Kwesi Johnson and Tom Leonard have encountered it. In Nigeria, so have Chinweizu, Achebem Soyinka and Tutuola. In Kenya, Ngugi.⁵⁶

We might consider this kind of ideological conflation in terms of the necessary expansion within Marxist/post-Marxist thinking that Laclau and Mouffe outlined in the introduction. However, as we shall see, such forms of radical alliance are not without their problems.

In *The Commitments* the proposed affinity between class and race is undercut by the teenagers' own use of notorious racial stereotypes: '[soul is] alrigh' for the blackies... They've got bigger gooters than us'(C37). The commercial and carnal aspirations of the band also interrupt any easy equivalence of class and race. Theoretically, The

⁵⁶ James Kelman, 'Elitist slurs are racism by another name', 2.

Commitment's success would see Jimmy earn his millions and the band would no longer be identifiable with the wider working-class community. A micro-version of this narrative is suggested through their progression from Barrytown community centre to the pubs of the Southside. It is not clear how a similar sort of emancipation is available to someone suffering racial discrimination. An individual certainly cannot transcend their ethnic identity upon which such prejudice is grounded. It is the performative nature of The Commitments' black identity that is ultimately unsatisfactory. They are the re-incarnation of the American minstrel singers, 'blacking up' in a metaphorical if not a literal sense of the term. Aaron Kelly summarizes the dubious nature of this type of cultural commandeering: 'There is a marked danger here of a perverse residual imperialism whereby an oppressed group in the Western world – in a seeming moment of solidarity – actually colonises and appropriates the suffering of others in order to bolster its own subaltern credentials.'⁵⁷ Although originally written about the work of Irvine Welsh, this comment is equally applicable to the cultural politics of Doyle's text.

Irish postcolonialism and the issue of class

The Commitments' conflation of race and class coincides with and cuts across one of the major issues within Irish studies of this period – postcolonialism. Doyle's use of dialect encourages us to re-examine such critical discussions, tracing the presence, or more accurately the absence, of class from this particular debate. 'The Irish are the niggers of Europe' draws on a tradition of kinship between Irish people and Africans. It is one that is born out of a shared historical experience of imperialism. In the 1650s, after Cromwell's invasion thousands of Irish were forcibly shipped to the Caribbean to work on plantations alongside African slaves. In *White Britain and Black Ireland* (1976) Richard Ned Lebow traces the distressingly similar ways in which 'paddy' and 'sambo' stereotypes functioned to legitimate such colonial subjugation.⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly it was during the Victorian era that such denigration reached its height of offensiveness.

⁵⁷ Aaron Kelly, *Irvine Welsh* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 116

⁵⁸ This reference to Lebow is made by Declan Kiberd in 'Strangers in their Own Country: Multi-Culturalism in Ireland' in Edna Longley and Declan Kiberd, *Multi-Culturalism: the view from two Irelands* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 45-74.

Charles Kingsley, the nineteenth century British historian, commented on his visit to Ireland:

I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country [...] to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it too much, but their skins except where tarred by exposure, are as white as ours.⁵⁹

During this period Daniel O'Connell was a staunch supporter of the abolition of slavery, and developed a close relationship with leading American abolitionist, and former slave, Frederick Douglass. In more recent times, Bob Geldof would invoke the Irish famine in helping his own people to become the largest per capita contributors to Third World relief during Live Aid (1985).⁶⁰ In *The Commitments* the Irish are not just the niggers of Europe, the working-class are deemed to be the niggers of Ireland. Similarly the language of race has not only traced a national inferiorization, but has also been used to describe internal power struggles within Irish history. One of the most prescient examples is Northern Ireland during the 1960s. Here disaffected Catholics drew explicitly on the experience of Martin Luther King and the Black Civil Rights movement in America. Civil Rights marchers in the North referred to themselves as 'White Negroes' and adopted the gospel anthem of Black protest: 'We Shall Overcome'. Mirroring the mushroom pickers at the 1993 Booker, at Dungannon in 1963 one boy blackened his face and marched holding a placard referring to the North's similarities with Alabama.⁶¹ As Brian Dooley asserts, 'the fingerprints of one struggle [can be] found on the other.'⁶²

Despite the extensive use of racial narratives throughout Irish history, when *The Commitments* invoked the language of race, it was brushing against the grain of critical thought at that time. Since the 1960s, imperialism had increasingly been regarded as an

⁵⁹ Quoted in Michael MacDonald, *Children of Wrath: Political Violence in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1986), 3.

⁶⁰ For a history of Ireland's relationship with the politics of race see Bill Rolston and Michael Shannon, *Encounters: How Racism came to Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2002).

⁶¹ Brian Dooley, *Black and Green: the Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland and Black America* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1998), 86.

⁶² Brian Dooley, *Black and Green*, 4.

outdated and inappropriate framework for theorizing Irish identity. Under the banner of revisionism, certain historians sought to question the authenticity of the anti-imperial, nationalist account of Ireland's past. Revisionism looked to re-examine the inevitable teleology of Irish history as one of anti-colonial struggle, leading inevitably the formation of the nation in 1922. By the end of the twentieth century, such revisionism was common parlance within the cultural sedimentation of the modern Republic of Ireland. In *The Remaking of Irish Political Culture* (2000) Tom Garvin explains:

In the Republic, Britain is history. The Empire is dead, and Irish anti-imperialism has died with it [...] the Republic increasingly sees itself as a smaller European democracy which happens to have extremely close cultural links with the North and with Britain.⁶³

Besides revisionism, the roots of this sea change lie in 1973 with the Republic of Ireland's membership of the European Economic Community (EEC). As the Irish economist John Fitzgerald confirms:

Up until then [1973] we were entirely dependent on the goodwill of successive UK governments. I was a civil servant at the time. We were like Scotland, we looked to London to see how things were done. All our files related to relations with the British [...] After entering Europe, we found new allies. We saw that, in some respects Denmark did things better, in other respects it was Germany. We learnt from a whole variety of people. Now we are seeing the benefits.⁶⁴

The rise of the European community in the latter decades of the twentieth century inaugurated a whole new series of economic, political and cultural reference points, fundamentally re-orientating the modern Republic. Ireland's ideological horizons were extended beyond their closest neighbour. Familiar core-periphery models of colonialism/postcolonialism were interrupted. The spirit of revisionism and Ireland's apparent progress beyond postcolonialism found formal expression in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), one of the first texts to outline a theory and practice of postcolonial

⁶³ Tom Garvin, *The Remaking of Irish Political Culture* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), 200.

⁶⁴ Joan McAlpine, 'Gael Force', *Sunday Times* (12 Oct 1997), Features section, 1.

criticism. Here, Irish Literature was afforded a cursory critical glance before being casually dismissed from what was proposed as a canon of postcolonial cultures:

While it is possible to argue that [Irish and Scottish] societies were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonized peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as postcolonial.⁶⁵

During the early 1990s such prescriptive judgments found support amongst Irish critics like Liam Kennedy. For Kennedy, Ireland possessed a set of 'postcolonial pretensions.'⁶⁶ His argument was built on the economic disparity between the Free State and other postcolonial nations at the time of their respective independence. The annual GDP per head of population in Ireland in 1913 was \$655, compared to 1960s India (\$74), Gambia (\$83) and the Belgian Congo (\$91).⁶⁷ For Kennedy, Ireland's relative prosperity made any talk of its postcolonial status extremely problematic. A postcolonial Ireland signaled an attempt to occupy the moral high ground of history, and to falsely assume the much fetishized identity of imperial 'Other'.

The Commitments' assertion that 'the Irish are the niggers of Europe' can be seen to prefigure the postcolonial turn Irish studies would take during the 1990s. Throughout this period, the issue of Ireland's colonial past increasingly came to preoccupy the critical imagination. But, if the idea of a postcolonial Ireland now seems like a statement of the obvious, it has not always been the case. Since the outbreak of the Troubles there existed a certain degree of anxiety about engaging in a debate that could be seen to legitimate the campaign of the Provisional IRA. Republicans in the North regularly invoked the language of colonialism to justify the armed struggle. As Mitchell McLoughlin, the Northern Chairman of Sinn Fein, illustrates: 'The history of the British-Irish relationship

⁶⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature* (London: Routledge, 1989), 33.

⁶⁶ Liam Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland: Postcolonial society or Postcolonial pretensions?' *The Irish Review*, No13 (Win 1992/1993), 116-122.

⁶⁷ The dates of these figures correspond roughly to the period when each region attained national independence. Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland: Postcolonial society or Postcolonial pretensions?', 118.

is one of colonial domination, violence, racism and repression, which in turn has nurtured Irish nationalist resistance.’⁶⁸ The eventual development of an Irish postcolonial debate in the 1990s was built on the groundbreaking work of Field Day and in particular its pamphlet series of the 1980s.⁶⁹ As Seamus Deane sets out:

Field Day’s analysis of the situation derives from the conviction that it is above all, a colonial crisis. This is not a popular view in the political and academic establishment in Ireland.⁷⁰

With Field Day having broken the mould, a succession of Irish critics sought to interrogate how postcolonial theory might be usefully mapped onto the study of Irish literary history. In *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1996), also a Field Day publication, Luke Gibbons demanded not only inclusion but a degree of exceptionalism. For Gibbons, Ireland was both the first and last site of de-colonisation, with British soldiers still patrolling the streets of the North.⁷¹ Gibbons was joined by Declan Kiberd in the magisterial *Inventing Ireland* (1996) which sought to re-examine the canonical texts of Irish modernism through the conceptual framework of postcolonialism. Kiberd challenged Anglo-centric readings of modernism that sought to unmoor Joyce, Yeats et al from this crucial imperial context. Such exegesis would regard Irish modernism outwith its specificity, a mere appendage to an international movement responding to the pressures of industrialization, mechanization and the First World War. For Kiberd, Ireland’s proximity to England was a decisive factor in the kinds of formal experimentation and thematic tropes that characterised the writing of the period. Far from being excluded from the postcolonial canon, Irish Literature belonged at the

⁶⁸ Quoted in Colin Graham, ‘Liminal Spaces: Postcolonial Theories and Irish Culture’, *The Irish Review*, No.16 (Aut/Win 1994), 30-41, 33.

⁶⁹ Notable pamphlets included Tom Paulin, ‘A New look at the language question’ (1983); Seamus Deane ‘Civilians and Barbarians’ (1983). Field Day also drew in contributions from a number of pre-eminent international critics on the issue of Ireland and the postcolonial question: Edward W. Said, ‘Yeats and Decolonization’ (1988); Frederic Jameson, ‘Modernism and Imperialism’ (1988); Terry Eagleton, ‘Nationalism: Irony and Commitment’ (1988).

⁷⁰ Seamus Deane, ed, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 6.

⁷¹ Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, 3-10.

vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle during the twentieth century: 'I have been mindful of the ways in which some shapers of modern Africa, India and the emerging world looked at times to the Irish for guidance.'⁷² The critical force of Gibbons, Kiberd and others seemingly won the day, and by the late 1990s Irish postcolonialism was no longer the sole property of Republicanism. When the second edition of *The Empire Writes Back* was published in 2002, it had been duly amended to allow the consideration of Ireland within the wider postcolonial debate.

To return to the question of class, we may recall that *The Commitments* invoked the language of postcolonialism in an international and an intra-national context. Though the Irish may be the niggers of Europe, the novel insists that Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland, and furthermore, working-class Northsiders are the niggers of Dublin. These internal fissures, the inadequacy of nationalism and its systematic marginalization of class, coloured certain reactions to Kiberd's reassertion of Irish postcolonialism. In his review of *Inventing Ireland* Colin Graham argued against Kiberd's insistence on the nation as the primary unit of de-colonization. He pointed to *Inventing Ireland's* theoretical dependency on postcolonial commentators such as Fanon and Said, and its neglect of more recent, revisionary thinkers like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. For Graham, the problem with such nation-centred analysis is that it makes secondary a host of other vital questions including gender, sexuality and, of course, class. Reconsidered, Kennedy's 'postcolonial pretensions' can be seen to mirror this conceptual bias by offering a statistical account of *national* economic trends. David Cairns and Shaun Richards had earlier contested such analysis, pointing to important local differences within Ireland - for example, in the early twentieth century infant mortality rates were actually higher in parts of Dublin than they were in Calcutta.⁷³ In *Deconstructing Ireland* (2001) Graham redressed these deficiencies by invoking the

⁷² Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 4.

⁷³ David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: colonialism, nationalism and culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 129.

work of the Subaltern Studies group in India.⁷⁴ Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, Subaltern Studies argues that the ascension of the post-independent nation state merely signals the reconfiguration of a bourgeois hegemony. It witnesses native elites assuming the reigns of power, perpetuating further inequality and the continued subordination of the majority of the indigenous population.⁷⁵ The story of the nation is revealed to be, not the history of decolonization, but rather the history of *re-colonization*.⁷⁶

The significance of *The Commitments* in regards to this vast critical sedimentation lies in anticipating the kinds of class debate that only later received a detailed level of critical scrutiny. In such terms the role of dialect within the contemporary Irish novel cannot be underestimated. The use of vernacular within *The Commitments* foregrounds the deficiencies within the Irish language debate, as it has traditionally been conducted. For example, in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995), Terry Eagleton argues that the Irish language question evinces the residual tension between English and Gaelic, as the fraught inheritance of British imperialism.⁷⁷ Doyle's insistence on displacing Standard English with the vernacular of the Dublin streets cuts across this kind of formal opposition. For Doyle himself, Gaelic belongs to a restrictive, authoritarian and outmoded version of Irish identity:

I'm no big fan of the Irish language, and I detest the way it was inflicted upon me when I was at school. You were a failure if you failed Irish, you could get any amount of marks in every other subject on the planet, but if you failed Irish you weren't a true Irish person.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Graham's work built on earlier Irish interest in Gramsci's idea of the Subaltern. Particularly useful is David Lloyd, *Ireland After History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999) – notably, also a Field Day publication.

⁷⁵ Colin Graham, *Deconstructing Ireland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 81-101.

⁷⁶ To be fair to Kiberd, it is worth pointing out his awareness of the inherent problems within the formation of the bourgeois Irish state. See Declan Kiberd, 'Post-colonial Ireland: Being Different', in Daltun O Ceallaigh, ed, *Reconsiderations of Irish History and Culture* (Dublin: Leirmheas, 1994), 94-112.

⁷⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hinger: Studies in Irish Culture*, 263-272.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Reynolds and Noakes, *Roddy Doyle: the essential guide*, 17.

If Gaelic has become bound to certain officially sanctioned notions of Irishness, for Doyle it is also associated with Republicanism and the political conflict in the North. Doyle explains: 'I remember being taught Irish at school by this little man who was a Provo sympathiser. He taught us the Irish for 'incendiary device' [...] what he was doing seemed quite obscene. I remember all of us in the classroom looking at each other thinking "Who is this fucking idiot?"'⁷⁹ As such, *The Commitments*' insistence on the validity of working-class speech signals an opposition to both official state and militant Republican versions of Irish identity. The assertion that soul would stop the Irish Brothers shooting the arses off each other is the novel's only explicit reference to the ongoing political conflict of the North. As such it would seem to confirm the point made by fellow 'Dublin Realist' Dermot Bolger:

The response of the largely untouched South to the frequent barbarism of both sides in the North has been such that recent statistical analysis has shown the citizens of the Irish Republic to feel now that they have more in common with the Scottish, Welsh and English than with any section of the population within the North.⁸⁰

Bolger's comment highlights the cultural separatism that has accompanied the development of historical revisionism. Joe Cleary theorizes this imaginative shift that is the inevitable result of the establishment of national boundaries:

Partitions inaugurate the establishment of new states, and since most historiography is state-centric in its focus, the events that occur after partition tend to be assimilated to the career of one or other states involved. In other words, once state borders have been established, academic disciplines such as history adapt themselves to them, taking the lineaments of the nation-state as the framework of their own investigations and analysis. As a result, 'after partition', the states are treated as naturalised units of analysis, and the material consequences and functions of their borders tend to either be much less emphasised or to drop out of sight altogether.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Quoted in Heller, 'Sticking with the masses', 2.

⁸⁰ Dermot Bolger, *The Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction* (London: Pan MacMillan Publishers Ltd, 1993), ix.

⁸¹ Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 60.

The Commitments' declaration of an alternative class-based politics is an indictment of the lack of vision that has defined the predominant modes of thinking about Irish identity. We might ask, would militant Republicans be so set on a United Ireland, if they realised the similarity between the economics of Andersonstown and Barrytown? The language of class adds valuable texture to our understanding of modern Irish identity, its heterogeneity, its contradictions and its implicit demands for social renewal.

As argued above, *The Commitments*' claim that the Irish are the niggers of Europe and the working-class are the niggers of Ireland is in many ways a period piece. The rise of the Celtic Tiger and the subsequent transformation of Irish society makes such assertions highly problematic. During the 1990s the Republic of Ireland changed from one of the poorest nations in Europe into one of its wealthiest. The Irish as the niggers of Europe is decidedly untenable in this new era of economic prosperity. Coinciding with this rebirth, the Republic became, for the first time, a recipient of significant numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants. Between 1995 and 2000 over 250,000 migrants came to Ireland. Half were Irish emigrants returning to reap the benefits of economic expansion, whilst around 10 per cent (25,000) were refugees and asylum seekers.⁸² Such developments put paid to Mr Deasy's assertion in *Ulysses*, that the reason Ireland never persecuted the Jews was because they never let them in in the first place. In the late 1990s, the famed *Céad Mile Fáilte* seemed to have run dry and racial attacks became commonplace on the streets of Irish cities.⁸³ One veteran of a Dublin city-centre brawl with Nigerian immigrants declared: 'We fought the culchies when we had to and then we fought the cops. And now we have to fight the darkies.'⁸⁴ Such

⁸² Luke Gibbons, 'We Knew Their Plight Well', *Third Text*, Vol. 19, Issue 5 (Sept. 2005), 555-566, 556.

⁸³ Paul Harris and Nicola Byrne, 'Arson, abuse and stone-throwing: Ireland's welcome for refugees', *The Observer*, 19 August 2001, 9.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Declan Kiberd, 'Strangers in their Own Country: Multi-Culturalism in Ireland' in Edna Longley and Declan Kiberd, *Multi-Culturalism: the view from two Irelands* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 45-74, 51.

shameful developments make *The Commitments*' conflation of race and class, however tenuous it always was, truly inapplicable to the Celtic Tiger Republic.⁸⁵

The Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o reminds us of the true nature of colonialism, one that has specific resonance with Ireland at this juncture in its history:

The real aim of colonialism was to control people's wealth -- what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed -- to, control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life [...]. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world [...]. To control a people's culture is to control its tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction, or deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture [...] and the domination of a people's language by that of the colonizing nation.⁸⁶

In this context the transformations brought about by the Celtic Tiger, the intensification of consumer culture and the commodification of Irish identity might be thought of as a process of neo-colonialism. It becomes pertinent to trace such reconfigurations and their effects on the working-class communities like Barrytown. It is this issue that we shall return to in chapter five.

⁸⁵ For further discussion of this see Declan Kiberd *Multi-Culturalism: the view from two Irelands*; Paul Cullen, *Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000).

⁸⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 'The Language of African Literature', *New Left Review*, No.150 (March/April 1985), 19.

Chapter Four

The Northern Irish Dialect Novel, or, If only we had no bananas

Socialism is neither Protestant nor Catholic, Christian nor Freethinker, Buddhist, Mohammedan, nor Jew; it is only human.

- James Connolly – ‘Labour, Nationality, Religion’¹

A society in which socialism is considered a form of the plague.

- Max Hastings – *Ulster 1969*²

Although we are still forced to use the language of stereotypes for analysis, the stereotypes no longer apply. This is the reason for the withdrawal into private life and apparent apathy of so many Northern Irish people – the fragmentation of old identities, the abuse to which this has given rise, but the inability to arrive at anything new which carries the same clarity.

- Opsahl Report 1992³

¹ James Connolly, *Selected Writings*, Peter Beresford Ellis, ed, (London: Pluto Press, 1977), 117.

² Quoted in Peter Beresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class* (London: Pluto, 1996), 314.

³ Andy Pollock, ed, *A Citizens' Inquiry: The Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Lilliput Press for Initiative '92, 1993), 95.

The title of this chapter is, in fact, a deliberate misnomer. The reason: there is almost a complete absence of dialect writing within Northern Irish fiction. Our aim then is to explore what it is about the cultural and political specificity of the North, which would foster this literary blind spot. In *The Commitments*, soul was used to signal a process of estrangement, whereby official party politics no longer corresponds to the needs of ordinary people – the Labour Party doesn't have soul. Fianna Fail doesn't have soul etc. The cover of Sabine Wichert's book, *Northern Ireland since 1945* (1991), evokes a similar terrain which the following discussion of Northern Ireland will seek to address. It features a cartoon, with an official holding a clip-board asking a bemused working-class man: 'Under which constitutional arrangement would you like to be unemployed?'⁴ It is this contradiction, between the seeming irrelevance of constitutional questions on the one hand, and their sheer ubiquity within Northern Irish life on the other, that the following chapter aims to explore.

Recently, in both Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, there have been a number of attempts to engage with the literary possibilities afforded by dialect speech. Arguably, Kelman and Doyle have been the most consistent practitioners of this aesthetic. The other author we could of course include would be Irvine Welsh.⁵ However, the influence of dialect on the literary imagination has been greater than this triumvirate of commercial heavyweights would initially seem to suggest. A comprehensive survey of vernacular in recent Scottish fiction would include the work of Jeff Torrington, Duncan McLean, Janice Galloway, Alan Warner and William McIlvanney. A similar observation could be made in terms of the Republic. Whilst Doyle is by far the most widely read author to use dialect, it plays a heightened role in, for example, Patrick MacCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1992) or Aidan Matthew's *Lipstick on the Host* (1992). For the critic Eve Patten, this triangular frame of reference only serves to highlight the anomalous nature of contemporary Ulster fiction: 'Other than that of the pulp-merchants, no characteristic school has emerged here to compare with Glasgow's urban chroniclers or Dublin's new

⁴ Sabine Wichert, *Northern Ireland since 1945* (London: Longman, 1991).

⁵ For a discussion of dialect in Welsh's work see Aaron Kelly, *Irvine Welsh* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), especially 50-61.

‘dirty realists.’⁶ Admittedly, Bernard MacLaverty and Glenn Patterson both make use of the nuances of Belfast speech. However, neither author’s work possesses the same level of intensity that we witness in Kelman or Doyle. So, the question remains: if Scotland has the vitriolic Sammy Samuels, and the Republic the jive-talking Jimmy Rabbitte, then what about the North?

This opening admission leaves us with a slight problem: how to write an entire chapter based on something which doesn’t exist! By way of an introduction I will address several key points. The initial project will be to locate the absence of dialect within the broader context of contemporary Northern Irish literature. Having done so, we will consider the broader issues surrounding the politics of language within the North. The issue of minority languages, specifically Gaelic and Ulster Scots, will be of fundamental importance. I will argue that this way of thinking about the language question retraces certain familiar paradigms about Northern Irish culture. These are, of course, premised on the existence and naturalization of two traditions: Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist etc. For the most part, this has been the dominant reading of the crisis within the North. As Frank Gafkin and Mike Morrissey assert: ‘In an area with acute and historic patterns of deprivation [...] there has been little development of poverty-focused politics. The political pre-occupations with either defending or destroying the state has overshadowed all else.’⁷ I wish to suggest that in order to understand the so-called two traditions model, we must attend to the way that social and economic inequalities were historically conjoined to the issue of religious identity in the North. The absence of dialect will be read as indicative of a wider absence within the political landscape of the Northern Ireland. As Aaron Kelly explains:

⁶ Eve Patten, ‘Fiction on Conflict: Northern Ireland’s Prodigal Novelists’ in Ian A. Bell, ed, *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 128-149, 129.

⁷ Frank Gafkin and Mike Morrissey, ‘Poverty and Politics in Northern Ireland’ in Paul Teague, *Beyond the Rhetoric: Politics, the Economy and Social Policy in Northern Ireland* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), 136-159, 137.

Irish Nationalism and Unionism are in fact shared attempts to occlude the full historical and social complexity of this island, which entails a consideration of class conflicts, popular radicalisms, struggles for women's rights, the dialectics of urbanity, etc.⁸

The idea of two traditions can be read as a piece of critical reductionism. It is an attempt to isolate the problems of the North from a whole series of wider issues. These include the historical role of both British and Irish Governments, and perhaps most importantly for us, the politics of class. As such, this way of thinking about the Northern Irish problem can be seen to draw on Pierre Machery's theory of art:

What is important in a work is what it does not say. That is not the same as the careless notation 'what it refuses to say', although that would in itself be interesting: a method might be built on it, with the task of measuring silences, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. But rather this, what the work cannot say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey to the silence.⁹

It is the elliptical nature of mainstream thinking about the North, what the official discourse does not say, that the question of dialect invites us to explore. I will argue that the issue of class is fundamental to any attempt to understand the politics and culture of Northern Ireland. Historically, religious identity has been imbued with a certain class dynamic – Catholics as 'second class citizens' etc. The following chapter will unearth the narratives of class that lie embedded within the sectarian history of the North. Moreover, a rereading of class disrupts the fatalistic inevitability of the two traditions narrative. It renders problematic the very notion of homogeneous religious communities, upon which such oppositions are founded. Finally, sectarianism itself will be scrutinised in terms of a bourgeois conspiracy, by which the working class of both communities have been effectively disempowered.

It is this focus which suggests the alternative title for the current chapter. "Yes we have no bananas" was the song performed by bands as they accompanied the 20,000

⁸ Aron Kelly, 'Icons of Identity', *Circa* No.95 (Spring 2001), 44-45, 44.

⁹ Pierre Machery, *A Theory of Literary Production*, Geoffrey Wall, trans (London: Routledge, 1978), 87.

strong march by Catholic and Protestant workers in Belfast in 1932. It was the only song that bands from both communities knew and as such, symbolises a rare moment of communal harmony in Northern Irish history. The paper *Irish Worker's Voice* wrote: 'It was an overwhelming demonstration of class might and determination, as the masses moved forward, rank after rank, their crimson banners gleaming in the flare of the lighted torches they were carrying. This was the working class – no political party or religious sect. Old differences and prejudices had vanished, burnt out in the fire of a common suffering and need.'¹⁰ It is the fraught nature of such solidarity within the North that the following discussion will examine. Hence, the aspirant tone of our alternative title, 'If only we had no bananas'.

As with most things, it is the exception that proves the rule. In the case of dialect and Northern Irish fiction, the exception is Frances Molloy's novel *No Mate for the Magpie* (1985). This is the only full length novel to offer sustained engagement with the possibilities of dialect writing. Molloy's text will be examined alongside John Boyd's *Out of my Class* (1985) which, to a lesser degree also attempts to account for the specificity of local speech. Boyd is of course better known as a playwright. As such, *Out of my Class* offers a conduit to thinking about why it is drama, rather than poetry or prose, that has made the most use of local dialect. Ironically, the choice of these texts might suggest our own version of the two traditions narrative; Boyd is Protestant, whilst Molloy is a Catholic. However, the aim is not to align ourselves with the patronising 'parity of esteem' rhetoric that pervades liberal discourse on the North.¹¹ Instead, these texts highlight the need to examine how the politics of class have been manifest within each of the religious communities in Northern Ireland.

¹⁰ Quoted in "Yes we have no bananas" workers united in Belfast' *Socialist Worker*, 18 Feb 2006. See <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/article.php?article_id=8283> For detailed discussion of this episode see Paddy Devlin, *Yes we have no bananas: outdoor relief in Belfast 1920-39* (Belfast: Blackstaff Square, 1981).

¹¹ This will be picked up on again in our discussion of the Cultural Traditions Group below.

Again, the work of Gramsci provides an important theoretical framework for exploring these issues. The 'Organic Intellectual' will feature in our understanding of the Catholic intelligentsia that emerged during the Civil Rights movement. Gramsci's work on the relationship between culture and politics will also be relevant in understanding the latent class politics of the North. In concluding this chapter, we will consider attempts, both political and critical, to remedy the problems of the North by, rather patronisingly, calling for greater cultural tolerance. Such liberal rhetoric will be exposed as an attempt to skewer the debate, eliding fundamental questions regarding the real material roots of the conflict.

Northern Irish Literature

Eve Patten's comments remind us about what certain critics have bemoaned as the literary deficiency of the North. Patricia Craig, for example, introduces *The Rattle of the North: an Anthology of Ulster Prose* (1992) with a mixture of caveat and apology: '[I]t is well known that conditions in the North of Ireland, from Plantation times on, were never sufficiently settled to foster literary activity, and that the development of the novel, in particular, was consequently retarded.'¹² This begs the obvious question: what would a fully developed novel actually look like, and against which Northern Irish fiction might be found so obviously wanting? The following argument will attempt to understand but ultimately to look beyond this kind of pejorative reading of Northern Irish fiction. Instead, I will contend that it offers us a unique imaginative space, one in which the dominant interpretations of the conflict may be re-examined and ultimately reconfigured.

Like both Patten and Craig, we will begin with a wide angle lens, thinking for a moment in deliberately general terms about Northern Irish literature. Admittedly, it is poetry that is commonly regarded as offering the more satisfying engagement with the subject matter of the Troubles. As such, the North can be seen to buck contemporary literary trends, whereby it is the novelist that has begun to enjoy pseudo-celebrity status –

¹² Patricia Craig, ed, *The Rattle of the North: an Anthology of Ulster Prose* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1992), 1.

Rushdie, Doyle, Amis etc. Undoubtedly, it is Heaney that has become the poet laureate of the Troubles, a mantle that has brought recognition and remuneration in almost equal measure. Staggeringly, Heaney's work constitutes two-thirds of all sales of contemporary living poets.¹³ However, such canonical status has come without a certain degree of critical baggage. Richard Kirkland outlines one of the problematic ways in which critics have tended to read Heaney's work:

[There is] a wariness about the extent to which the paradigms of Northern Irish poetry have been allowed to function as a metonym for the wider strategies of the culture in recent analytical work. To take an obvious example, by this reading John Hewitt is perceived as the poetic voice of Protestant Ulster and Seamus Heaney as his Catholic counterpart, and in this way they are not simply rendered as embodiments of a community but become mutually defining. That this cultural preoccupation has led to the neglect of other forms of cultural activity is largely unarguable.¹⁴

It will be argued that dialect writing is one of the neglected forms of cultural activity that Kirkland identifies. Moreover, it is this tendency, to neatly classify Northern Irish literature within the two traditions paradigm, that we will seek to contend.

Importantly, Heaney is no longer, if in fact he ever was, the lone poetic voice of the Troubles. Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian and Ciaran Carson have all received significant international acclaim. Their poetry is part of a wide ranging examination into the manifold variety of artistic responses to the Northern Irish crisis. One of the problematic effects of this interest in poetry is revealed by Terry Eagleton: '[A]n outsider might be forgiven for concluding that the Irish literary pantheon was populated more or less exclusively by Yeats, Synge, Joyce, Beckett, Flann O'Brien and Northern Irish poetry.'¹⁵ It is as if poetry has become the sum total of contemporary Northern Irish literature. It is notable that a similar critical scrutiny has been denied novelists such as Brian Moore, Maurice Leitch and Sam Hannah Bell. One could also

¹³ Stephen Phelan, 'Tools for working the land of imagination', *Sunday Herald* (9 April 2006), Seven Days, 26.

¹⁴ Richard Kirkland, *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and dissident subjects* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 7.

¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Crazy John and the Bishop*, ix.

add to the list more recent authors, such as Glenn Patterson or Robert McLiam Wilson. If the Troubles have been good news for poetry, it could be argued, they have been bad news for prose. Throughout this thesis it has been argued that the literary use of dialect invokes a certain type of political thinking, one that is inevitably concerned with questions of class. As such, it is significant that amongst the wealth of poetic voices emanating from the North, there has been a considerable lack of interest in the artistic possibilities of vernacular speech. The formal conservatism of Heaney et al may be contrasted with the linguistic innovation of Scottish poets like Ian Hamilton Finlay, Tom Leonard and Liz Lochhead.¹⁶ Belfast poet Alan Gilles' debut collection *Somebody Somewhere* (2004), with its sensitive ear for local speech, is a welcome if somewhat isolated intervention in this field.¹⁷

For all its achievements, Northern Irish poetry is imbued with the same rusticative imperative that belies the dominant ideologies of Nationalism and Unionism. As Aaron Kelly argues these ideologies are 'entrapped in a mythic orientation towards a rural idealism.'¹⁸ Every year on the 12th July, the symbolic procession of the Orange March

¹⁶ Willy Maley offers an excellent discussion of this juxtaposition in his essay 'Ireland, versus, Scotland: crossing the (English) language barrier', Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth, eds, *Across the Margins: Cultural identity and change in the Atlantic archipelago* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 13-31.

¹⁷ Seamus Heaney does make some attempt to address the peculiar nuances of local speech, particularly in his placename poems "Anahorish" and "Broagh". These poems describe the English adaptations of Gaelic placenames, which Heaney describes as making them 'difficult for strangers to manage'. Moreover, the translations of the original Gaelic reveal a level of meaning that remains hidden from those that only can speak English. As such, local speech is seen to create a community of speakers. It also contains a hidden layer of meaning, one which disrupts English as an authoritarian discourse, and a way of rendering a place knowable. Here, Heaney can be seen to be echoing certain traditional readings of the language question, as outlined above through Eagleton. We recall that for Eagleton, the peculiarities of English in Ireland index a series of imperial after effects, derived from the imposition of English upon a Gaelic speaking population. Such readings offer no real account for other, local differences in English, whether emerging from geography, or as in our case, class. See Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground: Selected Poems 1966-1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 46, 54.

¹⁸ Aaron Kelly, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland Since 1969: Utterly Resigned Terror* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 84.

leaves the city and congregates in The Field. Similarly, nationalism itself is historically grounded in idealizations of a green and pleasant land. Hugh Shearman presents a useful example of what is a misguided interpretative strategy:

Perhaps the fairest general comments about the Ulsterman is that he is, for the most part a countryman at heart. Even those who live in the city of Belfast normally have relations in the countryside, and that rigid division between rural and urban habits and traditions, which is so marked in some of the larger conurbations in Great Britain, has not yet developed in Northern Ireland.¹⁹

Shearman offers a familiar version of the North as a fundamentally anomalous space, one which can only be understood in isolation from its neighbours. In direct contrast, several critics have argued that the Northern Irish situation cannot be cordoned off from this kind of wider discussion. Richard Kirkland asserts: 'Northern Ireland offers itself as an implicit critique of both the bourgeois liberal British state and the triumph of the bourgeois-nationalist project in the Republic.'²⁰ It is this inter-related nature of the Northern problem, along with its specific Marxist implications, that will be addressed below. In changing the locus of the debate from the country to the city, we are re-establishing the ideological co-ordinates through which the crisis in the North may be theorised. The country lanes and bog meadows provide an inevitably elliptical engagement with this subject matter. It is in the city, on the Falls and the Shankill Road, on the Bogside and the Creggan estates, where the seeds of the post '69 conflict are most likely to be found. It is through narratives of dispossession, disenfranchisement and exclusion that we may begin understand the very modern nature of Northern Ireland's enduring tribalism. As such, Homi Bhabha's comments become particularly relevant: 'It is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out. It is there that, in our time, the perplexity of the living is most acutely experienced.'²¹

¹⁹ Hugh Shearman, *Northern Ireland* (Belfast: HMSO, 1968), 70.

²⁰ Kirkland, *Identity Parades*, 4.

²¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 169-170.

In terms of our interest in Irish-Scottish studies, it is the shipyards of Queen's Island and the Clydeside that offer one of the most compelling points of comparison. Both have acute experience of an almost complete industrial decline. However, as we originally suggested regarding this kind of comparative analysis, it is often the differences, rather than the similarities, that are the most instructive. The shipyards of Glasgow are a famous symbol of working-class radicalism: Red Clydeside in the 1920s, and in more recent times they witnessed the heroic last stand of Scottish labour during the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders Work-in of the early 1970s. In contrast to such radical credentials, Belfast's Harland and Wolff is a symbol of religious discrimination. In its heyday, the single biggest employer of working-class labour in the Northern Ireland was 90% Protestant. 'Belfast Confetti' was to the common practice of dropping nuts and bolts from gantries, onto the heads of unsuspecting Catholics below.²² In place of a heroic militancy, the history of class in Northern Ireland is the perpetual struggle to control the flames of sectarianism. In examining the limited role of dialect in local fiction we will examine the exact nature of this residual tension.

The linguistic inheritance of the North

Before abandoning poetry altogether, it is worth considering Seamus Heaney's 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing'.²³ Written in 1975, it is a poem about the way in which language has been affected by the violence of the Troubles. Unlike Scotland or the Republic, where speech is primarily marked by social or regional differences, Heaney argues that the Northern Irish tongue registers a whole other series of significations:

I incline as much to rosary beads
As to the jottings and analyses
Of politicians and newspapermen
Who've scribbled down the long campaign from gas

²² Although a formal study remains to be carried out, the sectarianism of the Belfast shipyards was immortalised by Sam Thompson in his 1961 play *Over the Bridge* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1970).

²³ Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground*, 131-133.

And protest to gelignite and Sten,

Who proved upon their pulses 'escalate',
'Backlash' and 'crack down', 'the provisional wing',
'Polarization' and 'long-standing hate'.
Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing,

Expertly civil-tongued with civil neighbours
On the high wires of first wireless reports,
Sucking the fake taste, the stony flavours
Of those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts:

'Oh, it's disgraceful, surely, I agree.'
Where's it going to end?' 'It's getting worse.'
'They're murderers.' 'Internment, understandably...'
The 'voice of sanity' is getting hoarse.

The poem details the failure of language to negotiate the lived realities of the conflict. It is difficult to speak about the Troubles in any meaningful way. The English journalist in search of 'views on the Irish *thing*' [my emphasis] evinces an essential laziness in the way the media reports on events. Significantly, it is not just external and official discourse that falters, when faced with such volatile and grisly happenings. Heaney's poem confronts the polite meaningless words of everyday speech, and their role in offering platitudes of ritual condemnation. It charges the common parlance of the North with not only avoiding the moment, but with complicity in the kinds of ideological distortion upon which the conflict is predicated.

Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us:
Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,
Subtle discrimination by addresses
With hardly an exception to the rule

That Norman, Ken and Sidney signaled Prod
And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape
O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,
Of minds as open as a trap

In contrast to Scotland or the Republic, the everyday speech of the North is a repository for the hidden signifiers of religious identity. Beneath the fake taste of sanctioned retorts lies an encrypted code, where a name, an address or a school, discloses a tribal

conspiracy in which everyone is implicated. Hence the title and its deliberate ambiguity: 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' is both warning and diagnosis. Language has been compromised, and casual conversation is a dangerously loaded, inevitably fraught enterprise.

Minorities and minority languages

It is perhaps unsurprising that the two traditions narrative, ubiquitous within Northern Irish, pervades the everyday speech of people that live there. These associations are readily discernible within the broader linguistic landscape of the North. A survey of this terrain would highlight the significance of three distinct languages: English, and the recently recognised minority languages of Gaelic and Ulster-Scots. In many ways, the battle of the brogues, between Gaelic and Ulster-Scots, can be seen to re-trace the familiar narrative of Peace Process, which attempts to substantiate a parity of esteem between the two communities of the North.

The history of Ulster-Scots is, of course, intimately connected with the story of the seventeenth century Plantations. As such, it offers a particularly fertile location in which a burgeoning Irish-Scottish studies might reasonably be expected to flourish.²⁴ James Orr and the Ulster Weaver Poets provide a body of work that, as yet, await analysis in this new comparative context. However, for us it is contemporary attempts to resuscitate the Ulster-Scots language that are of specific interest. The 1990s witnessed an unprecedented revival in the fortunes of Ulster-Scots. The 1998 Belfast Agreement played a key role in this transformation. Most tangibly, it created a cross border language body, designed to promoting the minority languages of Gaelic and Ulster-Scots within the island of Ireland. In 1999, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mo Mowlam, agreed that Ulster-Scots would receive funding on an equal footing with Gaelic, which at

²⁴ See Liam McIlvanney, 'Across the narrow sea: the language, literature and politics of Ulster Scots' in McIlvanney and Ryan, eds, *Ireland and Scotland*, 203-227.

the time meant £2 million a year.²⁵ This official recognition and renewal of interest must be understood in terms of the political context underlying the Peace Process.²⁶ As the iconography of the British state would be inevitably downscaled, Ulster-Scots was seen as a way of allaying Protestant fears that their cultural identity was being eroded from the fabric of Northern Irish life. It was also an attempt to combat certain pernicious assertions that culture was a Catholic thing, just as bigotry was a Protestant thing.²⁷ The political logic behind support for the Ulster-Scots movement was that if the sectarian flavour of Protestant culture could be somehow diluted, this would help to foster a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

Where the issue has run aground in recent years has been over the misuse of government funds by the Ulster-Scots Agency. In 2004 the *Sunday Times* reported on funded trips to see Glasgow Rangers play in Belfast. Money was also allocated to Orange bands and 12th July celebrations, all of which possess tenuous links to the the issue of language promotion.²⁸ For Edna Longley, these dubious actions illustrate a familiar opposition within Northern Irish culture: 'The inflated and politicised claims made for Scots [...] copy Sinn Fein's exploitation of the Irish language.'²⁹ For Longley the issue of minority language can be seen to legitimate a certain binary version of Northern Irish identity. At the forefront of attempts to revitalize Ulster-Scots literature has been writer and academic Philip Robinson who has written several children's books as well as a trilogy of novels, partly using Ulster-Scots. As its back cover informs us, the first of the trilogy *Wake the Tribe o Dan* (1998), is a novel written in the kailyard style.

²⁵ John McManus, 'Och aye, Mowlam puts up Pounds 2m for Ulster-Scots' *Sunday Times* (14 March 1999), 5.

²⁶ Quoted in Edna Longley and Declan Kiberd, *Multi-Culturalism: the view from two Irelands* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 38.

²⁷ 'Our debt in Northern Ireland to the writers of the past twenty years is immense. They have enhanced our self-regard, if only because we can congratulate ourselves that we have produced such writers. Yet Protestant readers will look mostly in vain if they seek in the literature some reassurance that their community has any dignity of imagination.' John Wilson Foster, *Colonial Consequences* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1991), 273.

²⁸ Scott Millar, 'Ulster Scots body warned on using state handouts for trips', *Sunday Times* (13 Jun 2004), 5.

²⁹ Edna Longley, 'What do Protestants really want?' *Irish Review* No.20 (1997), 104-120, 114.

It depicts a small rural community of Drumcrun, where the traditional ways of life are under immanent threat from the forces of modernity. The reason we are only casually interested in Robinson's use of dialect is that as a kailyard novel, the form of *Wake the Tribe* is more than a century old. As such it evinces the enduring problems within certain aspects of Ulster Unionism, its intransigence and wish to arrest the forces of change – what we have we hold. The fact that Robinson's fiction is only available direct from the Orange Order's website tells its own story about the politics of this so-called revival. This limited availability invites us to ask if there actually is a viable audience for a contemporary literature in Ulster-Scots. In 1999 a £19,000 salary as Ulster-Scots translator for the Northern Ireland Assembly struggled to find a single suitable candidate. In the same year Nelson McCausland, DUP politician and head of the Ulster-Scots Agency, commented he might have difficulty finding 8 representatives with which to fill their allotted seats on the North South Language Body.³⁰ Such observations point toward an inevitable question: exactly how representative is the cultural identity offered by Ulster-Scots? Moreover, how would the Gaelic language fare under a similar process of quantity surveying? The 2001 Northern Ireland census revealed that fewer than 14% of the population had 'some knowledge of Irish.'³¹ Those with some knowledge of Ulster-Scots make up an even smaller number - less than 6% of the total population.³² In highlighting these numbers my intention is not to disparage the importance of minority language, which makes a valid contribution to the rich tapestry of Northern Irish cultural life. However, if less than 20% of the population have 'some knowledge' of either Gaelic or Ulster-Scots, the question inevitably arises: what about the other 80%?

In contrast to both Gaelic and Ulster-Scots, the Northern Irish accent itself eschews the familiar categorizations of sectarian identity politics. As we saw with

³⁰ McManus, 'Och aye, Mowlam puts up £2m for Ulster-Scots', 5.

³¹ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, *Northern Ireland Census*, 28 August 2006.

<<http://www.nicensus2001.gov.uk/nica/browser/profile.jsp?profile=Cultural&mainArea=&mainLevel=>>

³² This figure is a percentage derived from the estimate by the Ulster-Scots Language Society that there are currently around 100,000 Ulster-Scots speakers in *Ullans* Vol.2 (1994), 56.

Heaney's poem though, this does not completely exonerate the everyday speech of the North. However, it is crucial to recognize that such distinctions are a matter of content rather than form, what an individual says, rather than how they say it. In his general survey, *The Language of Irish Literature* (1989), Loreto Todd makes the following assertion:

With regard to language, uneducated Belfast people often reveal their ethnic (and consequently their religious) affiliations in their preferred speech patterns. A Presbyterian will resemble an Ulster-Scots speaker from Down; a Church of Ireland person will normally speak Anglo-Irish; and a Catholic from the Falls Road will often have relatives in Armagh or Tyrone and so will show some influence from Hiberno-English.³³

However, several linguistic studies fundamentally disagree with this type of categorisation. In *Belfast English and Standard English: Dialect Variation and Parameter Setting* (1995), Alison Henry states:

One of the interesting characteristics of Belfast English is that, although Belfast is known to be in many ways a divided society, with often little contact between the Protestant and Catholic communities, Belfast English is not distinguished, either phonologically or grammatically, along religious lines. All of the constructions discussed in this book are used by both communities, and where there is any distinction in usage, it is between working and middle-class speakers or older and younger speakers, rather than along religious lines.³⁴

James Milroy makes a similar case in *Regional Accents of English: Belfast* (1981). He argues that whilst it may be possible to make geographical distinctions, for example between, a Ballymena, Tyrone and an Armagh accent, and whilst certain regions may have their own specific religious demographic, accent alone is an insufficient way of deducing religious identity. As a result, the question of dialect necessitates the reinsertion of the politics of class into our sociological description of Northern Irish society. It provides a space where the familiar divisions of the North may be re-aligned, where old narratives may be deconstructed, and where new stories may begin to be told.

³³ Loreto Todd, *The Language of Irish Literature* (Basingstoke: MacMillan 1989), 48.

³⁴ Alison Henry, *Belfast English and Standard English: Dialect Variation and Parameter Setting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7-8.

The border problem: merely bordering on the problem?

The Heaney poem quoted above is about the relationship between language and the violence of the Troubles. However, at the same time, it is a poem about silence, or to be more accurate, silences. The silences of the North are offered as the repositories of an essential, yet private, form of truth about the situation – ‘Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us’. In terms of our own interest in class, it is this idea, of the unspoken and the unsaid, that provides the key to the following chapter. The widespread interest in the poetry of the Troubles has meant that the criticism of Northern Irish fiction could itself be described in terms of an uncharted or unspoken terrain. As yet, there have been only two attempts to survey the field: John Wilson Foster’s *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (1974), and Elmer Kennedy-Andrews’ *Fiction and the Northern Irish troubles since 1969: (de-)constructing the North* (2003). In 1974 Foster would describe himself as something of a critical orphan: ‘The bulk of this study of Ulster fiction has been written without benefit of previous criticism on the subject or on individual authors.’³⁵ We might explain this dearth in terms of certain political objections to such modes of canon formation. As Benedict Anderson reminded us, it was through the novel that individuals imagined themselves as part of a wider, national community.³⁶ For many nationalists the very idea of ‘Ulster fiction’ is anathema, an attempt to enthrone the cultural separateness of the North, and by implication legitimating the current political settlement. Such objections are not easily dismissible. One might reasonably speculate whether a category like ‘Ulster Fiction’ could be coherently theorised in the context of pre-partition Ireland. Furthermore, Foster’s omission of a writer like Flann O’Brien, born into an Irish speaking family in Strabane (Co. Tyrone), would support suspicions of a residual political agenda.

But, are we not in danger of a little critical hypocrisy here ourselves? Could the current thesis, with its tri-partite division, not also be accused of cultural separatism?

³⁵ John Wilson Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1974), foreword.

³⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: verso, 1983).

Hopefully, the answer is no. The title of Kennedy-Andrews' book, with its explicit reference to the post '69 conflict, provides a way of renegotiating this problem. In his introduction to *The Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction* (1993), Dermot Bolger offers a different reason for distinguishing writing from the North and the South:

All this – along with various anthologies of poetry and prose – helped for a period to reinforce the notion that the North was central to all Irish writing, so that, as a writer from the Republic of Ireland – which is three times the size of the North – one frequently felt that you were writing about a society which had been rendered invisible [...] Certainly there are strong overlaps and shared understandings, but in terms of education, background and social experience this anthology contains the work of two very distinct societies.³⁷

Importantly, political conflict is not the sum total of Northern Irish life. Nevertheless, since 1969 the Troubles have had a considerable impact in shaping the experience of both communities within the North. At the same time, the Republic has remained, by and large, unaffected. As such, it is possible to differentiate the experience of those in the North, without necessarily legitimating the claims of the six county state. At the same time, we must be wary of reinforcing misleading perceptions about the anomalous nature of the North. The tri-partite structure of the current thesis can be read as a deliberate attempt to avoid such critical quarantine. Whilst accounting for the specificity of each region, our materialist analysis also encourages us to trace how a similar set of themes have played out within each region.

From all this it is clear that the border question occupies a central role in Northern Irish criticism, the stone that troubles the living stream. In his introduction to *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland 1960-1990* (1991), Eamonn Hughes develops this point:

³⁷ Dermot Bolger, ed, *The Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction* (London: Picador, 1993), xi-xii. It is worth pointing out that Bolger's claim that the Troubles are completely irrelevant to people in the South is deeply problematic. It would elide the fact that it is the very same Troubles that have caused much of the revisionism that dominated critical debate in the South in recent decades. Nevertheless, the lived reality of the Troubles still provides a case for a reasonable degree of critical segregation. See Liam Harte and Michael Parker, ed, *Contemporary Irish Fiction* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 2000), 4.

‘Northern Ireland as a whole is not so much enclosed by its borders as defined by them: it is a border country.’³⁸ It is well known that the early years of the Troubles had a polarising effect on the social cartography of the North. Burned from their homes, many working-class Catholics and Protestants were forced to retreat into religiously homogeneous neighbourhoods. The Belfast cityscape, with its patchwork of Protestant and Catholic ghettos and fifty foot ‘Peace Lines’, evinces the degree to which borders define both the external and internal landscape of the region. For Hughes, whilst the border sets the physical boundaries of the state, in recent years it has come to delimit the very possibilities for thinking and writing about the North. The ‘two traditions’ narrative forms the *ne plus ultra* of Northern Irish culture. It creates ideological no-go area, a limit beyond which one dare not tread. As Richard Kirkland comments, this has led to a form of ‘theoretical despair’ when it comes to thinking about the North.³⁹ However, by adopting and adapting the terms of Hughes’ argument, we can begin to begin to map a way out of this ideological cul-de-sac. We may recall that the term ‘border’ has another meaning. Besides signalling a dividing line between two nations/communities, it also refers to an edge, or a margin of something. Consequently, it becomes propitious to consider some of other issues that have been marginalised, silenced and sidelined by the two traditions version of Northern Irish culture. These include questions of gender, ethnicity, and of course, class. In this sense, the following chapter will examine the processes whereby class has become one of the great border issues of the Northern Irish debate.

In contrast to previous chapters, the following discussion primarily draws on the work of two authors. Unlike Kelman and Doyle, these texts are both set in the past: Boyd’s *Out of my Class* in the early decades of the twentieth century, and Molloy’s *No Mate for the Magpie* in the 1950s and 1960s. Although set in the past, both books were written in 1985. According to Paul Connerton:

³⁸ Eamonn Hughes, ed, *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland 1960-1990* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991), 3.

³⁹ Richard Kirkland, *Identity Parades: Northern Irish culture and dissident subjects* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 2.

Concerning memory as such, we may note that our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past [...] And we will experience our present differently in accordance with the different pasts to which we are able to connect the present.⁴⁰

As such, the intractable nature of the Northern conflict can be read behind these attempts to deconstruct the monoliths of religious identity. It is through the use of dialect and the politics of class that this form of subversion is articulated. A class analysis allows us to understand the modern resuscitation of such supposedly ‘anachronistic passions’ in the 1960s. However, it also alerts us to the fact that as the Troubles progressed, working-class communities on both sides of the religious divide became increasingly surplus to requirements to the free market ideologies of the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

John Boyd and the Protestant working class

Born in 1912, *Out of my Class* recounts the first thirty years of John Boyd’s life: his upbringing in working-class east Belfast; his scholarship to Belfast Academical Institution (known locally as Inst); his time spent at Queen’s University and his brief career as a teacher. Spanning the historical moment of partition, the text examines the cultural politics that accompanied the birth of the state, and set the course for its subsequent development. As the title suggests, Boyd describes the trajectory of his life as a journey out of and away from his class origins. In what follows we will consider what exactly Boyd means when he uses a phrase like ‘my class.’ Does it refer to ‘the working-class’ in the same way it would in Glasgow, Liverpool or Leeds? As outlined above, *Out of my Class* will allow us to think about the broader questions surrounding dialect and Northern Irish literature. It is Boyd’s career as a playwright, intimately concerned with the social collapse of the North, that is of particular relevance. Arguably, it has been Northern Irish drama, rather than its poetry or prose, that has been most interested in dialect and its profound implications for a radical aesthetics of class. We will consider

⁴⁰ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2.

why this has been the case, and briefly examine the work of Belfast playwright Martin Lynch, who maintains a similar set of interests.

In chapter two Kelman's artistic manifesto, 'to write and remain a member of my community', guided our analysis of both the form and content of the author's work. We argued that Kelman's writing deliberately subverts realist narrative convention, which he himself regards as the enthronement of a certain set of elitist cultural values. This model provides an apposite starting point from which to approach the formal politics of *Out of my Class*. What makes Boyd's text particularly interesting is that as autobiography, the voice of the author and that of the narrator are, to a certain degree, conflated. As a result, it is possible to trace correspondences between the technique of Boyd's writing and the trajectory of his life, or in familiar literary terms, between the form and content of his work. Like most autobiographies *Out of my Class* begins with childhood, which in Boyd's case was spent in the shadow of the Harland and Wolff cranes, in the Ballymacarret district of east Belfast. From the outset the narrative makes use of Non-Standard English to represent the nuances of Belfast speech. In response to advice to shut the window if he wants to sleep, Boyd's father exclaims:

Shut the winda! If I shut the winda how'll I get air? I've toul' ye before but ye won't nivir listen t'me...' (*OMC* 3)

Words like 'winda', 'toul' and double negatives such as 'won't nivir' are used to denote the specific character of Boyd's father's speech. Furthermore, there is a marked difference between this and the Standard English of the narrator, who is of course Boyd himself. Notably, *Out of my Class* adopts the formal conventions of the classic realist text. Dialect speaking characters are juxtaposed with a Standard English narrator. This is significant when we recall that, at one stage, Boyd must also have belonged to the same speech community as his father. Formally then, the text enacts the underlying theme of Boyd's life; namely, his self-confessed estrangement from his working-class roots.

Out of my Class locates the language of Boyd's father within a wider working-class speech community. We hear the people of Ballymacarret speak a similar form of

Belfast vernacular: 'Your Bob's a fine lukkin' man, Jenny [...] niver out of work. Niver breaks your pay' (*OMC* 8). As discussed above, linguistic studies of Belfast deny any discernible difference between the speech habits of working-class Protestants and their Catholic counterparts. The question then arises: do the linguistic politics of Boyd's text allow us to speak about 'the Belfast working class' as an identifiable and cohesive unit? When Boyd confesses to journeying 'Out of my Class' what exactly is he referring to? The author himself would read sectarianism as a deliberate strategy of disabling the proletarian solidarity of the North's subordinate classes:

The sectarian divide that poisons the air of the community I write about is a smoke screen, a camouflage to obscure the social problems. Belfast is, after all, no different from other industrial cities, with the usual contradictions between rich and poor, privileged and underprivileged. It is a city of high unemployment and bad housing, where the working class has been nourished on mistrust. Probably no other working class has been so divided, so alienated.⁴¹

This kind of argument finds support amongst other commentators on the Left. In *Beyond the Troubles?* (1994) Peter Hadden maintains that, far from pursuing policies of reconciliation, throughout the Troubles the British government actively sought to fuel sectarian hostility. At first glance this might appear to resemble something of a socialist conspiracy theory. However, it is worth recalling that the Troubles have not always been bad news for the British Government. IRA bombing campaigns, particularly in the mainland UK, allowed the Government to seize the moral high ground and define themselves as defenders of law and order. However, as anyone with the least knowledge of Northern Irish history would attest, British justice is a highly suspect concept. Without wishing to catalogue such events, it is worth highlighting the recent Stevens Report (2003), which identified widespread collusion between British forces and Loyalist murder squads during the Troubles. That British interests have often been best served by inflaming communitarian distrust in the North, is a fact that is worrying and galling in equal measure.

⁴¹ John Boyd, *Collected Plays 1. The Flats: The Farm: Guests* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1981), vii.

Boyd's argument that sectarianism has merely been a form of false consciousness, a wool pulled over the eyes of the poor of both communities, is far too simplistic. In describing Belfast, *Out of my Class* demonstrates why any understanding of the history of class in the North must take account of the religious question. We are told that Boyd grew up in a Protestant area, segregated from the neighbouring Catholic community a few miles away. Elsewhere the author admits to not actually knowing any Catholics until he was well past the age of twenty.⁴² Deprived of any direct contact with the other community, the young Boyd must accept the language of distrust he hears from his Protestant elders:

Everybody said that, at least everybody I spoke to in our street: the Catholics always started the riots and were to blame for everything that happened afterwards [...] They hated the British and they hated us Protestants, and above all, they hated the Union Jack. I couldn't understand why. (*OMC* 39-40)

This sense of estrangement makes it problematic to speak about 'the Belfast working class' in the same way we would inhabitants of other cities. If there was a collective group consciousness, it was grounded in a religious identity that came before class. Through looking at comments by Eamonn Hughes above, we identified the distorting effect that sectarianism has had on the physical and mental landscape of the North. Unsurprisingly, the traditional politics of class were also affected. One of the fundamental reasons we cannot speak in general terms about a Belfast working class is that for the Catholic minority, religious identity has historically entailed a degree of social inequality. This was most overtly manifest in discrimination over employment and housing. Denis Barritt and Charles Carter have analysed the exact nature of inequality amongst the working-class of differing religious persuasion:

There is a marked difference in the economic status of the two communities: the Protestant tending to provide the business and professional classes, the larger farmers, and the skilled labour and the Catholics the small farmers and unskilled labour [...] unemployment, which commonly falls with more severity on the

⁴² Boyd, *Collected Plays 1*, vii.

unskilled, in Northern Ireland has a disproportionate effect on the Catholic workers.⁴³

The 1981 census revealed an unemployment rate of 12% amongst Protestants and 30% amongst the Catholic community.⁴⁴ As a result, any class analysis must take into account a more complex social stratification than the tri-partite model of conventional Marxism would inevitably allow.

If *Out of my Class* alerts us to a class dynamic belying religious difference, it also illustrates how class disrupts the homogeneous religious communities, upon which the two traditions narrative is predicated. As a gifted primary school pupil, Boyd won a scholarship to one of the city's grammar schools, Inst. Once there, he begins to realise that religion is not the only significant division within the Belfast community:

I was floundering unhappily between two worlds: the world of Ballymacarret and the world of a middle-class school where the masters came from Oxford and Cambridge, Trinity and Queens [...] Inst was responsible for increasing my feelings of self-consciousness and social inferiority. Though there was no snobbery at Inst., I was becoming a snob – by which I mean I was more and more conscious of belonging, by birth and upbringing, to what I regarded as an inferior class. I lived in a house and a street I was ashamed of, while most of the boys I knew at Inst lived in villas in quiet suburban avenues. (*OMC* 60,62)

Before entering this new world, Boyd had been ignorant of any deficiency that might otherwise have characterised his upbringing. Just as the denizens of Ballymacarret lived in almost complete isolation from their Catholic neighbours, we see a similar gulf separating middle and working-class Protestants of Belfast: 'It was a cocooned life, and everything outside the gates of the school seemed irrelevant and insignificant. We ignored the sporadic 'troubles' between Catholics and Protestants as long as they didn't impinge on our activities' (*OMC* 72). The 'cocooned life' at Inst anticipates what would become one of the defining features of the Troubles. As Bill Rolston explains, the

⁴³ Denis P. Barritt and Charles Carter, *The Northern Ireland Problem: a study in group relations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 54-55.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Gafkin and Morrissey, 'Poverty and Politics in Northern Ireland', 149.

violence that tore at the fabric of Northern Irish society occurred, for the most part, at a safe remove from the leafy suburbs:

Despite its propinquity to the 'troubles' the middle class in Belfast need not have more than the slightest contact with the violence [...] It is possible to know as little in parts of Belfast as in New York about the reality of the 'troubles', because in both places that reality is mediated through and filtered by the medium of television or the press.⁴⁵

In line with the late twentieth century move away from Leftist analysis, the class politics of the Troubles remains a relatively unexamined aspect of the conflict. It is easy to condemn the 'anachronistic passions' of others, from the safety of the suburbs. For many working-class Catholics, where religious discrimination maintained an abject level of poverty, a communal loyalty based on religious identity seems like a perfectly natural response.

In terms of dialect, it is significant that whilst at Inst, the difference between Boyd's family and the more middle-class boys emerges through language. The author declares:

My father wore dungarees and worked in the railway, while their fathers were business men, doctors, dentists, architects, teachers, civil servants; and their mothers- whom I'd seen at the Christmas concert and at Sports' Day- wore expensive-looking clothes and spoke with a semi-English accent. (*OMC* 62)

The 'semi-English' accent of these middle-class parents highlights the Anglo-centric value system that Protestant Ulster has often favoured. The problematic nature of this is emphasized when, following his graduation from Queen's University, Boyd tutors the son of a wealthy businessman from Cultra. The son is convalescing after an operation pending his return to boarding school in England:

[Peter] disliked his English prep school because he hated games, and he told me that the other boys ragged and called him 'Paddy' [...] the English boys made fun of his accent. To my ear Peter had a perfectly good English accent, but then I wasn't much of a judge of an accent, least of all my own. (*OMC* 145)

⁴⁵ Bill Rolston, 'Escaping from Belfast: Class, Ideology and Literature in Northern Ireland' *Race and Class* Vol.20, No.1 (Sum 1978), 41-62, 42.

The English boys make no allowance for Peter's Protestantism or his sense of Britishness, and are content to characterise him pejoratively as another 'Paddy'. There is a certain sense of a community caught in limbo, between an Irish identity that they do not want, and an English one that they cannot attain. If Peter's experience is a specifically middle-class phenomenon, recent history has witnessed similar feelings of abandonment within the working-class Protestant psyche. In *Ulster Working-Class Protestants* (1994) Michael Hall argues:

It is the British government which has been primarily responsible for the deep trauma within the Protestant psyche, for its actions have engendered an increasing sense of betrayal, which twenty-five years on has led to the almost total estrangement of Protestant Ulster from 'mother' England. Most working-class Loyalists now believe that their 'loyalty' counts for little on the mainland – Britain no longer wants them.⁴⁶

This sense of rejection is undoubtedly an effect of the Troubles, as the enduring thorn in the side of successive British Governments. However, it might also be located within more general narratives of working-class experience that the recent ideological shift to the Right has witnessed. Moreover, the remarkable similarity between the free-market ideologies adopted in the Republic and the UK, fundamentally challenges the whole basis for Nationalist and Unionist politics.

If *Out of my Class* highlights the false homogeneity within mainstream conceptions of Protestant identity, it also articulates the way in which the language of poverty has the ability to transcend the religious divide. Boyd teaches at a Labour Exchange, a school for the unemployed children of both communities during the depression of the 1930s.

My first extra-mural group dispersed, some making their way towards the Falls, others towards the Shankill; for, with a list of their names in my pocket, I could pick out the Catholics and the Protestants. I was glad that the Juvenile Instruction Centre had at least given both sides the chance of enjoying each others company. (OMC 171)

⁴⁶ Michael Hall, *Ulster Working Class Protestants* (Newtownabbey: Island Publications, 1984), 7.

However, we must be mindful of Barritt and Carter's argument, that in times of economic depression, unemployment fell more heavily on the unskilled, Catholic section of the population. If social deprivation does not provide a *lingua franca* for the working class of both communities, it is deeply ironic that where they most resembled each other is in their utter disregard for the politics of Marxism:

Socialism didn't appear to have anything special to offer me. It was supposed to have a flag- the Red Flag- but I never saw it hung from a window in our street, or from a window in a Catholic street such as Seaforde Street, opposite Beechfield Street. Apparently Catholics had no more love for the Red Flag than Protestants. (OMC 39)

There is some debate as to why working-class Protestants never achieved the kind of class consciousness that would have seen them join underprivileged Catholics, and demand a radical social renewal. Boyd offers his own assessment of this missed opportunity: 'Only a small minority of Protestants refused to give the ruling party their allegiance; and dissent was interpreted as the equivalent of treason; and treason meant ostracism' (OMC 177). The politics of fear dominate critical assessments of the lack of working-class Protestant radicalism. For Max Hastings, 'working-class Protestants were more fearful of Catholics than they were of poverty,'⁴⁷ a fact that Michael Hall argues the Protestant establishment deliberately played on.⁴⁸ However, the idea that the Protestant proletariat were somehow duped by the ruling elite offers an extremely pejorative reading of working-class Unionism. In actual fact, the post war welfare state, an unequivocally British phenomenon, had witnessed a significant improvement for many of the poorest Protestants in Northern Ireland. As Sabine Wichert asserts:

The initial reluctance of conservative unionist cabinets to implement the 'socialist' legislation from Westminster, in case this threatened their right to rule, soon evaporated as the province grew more prosperous and left the Republic of Ireland economically well behind.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Quoted in Peter Beresford Ellis, *The History of the Irish Working Class* (London: Gollanz, 1972), 309.

⁴⁸ Hall, *Ulster Working Class Protestants*, 13.

⁴⁹ Wichert, *Northern Ireland since 1945*, 49.

At the time, working-class Protestants rightly perceived their social and economic interests as being best served by continued incorporation within the British state. Throughout the Troubles, the continued economic stagnation of the Republic did little to mitigate this underlying belief. As we saw in our discussion of Roddy Doyle, as late as 1988 the Republic of Ireland continued to be amongst the poorest nations in north-west Europe.⁵⁰ So, the failure of the Protestant working-class to radicalize cannot be simply regarded as a refusal to admit who the real enemy was. Moreover, their continued loyalty to the British state was intimately bound up with narratives of social and economic improvement.

The play is the thing – dialect and the NI stage

If Northern Irish fiction has failed to realise the artistic potential of dialect writing, the same cannot be said of local drama. Boyd himself is, of course, better known for his work in the theatre. His play *The Flats* (1970) was the first locally staged production to address the collapse of Northern Irish society during the late 1960s. As Daniel J. Casey comments, much of the play's power resides in its sensitive ear for local speech:

The strength of *The Flats* lies [...] in the playwright's ability to reproduce the vitality of the Northern working-class dialect, the wit of the street wise Belfasters, and the torment of soul-destroying conflicts that rage on.⁵¹

In discussing the linguistic contours of Northern Irish art, it is necessary that we consider why it has been drama, rather than poetry or prose, that has made most use of local vernacular.

The Flats is part of a tradition within Northern Irish drama of interrogating the relationship between language and the ongoing political conflict. Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980), is perhaps the most critically acclaimed attempt to explore this terrain. Although *Translations* is concerned with the colonial encounter of Gaelic and

⁵⁰ Frances Cairncross, 'Poorest of the Rich: A survey of the Republic of Ireland', *The Economist* (16 Jan 1988), 3.

⁵¹ Quoted in John Boyd, *Collected Plays 1*, x.

English, it is the play's acute interest in language that is particularly instructive. At one stage the schoolmaster Hugh declares: 'It is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language [...] we must never cease renewing these images; because once we do, we fossilise.'⁵² It is this attempt to find new languages, to confront the repetitive and exhausted narratives of the conflict that has driven Northern Irish drama in recent decades. Stuart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987), set in the turbulent days of the Ulster Workers Council strikes in 1974, takes the most religious of metaphors and transforms it into a plea that we learn 'to speak with other tongues'.⁵³ It is subsequently possible to trace a sustained development within Northern Irish drama of using 'other tongues', including local dialect, in order to challenge the assumptions of the sectarian conflict. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that it is in drama where Protestant writers have consistently defied the charge that they have no significant culture.⁵⁴

Undoubtedly one of the foremost playwrights to have employed dialect in his work is Martin Lynch. *Welcome to the Blandenmore Road* (1988) is a comedy of manners which follows the McFadden family's precarious rise up Belfast's social ladder, as they move from the working-class docks to the leafy suburbia of the Blandenmore Road. Once there, the family learn that the sectarianism does not possess the same level of intensity as it does in the more deprived districts of the city. This becomes apparent in an exchange between the McFadden's son Ignatius and Jan, the daughter of their new middle-class neighbours:

Jan: Well, the good thing around here is that no one bothers about religion.

Ignatius: They're all atheists?

Jan: No. They're all very religious but they keep it to themselves.

Ignatius: Very civilised.

⁵² Brian Friel, *Translations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 66.

⁵³ Stuart Parker, *Plays 2: Northern Star, Heavenly Bodies, Pentecost* (London: Methuen, 2000), 204.

⁵⁴ Ronan McDonald, 'Between Hope and History: The Drama of the Troubles' in Dermot Bolger (ed), *Druids, Dudes and Beauty Queens: The Changing Face of Irish Theatre* (Dublin: New Island, 2001), 231-249.

Jan: Bigotry doesn't pay amongst the well-heeled.... Up here, the only thing they fight about is money. (*WB*104)

Lynch's play continually uses language to highlight the class divisions that remain hidden within mainstream perceptions of the North. Similar to journalists and Kelman's Booker, the mother Bernie tells her Ignatius: 'Luck, I've already warned you. Bad language is one of the things that'll have to stop. This is the Blandonmore Road.' (*WB* 78) Later Bernie tries to adopt a posh accent in her attempt to impress the new neighbours, for which Ignatius rebukes her: 'Where'd you get that accent... y'sounded like you were trying to speak and suck a pickled onion at the same time.' (*WB* 81) And in a confrontation with Jan, Ignatius defends the pliability and richness endemic to Belfast speech:

Jan: Stop saying 'nigh'.

Ignatius: Whadaya want me t'say?

Jan: Speak properly.

Ignatius: Like you?

Jan: I use the English Language.

Ignatius: Tell me – apart from BBC newsreaders and the Royal Family – who actually uses standard English?

Jan: A lot of people...

Ignatius: Hobby horses crap. Standard English is borin' and restricted. My mates use the English language the way a fashion designer approaches a new dress. Drop a bit here, add this on, turn that round – changin' it all the time. It's ordinary people who keep the English language a livin' language. Give is a word?

Jan: What?

Ignatius: Just say the first word that comes into your head and I'll give you five different words for it.

Jan: Am... tray.

Ignatius [*stuck*]: No well... give is another one.

Jan: Drunk.

Ignatius: Steamboats, airlocked, bluttered, oiled, watered, blotto... (*WB* 103)

Welcome to the Blandenmore Road makes consistent use of different speech registers to foreground the politics of class and elitism that have otherwise been elided from popular artistic modes of representing the North. Gramsci's notion of the Organic Intellectual might well be applied to Lynch who himself has commented: 'in order for art to mean anything to large numbers of people, there must be an engagement by the artist with the

community [...] we believed in the power of the arts to get among the most affected areas and create a new dialogue and possibly change.’⁵⁵

But why has drama been particularly alert to the possibilities afforded by vernacular speech? One reason of course is historical necessity. In her survey of post 1970s theatre, Ophelia Byrne comments that when violence erupted on the streets of Northern Ireland, touring theatre companies began to cancel planned visits to the province.⁵⁶ One hotel manager in 1972 stoically declared: ‘If the outside world will not come and entertain us, then we must do the job ourselves [...] The show must go on even if the stars cannot come.’⁵⁷ It is no surprise that a dramatic environment that thrust local actors centre stage would become more attuned to the specificities of local speech. Beyond such external impetus, the formal differences between drama and fiction, provide an important point of comparison. In contrast to prose, the theatre is less narrative driven medium and is constructed primarily from characters’ dialogue. Unfortunately, word constraints prevent a more thorough investigation of these differences. For now let us conclude that far from looking for a form of escapism, during the Troubles audiences increasingly demanded a theatre that would confront the reality of the crisis. As John Boyd first showed with *The Flats*, this process was inextricably linked with questions of dialect and a sustained engagement with the politics of language.

Frances Molloy and the Catholic working class

The publication of *Out of My Class* in 1985 coincides with that of another Northern Irish *bildungsroman*, Frances Molloy’s *No Mate for the Magpie*. Where Boyd explored the complex and often contradictory relationship between Protestantism and the politics of class, Molloy interrogates how a similar set of themes played out within the Catholic

⁵⁵ Quoted in Joseph Sheedy and Joshua Schultz, eds, *‘You can’t eat flags for breakfast’: Poets, Politicians and public reflect on the Troubles* (Northern Ireland: The New Belfast Community Arts Initiative, 2001), xi.

⁵⁶ Ophelia Byrne, ‘Theatre – companies and venues’ in Mark Carruthers and Stephen Douds, ed, *Stepping Stones: the arts in Ulster 1971-2001* (Belfast: the Blackstaff Press, 2001), 1-27.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Byrne, ‘Theatre – companies and venues’, 8.

community of the North. It is significant that although critically acclaimed, Molloy's debut novel *No Mate for the Magpie* was only published once, by Virago in 1985. I would argue that this lack of commercial interest is indicative of the marginalization of class within the mainstream modes of thinking about Northern Ireland.

No Mate for the Magpie is semi-autobiographical, a portrait of the artist as a young Derry girl. It tells the story of Anne McGlown and her experiences growing up as a Catholic during the 1950 and 1960s. The novel depicts Anne's childhood, her attempts to join a convent, and her experience in a number of factories in both Derry and Belfast. It also details her involvement in the Civil Rights movement during the late 1960s and concludes with her fleeing the North, only to find herself amidst the discrimination and petty snobbery of bourgeois Dublin. Through Paul Connerton's theory of social memory, we argued that acts of remembrance were inevitably conditioned by the moment in which they occur. This temporal dynamic informs the very title of Molloy's book. The repetitive cycle of violence, sixteen years old by 1985, underlies her attempts to re-examine the past and deconstruct its familiar explanations of the North's ideological deadlock. In folklore, the lone magpie functions as a symbol of some impending ill fortune: 'one for sorrow, two for joy...' As such, the micro-narratives of Anne's childhood, her experience of localised sectarian hatreds, portend the social collapse of the North and its descent into political violence. In addition, the lone magpie also indicates the central theme of the novel: estrangement. Anne's journey into maturity is characterised by the deconstruction, and ultimately the rejection, of the North's familiar communitarian logic. The novel compels us to reconsider other kinds of division that cut across and dissects the simplistic sectarian model of Northern Irish life, most notably, class.

Through the narrative structure of *Out of my Class*, we were able to trace Boyd's linguistic and ideological journey away from Ballymacarret and the working-class community he was born into. In contrast, the narrative voice of *No Mate for the Magpie* is presented in a highly stylized vernacular. Certain critics have failed to appreciate the political significance of this formal trope. Loreto Todd asserts:

Where Molloy differs from Somerville and Ross is that the dialect is used by all the main characters, including the narrator, but like earlier users of dialect, she uses dialect mainly for humour. It is debateable whether any writer, in Ireland or elsewhere, could use an accurately produced dialect as a medium for tragedy.⁵⁸

It is against such reductive assessment of dialect writing that the following chapter aims to argue. The opening scene sets the tone for the rest of the novel. It introduces us to the idiomatic voice of Anne and its continual irreverence regarding the familiar codes of sectarian identity politics:

Way a wee screwed up protestant face an' a head of black hair a was born, in a state of original sin. Me ma didn't like me, but who's te blame the poor woman, sure a didn't look like a catholic wain atall. (NM 1)

Anne's physical appearance resists the Manichean dualism offered by the familiar logic of sectarian identity politics. There is an important satiric quality to this episode, with Anne sending up local prejudices such as Protestants having 'wee screwed up' faces. We are also reminded of the North's other, equally risible myths, such as discerning religious identity from how far apart someone's eyes are, how they pronounce the letter 'h', or which foot they dig with. We later learn that Anne is in fact the product of a mixed marriage. Her mother is a Catholic and her father a Protestant. Heaney's poem already alerted us to the significance of names as passwords of religious identity. Consequently, 'Anne Elizabeth McGlone' can be read as an attempt to appease both sides of this extended family, whilst deliberately disabling the familiar codes of sectarian identity. Homi Bhabha's analysis of colonial mimicry provides us with a useful tool for diagnosing what becomes one of Anne's characteristic habits, mimicry:

Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal [...] The effect of mimicry on the authority of the colonial discourse is profound and disturbing.⁵⁹

By invoking Bhabha, my aim is not to debate the postcolonial nature of the Northern Irish conflict. Whilst this is a tenable position on the Troubles, it also requires a more detailed

⁵⁸ Todd, *The Language of Irish Literature*, 143.

⁵⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.

analysis than can be afforded at present. Instead, it is the anti-authoritarian aspect of Bhabha's definition that I particularly wish to draw on. In the context of the current discussion, we might read the authoritative nature of colonial discourse in terms of the sectarianism, and its role as *the* definitive mode of understanding the North. In aping her mother's despair, Anne deliberately undermines such narrow, essentialist modes of thinking. In *No Mate for the Magpie* the binary dualisms of the North are subverted by a satiric voice that continually challenges their verisimilitude and authority.

To confront such codes is, of course, not unique to Molloy's novel. Over the last fifty years, Northern Irish writing is replete with attempts to escape the inevitability of the two traditions narrative. One might think of Robert McLiam Wilson and his irreverent creation 'Ripley Irish British Bogle'.⁶⁰ This theme of hybridity has also featured in several critical commentaries; including Seamus Deane's claim that, 'It is Ulster's peculiar fate to be neither Irish nor British, whilst also being both.'⁶¹ However, what makes *No Mate for the Magpie* unique is the fact that such notions of hybridity are embedded within the very language of the text. The novel insists on Anne's idiomatic voice as the lone source of authority within the text. As Elmer Kennedy-Andrews explains:

What we hear is not the standard, educated, genteel voice of formally written or spoken discourse, but a voice that works against socio-political and cultural centralisation, signalling from the beginning the importance of class, hierarchy and status – and therefore issues of power and authority.⁶²

In the introduction to this chapter, we argued that it was not the form but the content of Northern Irish speech that divulged any latent sectarianism. *No Mate for the Magpie* dramatizes this distinction when Anne takes a job in a Belfast factory, unaware that it is populated by a viciously bigoted, Protestant workforce. The factory floor is decorated with red, white and blue bunting, with banners proudly declaring: 'FUCK THE

⁶⁰ Robert McLiam Wilson, *Ripley Bogle* (London: Picador, 1990), 17.

⁶¹ Seamus Deane, 'The Artist and the Troubles' in Tim Pat Cogan, ed, *Ireland and the Arts* (London: Newgate Press, 1982), 44-49, 45.

⁶² Kennedy-Andrews, *(de-)constructing the North*, 172.

POPE. DEATH TO ALL PAPISTS. LONG LIVE PROTESTANT ULSTER. THE ONLY GOOD CATHOLIC IS A DEAD ONE' (NM 107). Significantly though, the women cannot discern Anne's religious identity from her accent alone. Assuming her to be Protestant, they commiserate her for being from Londonderry, a town full of so many Catholics! Fearing for her safety, Anne proceeds to adopt the language of sectarianism in order to maintain this charade:

A became more excessive an' outspoken than any of the others in me scathin' criticism an' condemnation of the fuckin' popish scum. (God was a glad that me ma was outa ear-shot). (NM 108)

Again, Bhabha's idea of mimicry is particularly apposite. We are alerted to the performative nature of religious hatred within the North. The novel reminds us that identity is a social construct. Molloy's text would rebuke any claims that sectarianism is an essential local pathology, an inevitable and definitive characteristic of Northern Irish people. Instead, it is revealed as a mode of behaviour, one that is susceptible to both subversion and manipulation by those with an interest in doing so. The following day Anne telephones the English factory manager to tell him that she cannot work there any longer. He apologises and compensates her with a full week's wages, confessing that he doesn't really understand the animosity of his factory floor. The manager's comments remind us of the deliberate mis-reading the North, one that regards it as home to an arcane set of rivalries, completely indecipherable to the rational English outsider. However, the social and economic dynamics at work here are worth considering. The factory continues to profit despite the presence of such vicious prejudice. As such the logic of capitalist production reveals itself as ultimately disinterested in confronting these hatreds. As such they receive only a token gesture of redress, which in Anne's case is a full week's wages.

Molloy's novel does not offer a partisan exposé of an inherently bigoted Protestant working-class. It deliberately undermines any attempt to read Northern Irish history as a narrative of Catholic martyrdom. *No Mate for the Magpie* disrupts any mythologization of the victimized Catholic minority, overwhelmed and overcome by a

discriminatory Protestant state. Some of the novel's harshest criticism is levelled at a Catholic working-class that is every bit as intolerant as its Protestant counterpart. As a child, Anne witnesses local Catholic women assaulting the bread man with pitch forks and hatchets, suspecting him to have denounced the pope at an Orange Lodge meeting the previous night. At Anne's first job at a factory in Derry, a group of girls set her hair on fire suspecting her to be a Protestant. When her father is interned, it is only the neighbouring *Catholic* women who abuse the McGlones for this apparent shame. Such incidents destabilize any readings of the North that would regard prejudice as a Protestant characteristic. Furthermore, the participation of women in such acts of violence demands that we rethink the gender politics of Northern Irish history. Women cannot be exonerated as passive members of a conflict carried out between two patriarchal communities. *No Mate for the Magpie* shows women as complicit in the perpetuation of religious hatred, both at home and in the workplace. The novel reminds of the point made in our introductory chapter; namely, that questions of gender have been much maligned within the traditional discourse of the Left. At a Belfast grocers Anne is given the job of bacon-slicer, a traditionally masculine role. Far from being a manifestation of a latent liberalism, it is an act borne out of greed: the grocer only has to pay her half the wages of a man. Admittedly, my own reading of Molloy's text could be accused of offering only a tokenistic reading of the novel's gender politics. If this is so, it is due to word restrictions, rather than a belief in their lack of importance. The gender implications of both contemporary Leftist politics and the recent history of the North, still await the kind of sustained and rigorous analysis they undoubtedly deserve.

Out of My Class sought to highlight the internal stratification of the Protestant community, something hidden beneath the false homogeneity of the two traditions narrative. *No Mate for the Magpie* subjects the Catholic community to a similar form of scrutiny, disclosing a series of hierarchies and petty jealousies that are inimical to simplistic readings of a religio-political conflict. This is most clearly illustrated through the novel's portrait of the Catholic Church. Whilst preaching immaterialism, we are witness to an organisation that is itself an avid hoarder of worldly goods. When Anne decides to join the convent she takes some money in order to pay for her personal needs.

When her period arrives the Mother Superior refuses to give her the money back, instead offering her some old cloth that had already been used by other women. Later Anne takes a job as housekeeper to a local parish priest. She is appalled when every Sunday at dinner the priest helps himself to the best cuts of the roast, leaving Anne to choose from his 'lavins' (leftovers). Significantly for the current discussion, language plays a vital part in attempts by the Catholic Church to maintain its hegemony. Anne recalls her first confession where the priest forgave her sins and offered benediction in Latin, which she recognised only as 'a foreign language' (NMM14). This episode pre-dates the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which introduced a series of Church reforms, one of which was the use of vernacular throughout the religious ceremony. Previously, the authority of the Catholic Church had been intimately bound up with its role as intermediary, speaking to God and translating his Word on behalf of the congregation. In *No Mate for the Magpie* this institutional elitism is most pronounced when Anne takes her vows and becomes a nun. She arrives at the convent and attempts to speak to one of the other nuns, only to learn they are all subject to a vow of silence. The religious order exerts its authority through policing the language of its devotees. When Anne decides to leave the convent and returns home, we learn that her linguistic identity has been fundamentally changed:

Wheniver a was in the convent, the nuns give me elocution lessons that spoilt me whole natural way of talkin' for many a long day afterwards. As soon as a spoke a word te me mashe said back te me, a don't know where you intend to sleep the night but a'm sure this house won't be gran' enough for a lady like you way such a posh way of puttin' on airs an' graces. (NM 89)

The Catholic Church is seen to practice similar forms of linguistic cleansing we witnessed earlier. Like the earlier use of Latin, its authority is embodied in a linguistic difference, one which distinguishes ordinary people from the official representatives of the Church.

In terms of class, the role of the Church in opposing the radicalisation of the Catholic working-class cannot be overestimated. In the Irish context, James Connolly's pamphlet 'Labour, Nationality and Religion' (1910) echoes the kind of duplicity that Molloy identifies:

Their master [i.e. Christ] served all mankind in patience and suffering; they insist upon all mankind serving them, and in all questions of the social and political relations of men they require the common laity to bow the neck in a meekless [*sic*], humility and submission which the clergy scornfully reject.⁶³

For Connolly, the history of the Catholic Church in Ireland had been a systematic defence of, what it perceived to be, its absolute authority over the people. This narrative has continued in modern times, with the Catholic Church increasingly suspicious of Marxism and its leanings toward atheism. From the present vantage point in our definitively secular age, it is easy to underestimate the historic importance of organised religion as a hegemonic force in Northern Ireland. In the 1950s, future NI Ombudsman Maurice Hayes recalls witnessing that ‘a rather excitable and eccentric curate preached a “red menace” sermon against the puny emerging local Labour party.’⁶⁴ In the 1950s, 90% of the Catholic community were active and regular church attendees.⁶⁵ Part of the reason for the disappearance of class from the Northern Irish debate undoubtedly belongs to the hierarchical nature of Church and its selfish concern to secure its own authority.

In the discussion of *Out of my Class* we alluded to the real socio-economic differences between working-class Protestants and their Catholic counterparts. *No Mate for the Magpie* details the historical moment when these grievances came to a head, the Civil Rights marches of the late 1960s. Anne’s own account of the events is worth careful consideration:

For a wheen of months te begin way the only people that went out marchin’ were the students themsel’s an’ a wheen of the lecturers outa Queens University.... They said that Stormont was a protestant parliament for a protestant people, an’ that for fifty years, catholics had been treated as second-class citizens. (*NM* 127)

The description of Catholics as ‘second-class citizens’ makes explicit the socio-economic inequality that attended religious difference on the economic margins of Northern Irish

⁶³ Peter Beresford Ellis, ed, *James Connolly: Selected Writings* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), 58.

⁶⁴ Maurice Hayes, *Minority Verdict: experiences of a Catholic public servant* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995), 27.

⁶⁵ Wichert, *Northern Ireland since 1945*, 80.

society. For Francis Mulhern, it is this moment, Northern Ireland's very own 1968, that represents a crucial turning point. This represented the last stand of a mass movement predicated on socialist politics, with little interest in questions of nationhood. Crucially, the seven point programme for reform produced by the Civil Rights Association addressed issues of equality, justice and civil rights, and had little interest in questions of Nationalism. Mulhern invokes Gramsci's concept of the Organic Intellectual in order to theorise the formation of this radical Catholic intelligentsia.⁶⁶ The CRA can be seen as the product of an intellectual formation that argued in terms of its own class interests, which in the Northern Irish context meant the Catholic minority. In terms of the ideological shift away from the welfare state that Thatcherism represents, it is worth pointing out that the students of the CRA were the children of Butler, Beveridge and Bevan.⁶⁷ *No Mate for the Magpie* complicates any simplistic reading of this moment in Northern Irish history. It disrupts any easy models of class that would homogenise all Catholics as irretrievably suppressed under the yoke of the Protestant state. The above description of the Civil Rights movement continues:

Well, when this news broke, a lot of ordinary people were surprised to learn that they had been citizens all their lives, an' not only citizens, but second-class citizens too at that. My god, they were sayin' te wan another, te think that all this time we have been only wan step down from the tap an' didn't know it. They were delighted so they took te the streets in their droves, an' a went way them. (NM 127)

Anne's description highlights the internal differences within the Catholic community, one that the political rhetoric of 'second-class citizens' would inevitably elide. The lecturers and students from Queen's can be seen to speak a different language from the 'ordinary people'. What might seem at first glance like a casual disparity has reverberated throughout the history of the Troubles. As Maurice Hayes comments:

One of the great shifts of the past quarter of a century has been the emergence of a Catholic middle and professional class that has done quite nicely out of all the changes, that has moved both geographically and spiritually away from its roots.

⁶⁶ Francis Mulhern, *The Present Lasts a Long Time: essays in cultural criticism* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), 13.

⁶⁷ Beresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class*, 311-2.

It has begun to lose contact with the working class, and that has created division of class and wealth in a community that was once more coherent.⁶⁸

The relative absence of dialect from the pages of Northern Irish fiction lends itself to this type of ideological analysis. What we have been offered for the most part are a series of literary engagements written from the safe distance of the suburbs.

Fleeing the violence of the North, Anne moves to Dublin in the Republic of Ireland. What Anne finds in the South is that far from redressing the balance, the Republic perpetuates the same social prejudices that were ubiquitous in the North, only without the familiar language of religious prejudice. Anne's first landlady 'made it known that she didn't usually cater for people from the lower orders' (NM 143). When Anne has to find new accommodation she rents a room from a family where the wife sleeps with her infirm husband and seven children in the kitchen, whilst renting out the three bedrooms in order to pay the bills. According to Eve Patten:

In this comparative light, corruption in the North is identified with an ideological decay rife throughout the island as a whole, as Molloy replaces Northern Irish identity based on historical obsession and localized tribal warfare with that of a contemporary, national dysfunctionality. Having struck out at the travesties of the British state control, therefore, her deceptively picaresque novel subsequently turns on the redundancy of claims for Irish nationhood.⁶⁹

As the novel ends Anne walks around Dublin witnessing poverty and deprivation which casts a shadow over any naïve dreams of prosperity in some future United Ireland:

A just walked about the city lookin' at people. A poorly dressed pregnant woman in her forties, way a pile of scruffy wains... Children, naked save for tattered, transparent, waterproof macks, beggin' in the doorway of a city centre pub... The vacant eyes of a young drug addict who'd got lost forever on a bad trip... (NM 169)

⁶⁸ Hayes, *Minority Verdict*, 95.

⁶⁹ Patten, 'Fiction and Conflict: Northern Ireland's Prodigal Novelists' in Ian A. Bell, *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 129-146, 133.

Anne's experience of injustice and inequality in the Republic is indicative of the novel's intention to place the situation in the North within a wider political context. The Civil Rights marches are juxtaposed with an anti-Vietnam protest in Dublin. Similarly, the religious bigotry of Derry and Belfast is not anomalous, but instead belongs to more general narratives of intolerance. In hospital Anne shares a room with an elderly woman who is extremely vocal in her loathing of Catholics. Her other significant hatred is for the Indian doctor whom she screams at whenever he comes near her to treat her. Similarly, the petty bourgeois snobbery of Anne's landlady in Dublin coincides with a deep seated suspicion of the 'darkies' that she experienced whilst working as a school teacher in America.

Dialect – the voice of truth?

At this point we must recognise the danger of mythologizing local vernacular. In *No Mate for the Magpie* Anne's voice plays a vital role in undermining the authoritative discourse of the North. However, we must be wary of privileging dialect as the lone voice of truth amidst a morass of unreliable rhetoric. The work of Belfast short story writer John Morrow offers a vital reminder of the problematic nature of such tendencies. Morrow makes use of dialect whilst simultaneously disrupting any unconditional enthusiasm for the verisimilitude of everyday speech. The story 'Northern Myths' is one such case in point. Morrow juxtaposes how different languages provide very different interpretations of a single event, the shooting of a UVF operative by the security forces. The events of the story are straightforward enough: Joe McConkey, having fired upon and wounded part of a patrol of Welsh soldiers, is shot in the head by an injured Lance Corporal, as he moved in to finish the job. The 'Northern Myth' by which the story is reconfigured is worth quoting at length:

Fifteen-year-old Sergeant Joseph McConkey, 91st Company, Church Lads Brigade [...] a quieter lad you cudn't meet in a day's walk, Comin' back from the shap with a half-a-dozen baps for his Mammy – she's a widda woman, half crippled – an' the sodgers stop him. 'Where'dya live?' says this big black fella. "Down there, Sur," says Joe, "number 47". "You'd better run for it then," says the nigger, an' Joe starts runnin'. They let him get as far as number 45 an' this black huer

shoots him in the back! Yon's poor Joe lyin' in the gutter with the baps scattered in the puddles of his lifesblood, an' what'ya think – up comes the same black, Fenian bastard an' starts atein' them, laughin' like mad...' (N 1)

Far from breaking through the rhetoric of sectarianism, the language of everyday speech is seen as complicit in mythologising the conflict. Furthermore, the speaker's easy conflation of racism and religious bigotry asserts a wider ideological framework in which one might understand the local intolerances of Northern Ireland. However, the story does not entirely condemn all local voices as inevitably complicit in such ideological slippage. The narrator of the story shows a discerning ability to undercut both McConkey and the political ideology that underpins his internecine actions:

Joe McConkey, twenty-two year old unemployed caulker, under the influence of fifteen bottles of stout, God and Ulster, cut the legs from under a five-man patrol of the 2nd Flintstones with a short burst from his Schmeisser machine pistol. Despite the agony of a smashed knee-cap, Lance Corporal Davy Evans a second generation coffee-coloured Welshman from Cardiff, managed to unsling his rifle and blow Joe's head off as he tottered forward to administer the *coup de grace*. Judging by his last shouted remarks, Joe had been under the impression that the Pope was among the wounded. (N 2)

In a similar strategy to that adopted by Frances Molloy, the narrative deploys humour to undermine and tear down the dubious political ideology that supports McConkey's actions.

A political or a cultural conflict?

In *Multi-culturalism: the view from two Irelands* (2001) Edna Longley argues that Northern Ireland would benefit from a more fruitful interchange between its various cultural traditions. This view echoes the dominant perception of the conflict, one which foregrounds the cultural rather than the political aspects of the problem. The socio-scientific literature on the Troubles is expansive, making it one of the most written about conflicts in recent history. In his survey this material, John Whyte concludes that the 'internal conflict approach' is the predominant mode of theorising the collapse of

Northern Irish society.⁷⁰ Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd take up Whyte's point, juxtaposing two different interpretations of the Troubles, what they call the cultural and the structural model. The former, and most widely accepted of these, would seek to emphasize the essentially anomalous nature of Northern Irish culture:

Each community, it is claimed, is trapped in its ancestral myths, extreme in its nationalism, archaic in its religious beliefs, tribal in its loyalties, intransigent in its political attitudes and prone to violence.⁷¹

Against this, Ruane and Todd argue that the crisis in the North is born out of an institutional and structural context, one that inevitably locks the two communities in a state of conflict. The structure of the Northern Irish state, along with its wider relations to both Britain and the Republic, ensures the persistence of economic and social inequality along sectarian lines. It is here that the enduring nature of the North's so-called 'anachronistic passions' ultimately resides. As we saw through the discussion of Boyd and Molloy, throughout the Troubles communal differences were not merely cultural differences. Instead, they indexed real inequality and were not merely a symptom of an inherently intolerant society.

The interpretive model Ruane and Todd identify emerged during the 1980s, as part of a concerted attempt to ensure not just the physical, but also the ideological, containment of the Northern Irish problem. Notably, this strategy was adopted by both British and Irish governments. As Joe Cleary asserts:

During the decades before the current peace process, even as they extended their stewardship over the Northern conflict, both the UK and Republic of Ireland state governments gradually evolved ideologies of containment designed to downplay as much as possible their own involvement in the struggle and to suggest that its roots lay exclusively in the intractable sectarianism of Northern Ireland's hostile communities.⁷²

⁷⁰ John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 209

⁷¹ Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, "'Why can't you get along with each other?': culture, structure and the Northern Irish conflict' in Hughes, ed, *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland 1960-1990*, 27-45, 27.

⁷² Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation State: culture and conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 109.

One of the most overt manifestations of this policy was the Cultural Traditions Group. Set up by the British government in 1988, it was designed to explore the cultural roots of the Northern Irish conflict. As a state sponsored funding body, it was tasked with affecting reconciliation through supporting certain, sanctioned forms of cultural activity. For Alan Finlayson, it is the interpretive model underlying this kind of policy that reveals the circumspect nature of British thinking on the Northern Ireland:

A concentration on cultural questions of traditions and identity is a manifestation of the British Government's belief that the problem in Northern Ireland is simply caused by people with deformed world views; that it is 'the natives' who are the problem [...] to suggest that the two communities must learn to accept and rejoice in differences appears to be an open, liberal aspiration. Yet it reproduces the identitarian logic that there are inviolable, essential communities in the first place, and leads to the kind of cultural consociationalism. Consociationalism operates on the principle that high fences make good neighbours.⁷³

The deliberate focus on culture rather than politics, chimes with the general ethos of Thatcherism; specifically, the move away from state interference, not to mention the loathing for anything that smacked of the redistribution of wealth. Whilst the Provisional IRA stole the headlines, the dismantling of heavy industry was quietly rolled out across Northern Ireland. In 1970 local manufacturing had employed 170,000. In 1979 it was 140,000. And under Thatcher, it had fallen to 97,000 by 1982. It is not without bitter irony that a working-class Protestant community group in 1994 commented: 'the IRA have been targeting economic targets here for years, but they haven't done as good a job as Thatcher and her cronies did across the water.'⁷⁴

In the introduction we argued that Gramsci's key contribution lay in re-thinking traditional Marxism, in particular its tendency toward over-determination regarding the relationship between the base and superstructure in capitalist society. The site of political authority has changed utterly. Through the work of Kelman in particular, we saw how

⁷³ Alan Finlayson, 'The Problem of "Culture" in Northern Ireland: A Critique of the Cultural Traditions Group', *The Irish Review* No.20 (Win/Spr 1997), 76-87, 77, 84.

⁷⁴ Hall, *Ulster Working Class Protestants*, 15

cultural values functioned to advance the interest of ruling elites. Again, it is Gramsci that allows us to put a theoretical framework on the misguided attempts to separate culture from politics, in the context of Northern Ireland. As Stuart Hall explained above, and it is worth repeating:

One of the most important things Gramsci has done for us is to give us a profoundly expanded conception of what politics itself is like, and thus also power and authority. We cannot, after Gramsci, go back to the notion of mistaking electoral politics, or party politics in a narrow sense or even the occupancy of state power, as constituting the grounds of modern politics itself [...] We are living through the proliferation of the sites of power and antagonism in modern society [...] a new culture.⁷⁵

As we saw with Boyd and Molloy, the different cultural identities of the North signalled real differences in terms of social and economic well being. The idea that we can address these cultural differences without attending to the underlying issues of inequality is simply wrong. Instead, as W.J. McCormack has argued the two traditions represents a fundamental distraction from the real issues at the heart of the Northern Irish problem:

[Irish Literature's] critics have been systematically denied any sociological rigour in the simple description of class society [...] Instead, the sectarian divisions of Ulster society are taken as normative and permanent. Not only does such passivity underwrite the suppression of any analysis in terms of class, of exploitation by rapidly changing forms of industry and capital, of the place of Ireland in the Western defence system; it also encourages, urges, indeed compels the reduction of literature to the status of authenticating evidence on behalf of one tribe or another.⁷⁶

The marginalization of dialect within Northern Irish literature is part of this wider ideological crisis, an empirical distortion, whereby a whole series of socio-economic issues have been excluded from mainstream modes of thinking and writing about the North.

⁷⁵ Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 168.

⁷⁶ W.J. McCormack, *The Battle of the Books* (Mullingar: The Lilliput Press, 1986), 72, 79.

Chapter Five

Postmodern Solutions to Postmodern Conditions?

The dominant strands within this theory, as it has unfolded after the movement of the 1960s were essentially over, have been [...] to reformulate in a postmodernist direction questions which had previously been associated with a broadly Marxist politics.'

- Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*¹

[P]ostmodern theory can have radical implications for politics [...] It points towards a decentralizing and disseminating of sovereignty which, in the European context at least, signals the possibility of new configurations.

- Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland*²

Post-Modernism is now a world-wide movement in all the arts and disciplines [...] We are well past the age where we can merely accept or reject this new 'ism'; it is too omnipresent for either approach.

- Charles Jencks, *What is Postmodernism?*³

¹ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), 1.

² Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, culture, philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), 61.

³ Charles Jencks, *What is Postmodernism?* (London: Academy editions, 1996), 6.

So far, the layout of this thesis has enabled us to consider each region in terms of its specificity. At the same time, the thematic threads – dialect, class, the theoretical crisis of the Left – have allowed individual chapters to speak to each other in a number of meaningful ways. By way of a complement, my current aim is to offer a more concentrated form of comparison, examining Scotland, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland within the bounds of a single chapter.

In the introduction we argued that the crisis facing traditional forms of working-class identity belonged to a specific historical moment at the end of the twentieth century. This moment was defined by way of certain reconfigurations within both local and global economies. These included the migration of heavy industry to less developed nations, and at the same time in the West, the deregulation of labour markets, the rise of digital technology, media saturation and the enthronement of a consumer driven commodity culture. We argued that in the UK and Ireland, these socio-economic changes were accompanied by a shift in the ideological terrain, whereby a post-industrial landscape rendered the traditional language of class theoretically redundant. This same period witnessed the meteoric rise of another type of discourse, one that filled the theoretical void left by a radical tradition that, in David Harris's words, suffered an enormous failure of nerve.⁴ This discourse is of course postmodernism. We might think of these critical vocabularies as two ships, passing on a particularly dark night, somewhere back in the 1980s. The relationship, between what we earlier called a post-Marxist, and now refer to as a postmodern age, can be clarified by attending to the historicity of both terms. The rhetoric of Marxism, along with its belief in political emancipation, arose out of what Jurgen Habermas has called the 'project of modernity'.⁵ To invoke the term 'postmodern' then, is to suggest an era when such material analysis of history, can be seen to have lost its theoretical purchase. It is this coincidence, between the demise of Marxism on the one hand, and the emergence of postmodernism on the other, that will be

⁴ David Harris, *From Class Struggle to the Politics of Pleasure: The effects of Gramscianism on Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992), xiii.

⁵ Jurgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity' in Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, eds, *A Postmodern Reader* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 97.

considered in detail below. As such, this final chapter signals a change in emphasis. It will continue to address, albeit indirectly, the issue of language. However, it will focus on how the language of postmodernism both enables and disables the process of thinking about the reconfigurations of class in Scotland and Ireland.

Part of the challenge facing any discussion of postmodernism centres on the sheer ubiquity of the term within contemporary critical discourse.⁶ Beginning in the 1980s, and reaching its apogee in the 1990s, postmodernism has become the staple diet of almost every field within the humanities. Sociology, philosophy and politics, as well as literature and cultural studies, all bear the marks of its theoretical wrangling. As a consequence, and in keeping with certain critical conventions, it would seem appropriate that we begin with a definition of how the following chapter will understand and apply the term 'postmodernism'. However, as Simon Malpas explains, this is a far from easy enterprise:

[D]efining the postmodern can seem an intractable problem. But things are even more difficult than this. Few critics agree about what exactly it is that they are dealing with. There is little consensus among its numerous supporters and detractors about what the postmodern might be, which aspects of culture, thought and society it relates to, and how it might or might not provide ways to comprehend the contemporary world. Rather than too little evidence, there is too much that has been brought to bear in the discussion, debate and frequently furious arguments that have attempted to determine what exactly postmodernism and postmodernity are about.⁷

The aim of this chapter then is not to offer a comprehensive account of postmodernism, or its manifold applications within Irish and Scottish studies. To do so would constitute a thesis in its own right. Our purpose is much more limited and, as one might reasonably expect, is grounded in the themes discussed in earlier chapters. Specifically, we will explore the ways that this new critical idiom cuts across the crisis facing the Left. We will outline and compare its affects on certain literary representations of working-class culture within each region. In doing so, we will counteract the criticism that

⁶ The National Library of Scotland catalogue records 306 different publications with the word 'postmodern' or 'postmodernism' in their title. The majority of these books were published after 1990.

⁷ Simon Malpas, *The Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 2005), 4.

postmodernism is often accused of ignoring – in favour of general theories – the local conditions that are supposedly one of its principal interests. This analysis will inevitably raise more questions than it can reasonably expect to answer. However, this does not render such exploration a futile exercise. Instead, such critical overflow testifies to the need for continued investigation into the social, political and cultural narratives that find themselves readily subsumed under the highly fashionable banner of postmodernism.

Whilst acknowledging the problems of definition, a useful preliminary exercise is to differentiate between two terms: ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postmodernity’. Broadly speaking, postmodernism refers to a particular style of artistic representation, one that is premised on techniques including pastiche, irony, self-referentiality and inter-textuality.⁸ Postmodernity on the other hand, has primarily been used to signal a particular epoch.⁹ The first is an aesthetic concept, whereas the latter is a historical one, attempting to define a specific era.¹⁰ No sooner have we performed this act of differentiation, than we find the two terms inevitably collapsing back in on one another. For the critic Frederic Jameson, postmodernism refers to a specific form of ‘cultural dominant’, one that has arisen in the context a particular epoch. Instead of ‘postmodernity’, where the prefix ‘post-’ risks implying a complete break with the past, Jameson defines this new age as the era of ‘late capitalism’. The relevance of this to questions of class, and the socio-economic changes charted above, emerge from Jameson’s full description of late capitalism:

Its features include the new international division of labour, a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and the stock exchanges (including the enormous Second and Third world debt), new forms of media interrelationship (very much including transportation systems such as containerization), computers and automation, the flight of production to advanced Third World areas, along with the more familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labour, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now global scale.¹¹

⁸ See for example Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*; Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987).

⁹ See for example Thomas Docherty, ‘Introduction’ in Thomas Docherty, ed, *Postmodernism: A Reader* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

¹⁰ Malpas, *Postmodern*, 9.

¹¹ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), xix.

This definition discloses both the micro- and macro-transformations that characterise this era. For us, it is 'the crisis of traditional labour' that has been, and continues to be, our primary concern. The following chapter aims to situate this crisis within some of the broader developments that constitute the era of late capitalism and the rise of postmodern culture.

In keeping with the central theme of the thesis, this chapter pays particular attention to the effects of late capitalism on traditional notions of working-class identity. It examines how various critics within each region have adopted the language of postmodernism as an antidote to certain immuring paradigms regarding Irish and Scottish culture. In terms of the Republic of Ireland, through Roddy Doyle's novel *The Van* (1991), our analysis will focus on the impact of the Celtic Tiger and the rise of consumer culture. We will explore what this new era of prosperity has to offer for those on the social and economic margins of Irish society. Does the dramatic growth of recent years represent a meaningful reprieve for those who have suffered most from years of underdevelopment? Or, is it more accurately regarded as merely the reconfiguration of old wounds, an illusory set of promises, providing false hope for those in need of real change? In chapter four, we outlined the sense of theoretical despair, born out of the ubiquitous two traditions narrative and its effect on almost every aspect of Northern Irish life. In what follows, we will consider how the language of postmodernism has been offered as a way out of this ideological cul-de-sac. This has been most apparent in critical responses to the work of a writer like Robert McLiam Wilson. We will assess McLiam Wilson's use of postmodern techniques in a deliberate attempt to short-circuit sectarian readings of Northern Irish culture. Leading on from the discussion of the Celtic Tiger, we will consider the alternatives on offer to working-class communities in the context of the Peace Process. We will question the ability of market driven solutions to meaningfully resolve the historic problems of Northern Ireland. Finally, in terms of Scotland, we will consider postmodern narratives of multi-cultural pluralism. In particular, we will examine their potential to challenge certain parochial, nationalist readings of Scottish Literature. Can working-class culture be readily assimilated within

this theoretical model? Or, do such narratives merely re-articulate the same kinds of social elitism that are all too familiar? James Kelman's most recent novel, *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* (1994), will be used to illustrate the key points of this argument.

Post-nationalism

If the project of modernity gave birth to Marxism and a material analysis of history, then arguably, its other most significant offspring was nationalism. Powered by the twin motors of industrialisation and imperial expansion, the long nineteenth century witnessed the consolidation of the nation state as *the* political unit of the modern world.¹² In terms of the current discussion of class, the issue of nationalism has never been very far away. We recall that for historian Tom Devine, calls for devolution during the 1990s were inextricably linked to the debilitating effects of Thatcherism on working-class communities across Scotland.¹³ Moreover, in chapter four we saw that in 1960s Northern Ireland, it was a set of specifically social grievances - Catholics as 'second class citizens' - that lit the touch paper of the Troubles, resurrecting nationalist demands for a United Ireland. A direct correspondence may be drawn between a frustrated class politics in both regions, and the latent rebirth of nationalism. Following from this, we will consider the recent move by some critics to use the language of postmodernism to announce the end of the nation state. Earlier, in our discussion of Kelman and in our look at the issue of Irish postcolonialism, we borrowed from the work of the Subaltern Studies group in India. This collective was interested in the ways in which the process of decolonization, particularly through the formation of the nation state, merely reconfigured the subordination of a subaltern underclass within native society. With this in mind we will ask: if nationalism does not entail the emancipation of those on the lower rungs of society, does postnationalism offer anything significantly different?

¹² Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964).

¹³ Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*, 591-599.

It should not surprise us that if the postmodern era has engendered a crisis for Marxism, then the nation state should also come under a degree of theoretical pressure. The publication of Richard Kearney's *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (1997) marks a key moment in this debate. Arising out of the intractability of the Northern Irish conflict, Kearney argues that postmodern theory provides a vital tool for renegotiating the ideological impasse afforded by rival nationalisms:

It has been suggested [...] that postmodern theory can have radical implications for politics. One frequently encounters the claim, for instance, that the postmodern critiques of the centre - as logos, arche, origin, presence, identity, unity or sovereignty - challenge the categories of established power. The most often cited examples here relate to the critique of totalitarianism, colonialism and nationalism. The postmodern theory of power puts the "modern" concept of the nation-state into question. It points towards a decentralizing and disseminating of sovereignty which, in the European context at least, signals the possibility of new configurations of federal-regional government.¹⁴

In terms of the burgeoning field of Irish-Scottish studies, postnationalism is perhaps the most notable example of what we might call a conceptual migration. In 2000 the *Edinburgh Review* published a themed issue - 'The End of the Nation?' - featuring an extended article by Kearney on postnationalism. Similarly, Eleanor Bell's *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (2004), which we will return to in more detail below, has drawn extensively on the idea of postnationalism, to reinvigorate a Scottish studies that, 'for too long [has] been posited in parochial, stereotypical, cultural nationalist terms without recourse to the possible reverberations and limitations of such constructions.'¹⁵

Kearney's postnationalism provides a useful diagnosis of the complex matrix of regional, national and international power (Holyrood-Westminster-Brussels) that Scotland found itself borne into in 1998. So far this thesis has been generally critical

¹⁴ Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, culture, philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), 61. It is worth pointing out that Kearney considers Ulster Unionism to be a version of British nationalism.

¹⁵ Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 2.

regarding the kinds of economic development that characterized the latter decades of the twentieth century. However, originally emerging from the Northern Irish situation, Kearney's postnationalism is grounded in the belief that economics could succeed where politics and culture had resolutely failed. The impact of the European Union is a crucial part of this discussion. We may recall that the EU is a direct descendant of the European Coal and Steel Community. The ECSC was founded in the wake of the Second World War, with the express purpose of avoiding national conflict through greater economic cooperation between neighbouring states. More recently, Northern Irish politicians from rival communities have found in the European context, particularly regarding issues like fishing and agriculture, an arena for mutual agreement. Ian Paisley and John Hume, both former MEPs, are perhaps the most striking example of this dynamic. And it was John Hume – rather ironically, considering his role as leader of the nationalist SDLP - who helped to foster the idea of a postnational, European regionalism.¹⁶ The European Union does provide a context in which the language of economics can circumnavigate older rivalries. However, membership of the EU is not an entirely guilt free enterprise. Critics point toward the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), whereby European farmers receive high levels of subsidies. This renders African farmers decidedly uncompetitive, and moreover, encourages the dumping of surplus European produce on African markets. Coupled with the high import tariffs for goods entering Europe, for many, EU economic policy actively sustains crippling levels of Third World poverty. More directly relevant to the discussion of class, is the gradual extension of EU membership to other countries. In 2004 for example, a number of relatively poorer nations joined the EU – Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The free movement of labour within the EU has led to large numbers of workers from these countries migrating to wealthier nations, including Scotland and Ireland. Here they provide cheap labour, primarily although not exclusively, at the unskilled and semi-skilled end of the market. The effects of such migration have yet to be fully realized. However, basic economics would suggest that this increase in supply will only maintain low rates of pay, and forestall the need for any government

¹⁶ See John Hume, 'Europe of the Regions' in Richard Kearney, ed, *Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988), 45-58.

intervention to help the less well off of Irish and British society. The potential increase in xenophobia and racism, and the ground swell of support for parties like the BNP, particularly within certain working class communities, is another issue that demands our attention. We will return to this issue below in our discussion of Kelman's latest novel, and his criticism of what some commentators have lauded as the new 'migrant sensibility' created by such movements.

Returning to the context of the 1990s, it is of course the Republic of Ireland that has thrived most vigorously under the aegis of greater integration within the EU. In 1999 the Republic conceded control of its money supply when it adopted the Euro as its currency. As John Fitzgerald remarked in chapter three, it was after incorporation within the EU in 1973 that the Republic first began to widen its ideological horizons. As such, the Republic stands as the model *par excellence* of a postnational state, fully integrated with Europe, and reaping the economic rewards.

Republic of Ireland and the Celtic Tiger

As we outlined in the introduction, Margaret Thatcher's ascension to power in 1979 marked a hegemonic shift within the political and economic consensus of post-war Britain. During the 1980s, the Thatcher Government strategically dismantled the Welfare State and the pillars of British national industry. The principles of the free market became sacrosanct. The Government redefined its role as one of enabling private industry and an enterprise culture to flourish within Great Britain. A similar ideological shift can be seen to have occurred in the Republic of Ireland, albeit at a slight time lag, during the late 1980s and early 1990s. These changes, toward monetarism and the free market, were a decisive factor in fostering the dramatic economic growth of the Celtic Tiger. As such, the contemporary Republic and Britain can be seen to share remarkably similar economic outlooks. This casts doubt over claims by the Irish economist John Fitzgerald (quoted above) that the Republic's economic growth was the product of a more cosmopolitan and decidedly European outlook.

So, what exactly were the transformations that defined the era of the Celtic Tiger?

In 1988 the Republic of Ireland was regarded as a second tier nation. It was the poorest country in north-west Europe, with a Gross Domestic Product merely 64% of the European Community average.¹⁷ Almost ten years later, it was headline economic news. In May 1997, the cover of *The Economist* featured a darkened Europe with the Republic illuminated in phosphorescent green. The strap line read: 'Europe's Shining Light'. Inside the magazine reported on 'one of the most remarkable economic transformations of recent times... [The Republic of Ireland] is now the most successful economy in the European Union.'¹⁸ The country had experienced unprecedented expansion, recording annual growth levels of up to 9% during the 1990s. The European average for the same period was only 1.7%.¹⁹ So how did this come about? In the late 1980s, with no indigenous industry to speak of, the Irish government had set about attracting significant economic investment from foreign multi-nationals. In an attempt to capitalize on a highly educated, English speaking work force, the Government set its corporate tax rate at 10% - the lowest in Europe. As a result, it succeeded in attracting high-tech giants such as Ericsson, Hewlett-Packard, Motorola and Siemens to Irish shores. This created what has become known as the 'silicon bog', and provided the economic motor that powered the social transformations of the Celtic Tiger.

If the facts of this economic growth are beyond question, its social and cultural significance remain relatively unexamined. Understandably perhaps, politicians and economists have been keen offer adulatory readings of this period. As the introduction to *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* (2002) explains:

The high levels of economic growth which have resulted are seen as marking a permanent transformation of the Irish economy, holding out the prospect that "Ireland may achieve a standard of living amongst the highest within the EU over the next fifteen years" [...] [This view] is highly influential in economic policy-making and can be regarded as the dominant, hegemonic interpretation of the Celtic Tiger.²⁰

¹⁷ Frances Cairncross, 'Poorest of the Rich: A survey of the Republic of Ireland', 3.

¹⁸ 'Europe's Shining Light', *The Economist* (17 May 1997), 25-30.

¹⁹ Sachs, 'Ireland's Growth Strategy: Lessons for Economic Development', 54.

²⁰ Cronin, Gibbons, Kirby, eds, *Reinventing Ireland*, 4.

However, we may be mindful of Gramsci's objection to both neo-liberal and orthodox Marxist accounts of society, and their narrow reliance on economic narratives as indicators of social well-being. In cultural terms the Celtic Tiger was accompanied by a decisive shift in both the form and function of Irish culture. The Republic could be seen to be finally maturing beyond the nationalist shibboleths of the past, adopting what Kearney would later christen a postnational consciousness. The election of Mary Robinson in 1990 as the first female President of the Republic, was for many a pertinent symbol of this new dawn. As a Catholic educated at Trinity, a feminist and a civil rights lawyer, Robinson represented the shedding of some of the nation's more weighty historical baggage. An extract from her inauguration speech as President is quoted in the epigraph to chapter three. Despite such adulatory readings, the underlying cultural significance of both the Celtic Tiger, and Robinson's 'new Ireland', have yet to be fully explored. As Luke Gibbons, Peadar Kirby and Michael Cronin explain:

While this 'new culture' is closely linked by its proponents with Ireland's economic success of the 1990s, widely referred to as the Celtic Tiger, the links between economy and culture have been little explored apart from a generalised correlation between economic success and a climate of national self-confidence and creativity.²¹

The following discussion of *The Van* aims to explore the ways in which postmodern rhetoric, including the language of multi-cultural pluralism, actually masks a series of unresolved problems confronting those on the economic margins within this 'new Ireland'. It will explore the rotten underbelly of the Celtic Tiger, the story that remains undisclosed amongst adulatory readings of economic growth and new found international confidence.

***The Van*: consumer culture and working-class identity**

The Van (1991) is Doyle's most direct engagement with effects of late capitalism on working-class communities like Barrytown. The title refers to the chip van, through

²¹ Cronin, Gibbons, Kirby, eds, *Reinventing Ireland*, 2.

which Jimmy, the father of the Rabbittes, and his friend Bimbo attempt to shed their working-class identity, and re-invent themselves within the entrepreneurial spirit of the Celtic Tiger. The novel opens with Jimmy, recently unemployed, sitting on the front step of his house. He had been forced from the kitchen to allow his son Darren space to do his homework. This sense of alienation and redundancy, of being beyond use and merely an obstruction reverberates throughout the novel. It is part of a material and ideological crisis confronting working-class communities, who are seen to be getting in the way of the Republic's epic journey of economic growth.

In our earlier discussion, Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia offered an apposite tool for examining Doyle's use of dialect in *The Commitments*. In thinking about the influence of postmodernism and the reconfigurations of working-class identity during this period, Bakhtin again provides us with a useful point of departure. The Bakhtinian term 'dialogism' suggests a number of ways in which we might understand the acute pressures late capitalism exercises on working-class communities. For Bakhtin dialogism, literally 'double voicedness', referred to the process whereby a single utterance contains more than one meaning. Within *The Van*, the concept of 'work' takes on a certain dialogic character, and in doing so reveals the new forms of exploitation that define post-industrial labour. Having been made redundant from a local bakery where he worked all his life, and with little other prospects, Bimbo contemplates applying for a position in the local McDonalds. Jimmy rebukes him sharply: 'They won't want you [...] they're lookin' for young ones an' young fellas tha' they can treat like shite an' exploit. Not grown up men like you, like us' (V435). The rise of late capitalism has witnessed the expansion of the service sector in place of traditional forms of working-class labour. It is the uniformed and uninformed nature of this existence that Jimmy rails against. In Jimmy's mind, this kind of job is degrading and dehumanizing and as such, cannot be considered real work. Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogism' points toward one of the great false homogenisations of late capitalist culture, a distinction that J.K. Galbraith also highlights:

There is no greater modern illusion, even fraud, than the use of the single term *work* to cover what for some is [...] dreary, painful or socially demeaning and what for others is enjoyable, socially reputable and economically rewarding.²²

McDonalds bears witness to the double standards applied to the concept of work in late capitalist society. However, within *The Van* the fast food chain itself functions as a polyvalent symbol, an index of the transforming nature of the Republic of Ireland during the 1990s. The changes of this period are most apparent when Jimmy journeys to the city centre of Dublin, ironically a trip designed to stave off the boredom of unemployment. His impression of the city's regeneration is marked by an overriding sense of estrangement: 'He went into town and wandered around. He hadn't done that in years. It had changed a lot; pubs he'd known and even streets were gone. It looked good though, he thought. He could tell you one thing: there was money in this town' (V 409). Later on a social night out in the city, Jimmy is confronted by the moneyed voice of this new prosperous Dublin.

There were huge crowds out, lots of kids- they were on Grafton Street now – big gangs of girls outside McDonalds. Not like the young ones in Barrytown; these young ones were used to money. They were confident, more grown up; they shouted and didn't mind being heard. They had accents like newsreaders. (V 580)

Significantly, it is through their speech habits that Jimmy recognizes the new generation of Dubliners who have made the commercial metropolis their own personal playground. The idiosyncrasies of the Dublin dialect have been supplanted by a softer, more homogeneous type of language. It registers the heightened influence of the international media in the entertainment age. Ken Hirschkop identifies this process of linguistic homogenisation as symptomatic of the cultural values prevalent in advanced capitalist society.²³ Crucially, it is their voices that differentiates the Dublin *nouveau riche* from the working-class denizens of Barrytown. At the same time, McDonalds functions as a highly potent, if somewhat contradictory, symbol. It signals the arrival of a specifically

²² J.K. Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson Ltd, 1992), 36.

²³ Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (eds), *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 4-5.

globalised form of consumer culture on Irish shores. Moreover, it functions as a point of both orientation and disorientation. It is literally a meeting point for these young moneyed Dubliners. It also suggests a wider cultural meeting point, one whose reference points include Hollywood, MTV and pop music. As M. Keith Booker explains:

That the Dubliners themselves seem entirely happy with the notion that most of their ideas seem to come from multinational popular culture [is a sign of domination]. After all the solicitation of the willing co-operation of the dominated classes is precisely the point of cultural domination, in the grand tradition (diagnosed by Gramsci and others) of the hegemonic strategies of bourgeois culture as a whole.²⁴

The fast food restaurant also functions as a point of disorientation - after all, when you see a McDonalds you could be almost anywhere in the world. Furthermore, it brings to mind Frederic Jameson's definition of postmodernism as the first specifically North-American global style.²⁵ This idea of Americanisation can also be detected in certain critiques of the kind of economic change that the Celtic Tiger has been predicated on. A concerted investment from primarily American companies and a process of re-alignment with certain Reaganite monetarist principles, allows Mary O'Sullivan to argue: 'the micro-economic structure of [Ireland's] industrial economy has evolved to more closely resemble a region of the United States.'²⁶ McDonalds is also indicative of the contraction of individual choice that has been caused by the spread of global consumer culture. As Naomi Klein summarizes:

The branded multinationals may talk diversity, but the visible result of their actions is an army of teen clones marching - in 'uniform', as the marketers say - into the global mall ... Dazzled by the array of consumer choices, we may at first fail to notice the tremendous consolidation taking place in the boardrooms of the entertainment, media and retail industries ... the world goes monochromatic and doors slam shut from all sides: every other story - whether the announcement of a

²⁴ M. Keith Booker, 'American Popular Culture in Roddy Doyle' *ARIEL*, Vol.28, No.3 (July 1997), 28-38, 32.

²⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, xx.

²⁶ Mary O'Sullivan, 'Industrial Development: A New Beginning?' in J.W. O'Hagan, ed, *The Economy of Ireland: Policy and Performance of a European Region* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 2000), 260-285, 283.

new buyout, an untimely bankruptcy, a colossal merger – points directly to a loss of meaningful choice.²⁷

Proponents of a postmodern sensibility often invoke consumerism as a model for understanding the underlying freedom and choice that this new era represents.²⁸

However, as Jean-Francois Lyotard explains, this is a particularly specious form of emancipation:

Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: you listen to reggae; you watch a western; you eat McDonald's at midday and local cuisine at night; you wear Paris perfume in Tokyo and dress retro in Hong Kong; knowledge is the stuff of TV game shows... Together, artist, gallery owner, critic and public indulge one another in the Anything Goes – it is time to relax.... [However] the realism of Anything Goes is the realism of money... This realism accommodates every need just as capitalism accommodates every 'need' – so long as these tendencies and needs have buying power.²⁹

Against such celebrations of postmodern hybridity, Alex Callinicos points out the so-called choices 'you' could make, all depends upon exactly who 'you' are.³⁰ The degree to which these are in fact real choices, depends entirely on the extent to which 'you' can afford the privilege of making them. For its proponents, this cultural dominant signals an end to older class based models of society, and signals the universal redefinition of our identity as consumers. However, what is clear is that the advent of consumer culture has not done away with social division, but instead has merely reconfigured it.

Postmodernism's talk of multi-cultural pluralism and hybridity describes the experience of a privileged minority. For the poor and underpaid such pronouncements only emphasize a new form of entrapment. The smell of Paris perfume bought in Tokyo is remarkably absent from the streets of Barrytown.

²⁷ Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (London: Flamingo, 2000), 129.

²⁸ See for example McCrone, *Understanding Scotland*, 170.

²⁹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained*. Trans, Don Barry, Bernedette Maher, Julian Pefanis, Virginia Spate and Morgan Thomas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 8.

³⁰ Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), 162.

The Van is concerned with revealing the daily humiliations that consumer culture creates in the lives of working-class families like the Rabbittes. The rampant materialism actively increases pressure on the family unit. Scouring the shops looking for cheap Christmas presents for the kids, Jimmy and Veronica agree that no one in Barrytown can really afford Christmas. Fintan O'Toole provides a scathing indictment of the emptiness of this consumer culture that swamped the Republic during the late 1980s. The post Christmas bargain hunt is a prime example, revealing the underlying vacuity that characterised this reborn, consumer Republic:

When the doors of the shop burst open, the stampede to the counter becomes the purest image available of the rat race of consumer capitalism, every man and woman for themselves, the law of the jungle let loose in the struggle for things we probably don't want but have to have.³¹

Unemployed and trapped in a subsistence lifestyle, Jimmy is continually confronted by a sense of impotence within an increasingly commercialized society. In one of the novel's most harrowing moments, Darren rebukes his father with the fact that it was the state that put the family's dinner on the table. Jimmy stops going to the pub, not wanting to be humiliated in front of his friends as he would be unable to buy his round.

Against this backdrop Jimmy and Bimbo attempt to transform their identity, from waged members of the working class to self-employed, entrepreneurial businessmen. If, as Declan Kiberd argued, modern Ireland had invented itself out of a complex relationship with British Imperialism, for Rory O'Donnell, 'Ireland and the Irish people continue the journey of re-invention at the close of the twentieth century.'³² However, the fated nature of such re-inventions in *The Van* qualifies such optimistic assessments. In light of the novel's treatment of McDonalds, it is ironic that the two men create their own version of the fast food industry: 'Bimbo's Burgers'. In the novel the decision to open the chip van is set against the backdrop of the Republic of Ireland's participation in

³¹ Fintan O'Toole, 'The Sales Ritual- a fable for our times' in *A Mass for Jesse James: A Journey Through 1980s Ireland* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1990), p.144.

³² Rory O'Donnell, 'Ireland and the growth of international governance' in William Crotty and David E. Schmitt, eds, *Ireland and the Politics of Change* (London: Longman, 1998), 156-177, 175.

Italia '90, their first ever visit to the World Cup finals. The early success of Bimbo's Burgers draws on the hysteria that accompanied the national team's footballing success. Jimmy and Bimbo park the van outside the local pub, feeding the euphoric and hungry fans as they emerge from watching another match. The success of the national team in Italia '90 is important in terms of the 'new Ireland' Mary Robinson invoked in her inauguration speech, in December the same year. The football team could also be read as a symbolic progression, beyond the immuring shibboleths of the past. Through sport the Republic could at last be seen to be taking their place on a truly global stage. They were playing an international game, and not the traditional Gaelic sports played by themselves alone, so to speak. Furthermore, against supposed ingrained Irish prejudice, the national team was being managed by an Englishman, Jack Charlton. The football team also marked a long awaited return of the Irish diaspora and its years of crippling emigration. Many of the players at Italia '90 were not actually born in Ireland, but attained eligibility by way of ancestry. What is perhaps more significant is the remarkable success the team enjoyed, reaching the quarter finals before being narrowly beaten by the host nation Italy. However, if the team did symbolise a 'new Ireland', the dubious credentials of certain players points towards a residual emptiness underlying this narrative. Born in England (and sounding very Italian), Tony Cascarino had won 66 caps by the time he learned his mother was adopted, and as a result, he was ineligible to play for the Republic. Regardless, Cascarino kept quiet and went on to win another 22 caps, playing an integral role in Jack Charlton's historic team.³³ In this sense, the national team can be seen to embody the mercenary ethos of unfettered capitalism. Success, or capital accumulation, takes precedence over any sense of morality or authenticity. At one stage, Jimmy and Bimbo visit an Italian chip, shop to learn how to make the batter for their fish. When they are thrown out by the owner Jimmy shouts back: 'Go back to your own country [...] an' bring Tony Cascarino with yis [...] He's fuckin' useless anyway' (V469). The incident affords a momentary glimpse of the novel's rejection of the unrestrained market forces that swept the Republic during this period.

³³ Paul Kimmage, *Full Time: the Secret Life of Tony Cascarino* (London: Scribner, 2000).

In *The Van*, the prevalence of consumer values means that having momentarily provided his family with the smallest of luxuries, Jimmy feels duty bound to continue in his job despite his enduring loneliness and the loss of his friendship with Bimbo:

He couldn't go back to what it had been like before they bought the van – before Bimbo had bought the fuckin' van. He couldn't do that, get rid of the video again, stop giving the twins proper pocket money and a few quid to Sharon, and everything else as well – food, clothes, good jacks paper, the few pints, even the dog's fuckin' dinner; everything. There was Darren as well now. How many kids went to university with fathers on the labour? (*V* 602)

Whilst Jimmy is seen to gain financially from his partnership with Bimbo, we are aware that these advances are not without a deeper emotional cost. Their friendship deteriorates having been reconfigured in the context of a business arrangement. Echoing Fintan O'Toole's description of the primordial violence of the post-Christmas bargain hunt, the novel culminates with the two men fist fighting each other in the street. The spirit of free market individualism, far from auguring an age of amelioration, can be seen to actively impel the breakdown of traditional communal bonds. The final act of the novel sees the two men pushing the van into the sea in what would appear to be a heroic gesture of defiance. However, this denouement is equally tragic. Their novel has come full circle and we end as we began, with the working-class figure rejecting, but also being rejected by, the spirit of this 'new Ireland'.

One of the distinguishing features of the Celtic Tiger has been the extensive commodification of Irish culture. Reminiscent of Alex Salmond's comment regarding Ireland's 'high international visibility', the *Sunday Times* declares:

Bottled Irishness seems to be beating Scotch whisky in the export markets. The world has been bewitched by Riverdance, Michael Collins and Roddy Doyle. Auburn-haired beauties photographed against misty peatlands sell everything from Caffrey's to weekend breaks. Irish theme pubs such as Jinty McGinty's and Filthy McNasty's put wine bars out of business.³⁴

³⁴ Joan McAlpine, 'Gael Force', *Sunday Times* (12 Oct 1997), Features section, 1.

The inclusion of Roddy Doyle within this list of international exports is significant. Whether the author himself would welcome the fact, his work inarguably belongs the global branding of Irish culture. If the author's work is a commentary on this era, then arguably, it is also a symbol of it. Doyle's career has followed a remarkably similar trajectory to the Celtic Tiger. His self-financing of his debut novel *The Commitments* can be read as emblematic of the entrepreneurial ethos that swept the Republic in the coming decade. Undoubtedly, the adaptation of Doyle's work by other media, most notably Alan Parker's film version of *The Commitments* (1991), have contributed to the mass appeal of his work. Beyond this however, there is a sense in which the texts themselves can be read as offering a highly palatable representation of working-class culture. We recall Carmine White's criticism of the Barrytown novels' use of humour to smooth over the more jagged edges of working-class experience. *Reinventing Ireland* critiques the conservatism of much Irish writing of this period:

[It] simply transfers the 'forms' and myths of rural romanticism to new urban settings. As several critics have pointed out in relation to Alan Parker's film of Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* (1991), the emphasis on community, leisure and consumption, vernacular language, music, and – not least – the time-honoured struggle of the Celts against adversity, all but turned the film into a version of urban pastoral, complete with the mandatory 'triumph of failure' theme.³⁵

Postmodernism has become synonymous with a certain degree of cultural levelling, whereby the objects of popular culture are scrutinised with the same degree of attention as those of high art. In this sense, Doyle's success in giving a platform to the marginalised voice of the working-class, could be read as a politically enabling act. However, as we pointed out earlier regarding Bakhtin's 'carnavalesque', such temporary and fully sanctioned inversions of the established order possess limited critical bite. For Michael Pellion, the commodification of culture that defined the Republic of Ireland during the 1990s entails a fundamental critical compromise. In the context of late capitalism, cultural value is increasingly bound up with its value in the market place. As

³⁵ Cronin, Gibbons, Kirby, eds, *Reinventing Ireland*, 10.

Gibbons, Kirby and Cronin inform us: 'Romantic Ireland may be dead and gone but that has not prevented it re-emerging in commodity form.'³⁶

One of the ways we might think about the difference between Doyle and Kelman's representation of the working-class is through Adorno and Horkheimer's influential essay 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.'³⁷ For Adorno and Horkheimer, the production of consumable, stylized mass art is compatible with a disinterested view of society, one that serves the interest of the ruling class by actively maintaining the status quo. What they called 'the culture industry' comprised the entertainment business that produced film, television, radio, magazines and pop music. In the age of *The Da Vinci Code*, the Booker Prize, and the million pound publishing advance, we might reasonably add literature to Adorno and Horkheimer's list. They argued that the interest of leading film companies, television studios and publishing houses were interwoven with those of other capitalist industries. The culture industry constantly reproduces disinterested and conciliatory images of society, which naturalize and shore up the contradictions of the capitalist system. It could be argued that Doyle's representation of working-class experience belongs to this model of mass art and its inherently conservative politics. In contrast, for Adorno and Horkheimer, only modernist art, with its apparent detachment from reality, is capable of critiquing the world and presenting the possibility of a better future. Reading Kelman's work from this perspective seems a highly plausible strategy. Not only would it explain his relatively smaller readership, but it might also account for his more disturbing account of this contemporary social crisis.

For all their widespread popularity, Doyle's novels did little to arrest the hegemonic narratives that defined the Republic during the 1990s. An alternative economic analysis reveals a much darker side to the 'new Ireland' that Mary Robinson was so keen to announce. During this period of prolific economic growth, the inequality

³⁶ Cronin, Gibbons, Kirby, eds, *Reinventing Ireland*, 10.

³⁷ Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, John Cumming, trans (London: Verso, 1999), 120-168.

gap between Ireland's rich and the poor also grew significantly. In 2004 around 700,000 Irish people were still living in poverty.³⁸ The Republic of Ireland currently lists second only to the United States in terms of social inequality within the developed world.³⁹ Furthermore, due to the degree of overseas investment in the Celtic Tiger, every year the lion's share of profits leaves Irish shores. Reduced corporate tax rates yield significantly lower returns, and as a result, restrict the provision of front line services like health care, a need felt most acutely by the poor. For critics like Peadar Kirby and Kieran Allen, under the Celtic Tiger, economic success correlated with consummate social failure.⁴⁰

But how might Doyle and the Celtic Tiger relate to the ongoing events in the North? After all, the introduction to *Reinventing Ireland* informs us: 'The litmus test of whether a narrative caught the spirit of post-national Ireland thus became its total disregard for the Troubles – which, after all, were supposed to be taking place in a foreign country.'⁴¹ The Peace Process, and more particularly the kinds of economic narratives which have underpinned it, provide a point of meaningful contact between the two regions. Undoubtedly, the recent prosperity of the Republic has helped soften certain Unionist opposition to the idea of cross border links. We might recall the point made earlier, that economic self interest, particularly in the post-war years, played a decisive role in bolstering Protestant loyalty to the British state. In *Can the Celtic Tiger cross the Irish border?* (2001) John Bradley supports Richard Kearney's argument, regarding the EU and economic interdependence, as a viable context for greater co-operation. It is the potential for late capitalism to redress the class issues that have underpinned the historical problems of the North, that we will now turn to address.

³⁸ Source: Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) quoted in Damien Kiberd, 'Don't be blinded by poverty claims', *Sunday Times* (10 Oct 2004), Business section, 4.

³⁹ Kieran McDaid, 'State does not value nurses' *The Irish News* 12 Nov 2004, 16.

⁴⁰ Peadar Kirby, *The Celtic tiger in distress: growth with inequality in Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Kieran Allen, *The Celtic Tiger: the Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁴¹ Cronin, Gibbons, Kirby, eds, *Reinventing Ireland*, 11.

Northern Ireland

The complicity of mass art in maintaining the status quo provides us with a useful point of departure for discussion of Northern Ireland. One of the effects of the Troubles has been to raise the stakes in terms of the relationship between art and the wider society from which it emerges. As the playwright Stuart Parker comments, the ideological crisis of the North imbued local art with a particular importance:

The politicians, visionless almost to a man, are withdrawing into their sectarian stockades. It falls to the artists to construct a working model of wholeness by means of which this society can again begin to hold up its head to the world.⁴²

However, if the Troubles did present art with significant opportunity, they also functioned to handicap, debilitate and impoverish the aesthetic impulse. Following Adorno and Horkheimer's argument, this imaginative failure is perhaps most apparent within the more mass market modes of Troubles fiction, the romance novel and the thriller. We might attempt to excuse such aesthetic poverty by way of Terry Eagleton's argument; namely, that the form of the novel itself emerges out of a situation of social stability.⁴³ Patricia Craig's verdict of the North's 'retarded' literary development would fit rather neatly with this view.⁴⁴ But should we be so quick to completely exonerate Northern Irish art? Within the moral maze of the Troubles, is local art another maimed and innocent victim? Seamus Deane denies Parker's distinction, between a visionary art on the one hand and a failed politics on the other. Instead, the two are inextricably linked: 'the inertia and squalor of the situation [...] are a symptom of, or a product of the artistic imagination's failure to confront the issues which have been raised.'⁴⁵ We might reasonably locate the absence of a class narrative as part of this imaginative failure. For Deane, the blame game is not a one way street. It is both childish and irresponsible to

⁴² Stewart Parker, *Dramatis Personae* (Belfast: John Malone Memorial Lecture, 1986), 19.

⁴³ Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, 146-7.

⁴⁴ Craig, ed, *The Rattle of the North: An Anthology of Ulster Prose*, 1.

⁴⁵ Seamus Deane, 'The Artist and the Troubles' in Tim Pat Coogan (ed), *Ireland and the Arts* (London: Newgate Press, 1982), 42-52, 44.

insist, it's all Northern Ireland's fault. Instead, we must re-examine local art and question its implication in some of the more debilitating aspects of Northern Irish culture.

During the 1990s several Northern Irish writers attempted to address the imaginative failure of Northern Irish fiction. As Gerry Smyth explains: 'many writers have sensed a need to challenge the received forms of 'Troubles' narrative, and to develop new languages and new perspectives.'⁴⁶ The emergence of a younger generation of writers, born after 1960, with Robert McLiam Wilson and Glenn Patterson as figureheads, signalled for many critics a decisive shift in the coordinates of Northern Irish fiction. Patterson offers his own emphatic version of Kearney's postnationalism:

Nationalism and Republicanism are as dead Unionism and Loyalism [...] They are talking the language of the nation state and they are talking the language of a political map that was possibly true at the end of the nineteenth-century, but has not been true since the end of the war and is less true by the day.⁴⁷

It was the development of a new style of Northern Irish fiction, indebted to the literary techniques of postmodernism, that held out the possibility for a radical renewal. The city in Robert McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street* (1996) is described by Laura Pelaschiar thus:

Belfast has gradually become a new, fertile urban location, no longer a place from which escape is necessary, but rather a laboratory for opportunities, a *postmodern* place depicted as the only space where it is possible to build and articulate a (post)national conscience, the only location for any possible encyclopedic, multivoiced and multi-ethnic development of Northern society.⁴⁸ [my emphasis]

Eve Patten identifies a similar, postmodern sensibility within the literary imagination, one that marks a watershed within Northern Irish fiction:

[F]iction from Northern Ireland has begun to change dramatically. This is a manifestation, firstly, of the emergence of a new generation of writers who have

⁴⁶ Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, 116.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Richard Mills, 'Nothing has to die: an interview with Glen Patterson' in Bill Lazenblatt, ed, *Northern Narratives* (Belfast: University of Ulster Press, 1999), 113-131, 121.

⁴⁸ Laura Pelaschiar, 'Transforming Belfast: The Evolving Role of the City in Northern Irish Fiction', *Irish University Review* Vol. 30, No.1 (Spr/Sum 2000), 117-131, 117.

come of age since the beginning of the Troubles and whose reconstruction of childhood experience effectively undercut the moral baggage and creative paralysis of their predecessors. Secondly, it marks the overdue exploitation of literary strategies such as perspectivism, ambiguity and displacement which, though categorically *post-modern*, may also be perceived as attributes of a sustained constitutional and psychological identity crisis germane to any representations of the contemporary Northern Irish self-image. [my emphasis]⁴⁹

Both Pellaschiar and Patten would align themselves with what the critic Linda Hutcheon regards as the essence of postmodern writing. Rather than Jameson's abdication of political engagement, for Hutcheon postmodernism signals a fundamentally committed aesthetic impulse, it is 'inescapably political'.⁵⁰ For Hutcheon, the politics of postmodernism are constructed from a variety of literary tropes, including irony, pastiche, inter-textuality and meta-fiction. Examining the work of Robert McLiam Wilson allows us to consider the potential for such techniques to disrupt the established categories of Northern Irish culture. For us, the question is whether this entails the re-ignition of a meaningful social debate within Northern Irish culture? Having attempted to answer this, we will map the previous discussion of consumer culture onto Northern Ireland, and assess its potential to revitalise the working-class communities most devastated by the collapse of Northern Irish society.

Robert McLiam Wilson, *Ripley Bogle* (1989), *Eureka Street* (1996)

The concept of a postmodern Northern Ireland may be usefully orientated around one key term: essentialism. The super-saturation of identity politics has long been regarded as one of the defining features of the Northern Irish culture. As Seamus Deane suggests: 'If the Irish could forget about the whole problem of what is *essentially* Irish, if they could be persuaded to see that this does nothing but produce an unnecessary anxiety about a

⁴⁹ Patten, 'Northern Ireland's Prodigal Novelists', 130.

⁵⁰ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 4.

non-existent abstraction, they would have recovered some genuine independence.’⁵¹ Edna Longley acknowledges a similar reluctance to forsake such enshrined identities: ‘Ulster people hug wonderfully ‘fossilised’ versions of their own and someone else’s Irishness/Britishness; which retards newer definitions in the Republic and Britain.’⁵² For Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, it is the language of postmodernism that interrupts the deadlock arising from such essentialist notions of identity:

In a Northern Ireland context, postmodernism offers the possibility of deconstructing the perennial categories of Catholic and Protestant, Unionist and Nationalist; exposing the difference and *différance* within identity; exploring new horizons of identity altogether [...] Postmodernism questions the *essentialism* inherent in revivalist notions of recovery of a pure source and the totalizing tendencies of national mythologizing, which, in the opinion of many critics, not only encourages false consciousness of historical reality, but has the effect of contributing to violence.⁵³

Ripley Bogle is acutely aware of both this identitarian pathology, and its need for urgent re-evaluation. A Northern Irish education is a form of indoctrination, with sectarianism the first lesson on the curriculum:

Little Miss Trotsky herself told us the occasional Misguided Soul would try to call us British but of all the wrong things to call us – this was the wrongest (*sic*). No matter how the Misguided Souls cajoled, insisted or pleaded, our names would remain Irish to the core, whatever that meant. (*RB* 16)

Similar to Heaney’s ‘Whatever You Say Say Nothing’, Ripley Bogle discloses the complicity of everyday speech in reproducing the familiar codes of sectarian identity. Not wishing to deny his father, who is actually Welsh, the young Bogle comically re-christens himself ‘Ripley Irish British Bogle’. Not only does the novel satirize the North’s super-sensitivity regarding such identitarianism, it actively disrupts this kind of simple dualism. Through his own pen name, which draws on both the Gaelic (McLiam) and English (Wilson) versions of the same name, the author himself deliberately courts

⁵¹ Seamus Deane, ‘Remembering the Irish Future’, *Crane Bag* Vol.7, No.2 (1984), 81-92, 90.

⁵² Edna Longley, ‘Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland’ *Crane Bag* Vol.9, No.1 (1985), pp.26-40, 33-4.

⁵³ Kennedy-Andrews, *(de-) constructing the North*, 19.

such ambiguity. ‘Ripley Irish British Bogle’ and ‘Robert McLiam Wilson’ deny the possibility of any stable subject position, one that would legitimate a particular partisan reading of the North. We may recall that it was these very categories of national identity that gave birth to Kearney’s postnationalism. If cultural identity was the primary cause of the Northern Irish crisis, then such postmodern hybridity could be read as politically enabling. However, as we argued in chapter four, the conflict is about questions of power and authority, and not just the gesture politics of flag waving. Moreover, postmodernism’s insistence that one can pick and choose one’s identity simply becomes grossly insensitive when applied to the Northern Irish situation. According to David McCrone:

What is on offer in the late twentieth century is what we might call “pick ‘n mix” identity, in which we wear our identities lightly, and change them according to circumstance. Those who would argue for the paramountcy or even exclusivity of a single identity have a hard time of it in the late twentieth century.⁵⁴

For the thousands of people murdered in sectarian attacks during the Troubles, it is not clear that suddenly choosing an alternative identity – Catholic, Protestant, Irish or British – could have in any way averted their tragic fate.

Ripley Bogle belongs to a long line of Irish literary vagrants. He wanders the streets of 1980s London, recounting the story of a childhood growing up in Belfast during the early Troubles. In this way, it is a story about telling stories. The novel employs the self-referential and intertextual strategies that have come to characterize other postmodern literature. It adopts and adapts the clichéd forms of Troubles fiction, and in doing so exposes their complicity in certain reductive ways of reading the conflict. The homelessness of the main character is indicative of the novel’s ideological subtext, which deliberately seeks to deterritorialise such familiar literary forms. Bogle recounts his own version of the ‘across the barricades’ romance. As a Catholic teenager he had fallen in love with a Protestant girl, Deirdre. This provoked the rather predictable response from both families: outrage, intolerance and disownment. Like other romance novels, the couple’s love is portrayed as a pure emotion, contrasting with the cruelty of their wider

⁵⁴ McCrone, *Understanding Scotland*, 170.

communities. However, we soon learn that the teenagers' relationship was far from innocent. When Deirdre accidentally becomes pregnant, Bogle insists on an abortion. Bogle himself induces the miscarriage, inserting a paint brush and using it to scrape the wall of the girl's uterus. The use of the paint brush is doubly ironic. It recalls Deane's comment about art's complicity in the ideological failure of the North. Moreover, it also points toward the murderous consequences, the aborted future, that such failure has indirectly entailed. Similarly, the thriller-esque death of Bogle's friend Maurice is an event in which our hero is no innocent bystander. The IRA use Bogle to find Maurice, and he knowingly betrays his friend in order to save himself. Through postmodern pastiche, *Ripley Bogle* discloses the contrived and suspect nature of such generic representation of the Troubles. These narratives are exposed as a form of literary compensation, offering the reader aesthetic absolution from the unfolding horror of the North. In this context, McLiam Wilson's postmodernism can be seen as a form of immanent critique. Linda Hutcheon's concept of 'historiographic meta-fiction' is particularly relevant. As she explains: '[Historiographic meta-fiction] offers a sense of the presence of the past, but a past that can be known only from its texts. Its traces – be they literary or historical.'⁵⁵ For Hutcheon, our access to the past can only ever be by way of textual representation. As such, any reading of Northern Irish art as occupying a privileged position, as being intrinsically distanced from the conflict, is essentially misleading. There are no innocent texts, and we must strive for a literature that confronts rather than consoles us, in our relationship to such events.

Importantly, the iconoclasm of McLiam Wilson's work is not directed narrowly at the rather generous targets of 'Troubles trash'. In *Eureka Street*, a novel set at the time of the IRA ceasefire in 1994, the author turns his sardonic gaze from low to high art, and what has become the most internationally acclaimed mode of writing about the North, poetry. *Eureka Street* parodies the rustic bard of the Troubles that Seamus Heaney has come to represent. Shaughe Ghinthoss (a pun on 'shag and toss'), is described as 'a vaguely anti-English Catholic from Tyrone':

⁵⁵ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 125.

The great man, Ghinthoss, got up and read. He read about hedges, the lanes and the bogs. He covered rural topography in detail. It felt like a geography field trip. In a startling departure he read a poem about a vicious Protestant murder of a nice Catholic. There were no spades in this poem, and only one hedge, but by this time the crowd were whipped into such a sectarian passion they would have lauded him if he had picked his nose with any amount of rhythm or even in a particularly Irish manner. (*ES* 176)

Rather than uncovering the essential truths about the situation, the Northern Irish poet is portrayed as reproducing the most familiar of sectarian narratives.⁵⁶ However, we could argue that this is a fundamental misreading of the artistic intent that belies much of Heaney's poetry. As we saw with 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing', and it is also evident in a poem like 'Punishment', Heaney's poetry does not attempt to offer an easy escape from the moral maze of the conflict. Heaney's work refuses to avert the poetic gaze from the everyday brutality of the Troubles. It aims to acknowledge the horror of events, whilst also attempting to come to terms with the nature of such 'tribal [and] intimate revenge.'⁵⁷

But how do the postmodern aspects of McLiam Wilson's work relate to the question of class? At the outset, *Eureka Street* seems capable of penetrating beneath the surface rhetoric of sectarianism. Echoing the main argument in chapter four, the novel initially tries to uncover the social issues that such codifications would inevitably elide. Far from merely replicating a unique local pathology, *Eureka Street* seeks to locate the conflict within the global economic context of late capitalism. In discussing *The Van*, we alluded to the specific humiliations that consumer culture visits on the less well off. A similar unveiling takes place in *Eureka Street*, through the narrator Jake Jackson's work as a repo man:

Crab, Hally and I worked North Belfast. It was mostly poor up there so we had a lot of ground to cover. We were thrillingly ecumenical and we raided Protestant estates with all the *élan* and grace with which we raided Catholic ones. I could never see the difference [...] They could paint their walls any colour they wanted,

⁵⁶ McLiam Wilson has elsewhere criticised what he regards as the problematic rusticative imperative of Heaney's work. See Robert McLiam Wilson, 'The Glittering Prize', *Fortnight*, No.344 (Nov 1995), 23-25.

⁵⁷ Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground*, 117.

they could fly a hundred flags and they still wouldn't pay the rent and we would still come and take their stuff away from them. (ES 63)

In the age of consumer culture, Northern Ireland's social hierarchies shun previous divisions along religious lines. Discrimination is purely economic, based on purchasing power, and people's ability to afford certain consumer desirables. The logic of late capitalism is indifferent to the politics of sectarianism, insisting that money is the only mark of identity that really counts:

As your eye roams the city (as your eyes must, as our eyes, those democratic unideological things, always will, giving witness, testimony), you see that there is indeed a division in the people here. Some call it religion, some call it politics. But the most reliable, the most ubiquitous division is money. Money is the division you can always put your money on.

You see leafy streets and you see leafless streets. You can imagine leafy lives and leafless ones. In the plump suburbs and the concrete districts your eyes see some truths, some real difference. The scars and marks of violence reside in only one type of place. (ES 214)

In *Ripley Bogle*, a heightened sensitivity to the politics of form, allowed the novel to deconstruct the popular modes of Troubles fiction. In terms of the class politics of *Eureka Street*, a similar sensitivity reveals a latent conservatism embedded within the text. This contradiction emerges through the novel's reluctance to acknowledge its own status as a literary text. The scathing critique of Shague Ghinthoss becomes a condemnation of all indigenous art: 'I'd seen lots of arty bullshit in Northern Ireland. Provincial but famous, it could produce almost nothing else. Subsidized galleries stocked full of the efforts of useless middle-class shitheads too stupid to do anything else, too stupid to pass the exams that their folks paid for' (ES 187). Against this inherent artistic poverty, *Eureka Street* presents itself as offering a uniquely authentic version of events. The novel's famous set piece is its depiction of a bomb blast in the Fountain Lane area of Belfast city centre. The factual style adopted by the narrative would seem to penetrate the falsifying rhetoric of the media, the politicians and the paramilitaries, and arrive at some kind of fundamental truth. It assumes the formal strategies of the classic realist

text, with the narrator as authority figure, conferring the ultimate meaning on events.

Richard Kirkland explains the inherent flaws in this move:

In *Eureka Street* the core values of humanist individuation which ultimately (must) triumph are presented as marginal, easily threatened, and attainable only by isolating the liberal voice and placing it between two warring factions.⁵⁸

Kirkland's critique resonates with the wider debate regarding the project of revisionism, and its attempt to reconfigure the cultural terrain of Northern Ireland. Edna Longley argues for a rational criticism of culture, one that is able to transcend the pull of familiar tribal loyalties.⁵⁹ This seems a perfectly reasonable argument. However, as we have just admitted, there are no neutral perspectives. Moreover, the focus on questions of culture deliberately skews the terms of the debate, ignoring vital questions about power, authority and materialism. Significantly, *Eureka Street* ends with Jake safely residing on 'Poetry Street' back in 'bourgeois Belfast'. The ghettos to the North of the city are out of sight and out of mind. His friend Chuckie marries an American, and makes his fortune exporting local tat to the global marketplace – among other things, twigs become authentic Leprechaun walking sticks. As such we might include McLiam Wilson's novel in Terry Eagleton's critical summary about the politics of revisionism:

What is wrong with these scholars from a radical viewpoint is not that they are revisionists, but that they are middle class liberals. And what is wrong with middle class liberalism is not on the whole its values, most of which are entirely admirable, but the fact that it obtusely refuses to recognize the depth of social transformation which would be necessary for those values to be realized in universal form.⁶⁰

The underlying problem is a refusal to engage in a sustained way with the material narratives that have for decades underpinned the Northern Irish conflict.

⁵⁸ Richard Kirkland, 'Bourgeois Redemptions: the Fiction of Glenn Patterson and Robert McLiam Wilson' in Harte and Parker, eds, *Contemporary Irish Fiction*, 213-231, 218.

⁵⁹ See for example Longley, 'Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland'.

⁶⁰ Terry Eagleton, *Crazy John and the Bishop*, 320.

In conceptual terms the revisionist controversy rests on the question of separating culture from politics. In this sense it resonates with Kearney's postnationalism, whereby cultural identities may be maintained, while questions of politics may be reconfigured within a European context. In critiquing this separation we may recall Alan Finlayson's argument regarding the misguided nature of the Cultural Traditions Group. Joseph Ruanne and Jennifer Todd's diagnosis of the structural, rather than cultural, nature of the conflict would also be relevant. As David Lloyd explains:

The combined effect of political thinking on each side of the border has been to perpetuate not only nationalist ideologies, but their articulation along sectarian and, effectively, racial grounds. The real basis of the present struggle in the economic and social conditions of a post-colonial state, and the peculiar twist given to class differences by such conditions, has consequently been systematically obscured.⁶¹

In this context we might think about the structural and economic transformations that have occurred within Northern Ireland during the last decade. Large injections of money from the EU and the United States, as well as British and Irish Governments, have fuelled the redevelopment of many parts of the North. In Belfast the disused shipyards of Queen's Island are being transformed into the Titanic Quarter. This site will boast the very latest in luxury waterside living for the citizens of Belfast. However, one might usefully ask, exactly who are these changes for? Will they have any relevance for the dispossessed of the Ardoyne, the Shankill Road, or Andersonstown? Moreover, we might note that such developments have continued apace despite the stuttering nature of the region's burgeoning democracy. The Peace Process would seem to confirm claims made by Noreena Hertz; namely, that the postmodern era of late capitalism only signals a further sense of disempowerment, as democratic representatives gradually concede power to the unelected institutions of global capitalism.⁶²

⁶¹ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), 19.

⁶² Hertz, *The Silent Takeover*, 8-9

Scotland

Since the mid-1990s Scottish critics have become increasingly interested in the language of postmodernism, as a compass with which to chart the nation's evolving political and cultural landscape.⁶³ Again, an exhaustive account of these narratives is beyond the remit of the current chapter. Instead, we will focus on the work Robert Crawford and his interest in plural multicultural notions of Scottish identity. This forms a prelude to examining James Kelman's *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* (2004). Specifically, through mapping the enduring exploitations of post-industrialism, Kelman's novel deconstructs such adulatory readings of multi-cultural identity. It will be argued that working-class identity, or more accurately, its post-Marxist reformulations, can be seen to expose and disrupts the specious freedoms that postmodernism purports to offer.

Eleanor Bell draws explicitly on recent developments within Irish studies in her recent book *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (2004). It is the revisionist mentality of Longley in which Bell grounds her calls for a postmodern Scotland. As we saw above, for Longley it was essentialist identity politics that condemned the North to an endless repetition of communal violence. It is only through a plural multi-culturalism that we could hope to short-circuit such narratives. Longley's ideal would hold that the different cultural identities of the North could co-exist in an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual enrichment. *Questioning Scotland* argues that a similar sense of reductionism has historically plagued the study of Scottish culture. This is manifest in critical preoccupations with asserting the distinctively Scottish aspects of a particular literary work.⁶⁴ In terms of Kelman, we could cite Dietmar Boenke's dubious assertion that the author is the 'chronicler of the nation.'⁶⁵ According to Bell: '[F]or too

⁶³ See for example David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland*; Randall Stevenson, 'A Postmodern Scotland?' in Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie and Alastair Renfrew (eds), *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth Century Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 209-229; Cairns Craig, 'Beyond Reason – Hume, Seth, MacMurray and Scotland's Postmodernity' in Gavin Miller and Eleanor Bell, eds, *Scotland in Theory*, 249-284.

⁶⁴ Cairns Craig's book *Out of History: narrative paradigms in Scottish and English culture* could be argued as one such case in point.

⁶⁵ Boenke, *Kelman Writes Back*, 34.

long the discipline has been posited in parochial, stereotypical, cultural nationalist terms without recourse to the possible reverberations and limitations of such constructions.⁶⁶ In response, Bell employs Kearney's postnationalism and its embrace of postmodern theory, to suggest an opportunity for the radical renewal of contemporary Scottish studies. Fundamental to *Questioning Scotland* is its insistence on the impossibility of recovering any pure or original sense of what it is to be essentially Scottish.

The issues raised by *Questioning Scotland* re-articulate certain anxieties that were first voiced by Robert Crawford during the early 1990s. Crawford anticipates Bell's own disappointment with tendencies within Scotland toward an inward looking and reductive forms of criticism. Similarly, it is in notions of multi-cultural pluralism that Crawford seeks to transcend this ideological impasse. The work of Mikhail Bakhtin forms a crucial part of this attempt to bypass an essential Scotland. It posits what Crawford sees as a far more profitable destination - 'Scotlands':

Scotland is and has long been an assembly of languages and cultures, a plural culture not a monoculture. It is in this climate that the work of Bakhtin has much to offer in providing models and patterns to think with which, by their unfamiliarity, may liberate us from older theoretical straitjackets and bring us into closer touch with the theoretical debates of the wider world [...] This is particularly appropriate in a postmodern age when in many disciplines the notion of a canon with a fixed identity seems either threatened or improbable.⁶⁷

For Crawford the idea of 'Scotlands' maintains the importance of territory, whilst at the same time, avoiding definitive or essentialist notions of national identity.⁶⁸ For Bakhtin, identity is not formed in isolation. It occurs out of a process of contact with others, be they individuals, nations or cultures. However, if as Crawford argues, 'there are more Scotlands than people who live in Scotland', does this not make national identity a

⁶⁶ Bell, *Questioning Scotland*, 2.

⁶⁷ Robert Crawford, 'Bakhtin and Scotlands', *Scotlands* 1 (1994), 55-65, 57. Cairns Craig also used Bakhtin in order to reformulate the plural hybridity of modern Scottish culture. See Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 30-31.

⁶⁸ Significantly, Crawford first formulated these ideas in a book entitled *Identifying poets: self and territory in twentieth-century poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

blunted if not altogether redundant critical term?⁶⁹ Berthold Schoene-Harwood argues against this celebratory ‘Scotlands’, and the kind of postmodern multi-culturalism it purports to offer:

The seemingly ingenious critical manoeuvre of Scottish intellectuals simply to replace monolithic SCOTLAND with the more pluralistic notion of SCOTLANDS bears its own ideological quandary. While ostensibly acknowledging and even promoting cultural diversity, it is – like the older label – still a territorial, historically pre-encoded and hence potentially essentialist term which serves to identify, isolate and exclude both internal and external ‘aliens’ by clearly distinguishing what is Scottish from what is un-Scottish. [...] what the term SCOTLANDS appears to promote resembles an only less nationalistically inspired, territorially defined and culturally subsumptive straitjacket of communal homogeneity.⁷⁰

Specifically for us, the rhetoric of multi-cultural diversity would elide the kind of socio-economic straitjackets that define the daily experience of many in contemporary Scotland. A social hierarchy, economic inequality and the uneven nature of opportunity problematise any assertions of peaceable co-existence and the fruitful interchange amongst the various groups that constitute Scottish society.

Again, the language of postmodernism can be seen to underpin Crawford’s argument. In *Devolving English Literature* (2000) he draws on Linda Hutcheon’s notion of postmodern ‘ex-centricity’ to theorize the aesthetic politics of Scottish Literature:

The present book’s title is not intended simply to comply with the view that writing in English has been a narrowly centralized activity, and that power must now be devolved from the centre to the margins. Rather, it aims to suggest that, while for centuries the margins have been challenging, interrogating and even structuring the supposed ‘centre’, the development of the subject of ‘English Literature’ has constantly involved and reinforced an oppressive homage to centralism. As such, English Literature is a force which must be countered continually by a devolutionary momentum.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Robert Crawford, ‘Bakhtin and Scotlands’, 57.

⁷⁰ Berthold Schoene-Harwood, “‘Emerging as the others of our selves’ – Scottish multi-culturalism and the challenge of the body in postcolonial representation’, *Scottish Literary Journal*, Vol. 25, No.1 (May 1998), 54-72, 55, 56.

⁷¹ Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 7.

Devolving English Literature assumes a critical framework predicated on the existence of national literatures. As a result, the devolutionary momentum of culture runs parallel to that of politics. For Hutcheon, ‘the centre will not hold’ signals not a Yeatsian apocalypse, but rather postmodernism’s promise of radical political rebirth.⁷² Crawford’s use of ‘ex-centricity’ systematically neglects a whole series of questions that make such nationalist readings inevitably problematic – gender, race and of course, class.

James Kelman, *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free*

Within the secondary writing, several critics have regarded postmodernism as a profitable framework in which to consider Kelman’s work. For Mary McGlynn: ‘[Kelman’s] reshaping of the genre involves an embrace of incompleteness and fragments, textual experimentation, pastiche, anti-novel, non-story – the territory of the postmodern.’⁷³ Similarly, Dietmar Boenke leans on Crawford’s use of postmodern ex-centricity to theorise the latent nationalism of Kelman’s work.⁷⁴ It is the concept of deterritorialisation, originally formulated by Deleuze and Guattari, that Boenke employs to justify Kelman’s postmodern politics.⁷⁵ What I wish to suggest is that rather than authenticating the author’s specifically nationalist credentials, deterritorialization provides us with a key to understanding the reconfigured class politics that characterize this post-industrial, post-Marxist world.

In an obvious sense, *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free* is a novel about deterritorialisation. As an immigrant Scot living in the US, the main character, Jeremiah Brown, has literally been deterritorialised. The narrative follows Jeremiah drinking his way around several bars, the night before he is due to fly back home. There is a meaningful comparison to be drawn between this novel and both *The Van* and *Ripley*

⁷² Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 60.

⁷³ Mary McGlynn, ““Middle-class wankers” and working-class Texts: The Critics and James Kelman’, *Contemporary Literature* Vol.43, No.1 (Spring 2002), pp.50-84, p.82.

⁷⁴ Boenke, *Kelman Writes Back*, 99-100.

⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature in Theory and History of Literature*, Dana Polan, trans (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16.

Bogle. We recall that *The Van* opened with Jimmy Rabbitte unemployed and alone, sitting on his front step. Jimmy represents the working-class male, estranged (deterritorialised?) from both his family and the wider community of which he was formerly a part. This lack of belonging, a sense of spiritual homelessness, becomes more explicit in *Ripley Bogle*. The main character's homelessness is indicative of the narrative dislocation of Northern Irish fiction. The place has been abandoned, left to fluctuate between different, but equally unsatisfactory, modes of literary representation. In more general terms, deterritorialisation also suggests the mass relocation of working-class communities to peripheral housing schemes after the Second World War. More recently this is manifest in the gentrification of city centres, with the middle-class converting former industrial space into expensive loft apartments. It also describes the relocation of working-class fiction that Kelman is associated with. This sees the locus of working-class lives shift from the factory floor and the production line to the dole queue and the betting shop. And on an ideological level, deterritorialisation describes the change within post '79 politics, whereby the old class divisions have been displaced by the false homogenization that we are all consumers now.

For certain critics, the deterritorialised immigrant provides a unique and enabling perspective on the nature of the contemporary world. Salman Rushdie argues that the 'migrant sensibility' represents an opportunity for a more accurate description of our postmodern, globalised existence. For Rushdie, the migrant must forge a new imaginative relationships with the world, resulting in 'plural, hybrid, metropolitan' forms of consciousness.⁷⁶ In contrast to this celebratory ethos, *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* charts the harsh reality of this migrant sensibility. Throughout the novel Jeremiah exists as the perpetual outsider. Moreover, he refuses the sense of residual belonging to a spiritual homeland, a trope which characterizes the more clichéd form of immigrant narrative. On the cusp of 'gaun hame', Jeremiah angrily struggles to define exactly what this might mean: 'Why did I use these sentimental expressions. Hame. I mean what the fuck is hame!' (*YH* 175). This epistemological uncertainty is confounded

⁷⁶ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 125.

by the novel's rejection of immigrant narratives that would espouse a return to a mythological homeland as a stable place of origin. Jeremiah's friend Ranjit, a fourth-generation Indian immigrant, evokes this as a potential antidote to his status as a permanent cultural outsider: 'Ranjit had the dream of getting some money together to head off to India and see how things were, maybe discover something of his past. But some of his past was in Texas and some was in the Caribbean and some was here on the east coast of Umerka' (YH 45). In place of this mythic return, Jeremiah adopts his own version of the migrant sensibility. However, in contrast to Rushdie, who himself attended Rugby and Cambridge, for Jeremiah, on the bottom rung of society, such sensibility provides little compensation in the face of systemic exploitation.

For Frederic Jameson, postmodernism is the first specifically American form of cultural dominant. *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* allows us to explore the dubious freedoms that both the US and such postmodern culture would purport to offer. The title itself, as both promise and warning, signifies the underlying contradiction within the hegemony of late capitalism. In *The Van* we heard Jimmy's condemnation of the service sector world of McDonalds. In Kelman's novel, Jeremiah also struggles to come to terms with this new economic reality. In a post-industrial wasteland, Jeremiah wanders between a series of dead end jobs, working as a security guard and also a bartender:

Really, I just needit some dough, that was all. Some nights tips were good but maist nights they werenay. Maist nights were just dreich elongated affaris. It would have greatly helped if I could have brought my ayn music but there was a set list I had to play in keeping with the theme of the pub which was just too shameful to mention. I was a fuckin zombie at the end of these shifts, I didnay have two thoughts to run the gether, exhausted, incapable of gaun to my ayn place, locking up the doors, the bolts, trying to yawn to stay awake, forgetting to watch for gangster cunts. The thought of journeying ower to my place, that horrible wee room man if I had the energy to commit suicide... (YH 102)

In this new labour world, those on the economic margins have not been freed from the physical and mental hardship that characterised industrial labour. Later we see Jeremiah as a security guard given the privilege of buying his own uniform, on credit from his employers.

For Crawford, Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia enabled a postmodern sense of a plural Scottish identity. This emerged out of the different linguistic codes that constituted the literary text. He argued that Scottish writing would benefit from re-examining how these different languages 'illuminate, interrogate and complicate one another.'⁷⁷ Such a reading of Kelman's novel, as a textual web of different codes, is in many respects apposite. Jeremiah's voice continually code shifts, adopting a host of different dialects including Mexican, Negro, and American. The novel would appear to afford Jeremiah the freedom to choose from a plethora of different identities. However, in post-9/11 America all non-US citizens are regarded with suspicion. Jeremiah is continually asked to produce his identification by a number of authority figures throughout the novel. Far from signaling a form of postmodern free play, identity is revealed as a site of power and control. At one stage Jeremiah mimics the voice of a Negro slave and a Mexican immigrant: 'Yeh massa, here's the ID massa, thanks for asking massa. Let me bow let me scrape, you ees uhmereekaan ameeego, you ees meester heroec figyoor'(YH 194). By conjoining these sociolects, the novel places Jeremiah's experience alongside that of the Negro slave. We are also asked to consider the wage slavery that defines the experience of many Mexican immigrants in the contemporary US. In the world of postmodern difference, identity is supposedly imbued with a sense of malleability. People wear their identities lightly, and are able to pick and choose. Jeremiah's experience reveals the illusory and misleading nature of such liberal rhetoric.

Revisiting the concept of heteroglossia in this way helps to explain the residual tensions within postmodern notions of multi-cultural identity. Significantly for Bakhtin, literary languages do not exist peaceably alongside one another; rather, they interrelate hierarchically, and in doing so index the stratified nature of the society. Allon White offers a neat summary of this effect: '[B]ecause languages are socially unequal, heteroglossia implies dialogic interaction in which the prestige languages try to extend

⁷⁷ Crawford, 'Bakhtin and Scotlands', 61.

their control and subordinated languages try to avoid, negotiate, or subvert that control.’⁷⁸ Heteroglossia does not index a peaceable multi-cultural landscape, where language and identity are readily interchangeable. Instead, it illustrates how questions of power and control continue to define the experience of many in this world replete with supposed post-modern freedoms. In *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free* linguistic difference does not merely texture the novel, adding to the rich heterogeneity of contemporary identities. Rather, as a white foreigner in America, Jeremiah’s otherness is continually foregrounded by his voice. His talent for code-shifting does not enable him to eschew his status as cultural outsider. Difference breeds distrust – exclusion not integration – and thus fails to trigger the emancipatory impulse that postmodern pluralism allegedly offers. As Jeremiah discovers, the bar in which he drinks is, ‘a homogeneous hotbed of poisonous fuckers all staring at ye because ye are the wrang “thing”: religion, race, class, nationality, politics, they knew ye as soon as they look at ye, boy, you is alien’ (YH 26).

The novel’s translation of his Scottishness into ‘Skarrisch’ is indicative of the wider appropriative tendencies that characterise American cultural hegemony. To a bar tender claiming to be ‘Skarrish’ Jeremiah retorts:

Ye all want to go to the motherland in the off chance ye bump into one of your ancestors’ descendants, a long lost cousin. What ye hope to discover is if ye are related to a clan chieftan, if ye are descended from royal blood and maybe own a mountain or something, if ye have any cheap servants at yer disposal, with luck they’ll be wearing a kilt and sing praise songs for yer wife and family. (YH 14)

Within the novel ‘Bonne Skallin’ serves as a prism through which America refracts its own sense of global entitlement. The novel denies Scotland the status of idealized motherland, a reprieve from the kinds of subordination that characterizes the US: ‘I could chat about the dear auld motherland as well but it was aye with an uncommon sense of relief at no being there’ (YH 16). And later, ‘We all eat shit, I says, ma faimly’s worse than yours, my entire country man it is much worse, we are all cretinous fucking goddam

⁷⁸ Allon White, *Carnival, hysteria and writing: collected essays and autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 137.

servants, arselicking bastards'(YH 45). The novel also invokes Ireland, although unsurprisingly it does so in condemnatory fashion. Jeremiah's sense of estrangement is juxtaposed with the type of patriotic fervor he witnesses amongst certain Irish-Americans:

Spanish was one of the languages I often tried to learn, like Gaelic – if only because every time I had the bad luck to find myself in a stage-oirish bar I bumped into these stage-oirish pricks who got very blood and soil and linguistically pure and I wantit to confound them to the very marrow of their beings... All that blood and soil stuff is a joke, it is a fucking joke. (YH 105)

The journey 'hame' does not symbolize a possible form of narrative resolution. Contemporary Scotland belongs to the same discourse of globalization that Jeremiah endures in America. The 'migrant sensibility', as either benefit or burden, changes depending on your socio-economic status. For the frequent flyer it is a kind of duty free - picking and choosing from global culture with little responsibility or sense of obligation. For the low paid worker it is merely an endorsement of the fundamental nature of their economic powerlessness.

Kelman's novel refuses any easy affiliation amongst the politically and economically dispossessed within the land of the free. Jeremiah's attempts to establish a connection with other cultural outsiders only ends in frustration. A Ghanaian taxi driver refuses to enter into a conversation, fearing Jeremiah might be working undercover for the government immigration authority. Similarly, when Jeremiah becomes romantically involved with Yasmin, a black jazz singer, there is no easy solidarity. Convinced he would not understand, Yasmin refuses to talk to him about the racism that continues to define modern America:

She loved a lot of these auld singers – Nina Simone was her hero – and a lot of why she loved them was political. She knew it was but wouldny talk about it. How come? I asked her a few times but never got a real answer, no a satisfactory one. She didny want to talk to me about people that stand up for their rights as human beings. Naw, how come? I have to ask. Do aliens no get included in this? What is the fucking issue here! I could never get to grips with that yin, how come bodies like me were excluded from the debate. (YH 76)

In an interesting parallel with Chuckie and Max in McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street*, Jeremiah and Yasmin also have a child. However, far from signaling a redemptive union and the promise of new life, the narrative ends with Jeremiah estranged from both Yasmin and his daughter. There is an interesting comparison with Roddy Doyle, through the theme of jazz and the racial politics of America. Published the same year, Doyle's most recent novel *Oh Play That Thing* (2004) follows Henry Smart, a former soldier in Connolly's Citizen's Army, as he emigrates to Chicago and assimilates within the melting pot of American society. Rather unbelievably, Smart falls in with Louis Armstrong and finds a home within the 1930s Chicago jazz scene. Doyle celebrates America as the great land of immigrants, where different narratives intersect and mutually enrich one another. In contrast, Kelman's novel foregrounds the insurmountable obstacles that persist between different minorities.

Near the end of *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free* the drunken Jeremiah falls into conversation with an American couple, sitting near him in the bar. What evolves are a series of miscommunications, whereby the agitated Jeremiah attempts to talk about politics, only to be answered with platitudes and deliberately anodyne replies. Similar to much of what passes for postmodern discourse, the real political issues are excluded from the discussion. As Kelman himself has said: 'the kind of non-debates we have now in Scotland are shocking.'⁷⁹ While calls for a Scottish postmodernism renew the desire to progress beyond narratives of reductive essentialism, much of the multicultural and pluralist rhetoric these generate may very well amount to a series of Kelmanesque 'non-debates'. On examining Scottish culture in the twenty-first century it is important we stay more alert than ever to the ways in which postmodern narratives of difference, whilst ostensibly promoting 'freedom' and 'democracy', may actually perpetrate worrying practices of disempowerment and political impairment.

⁷⁹ Michael Gardiner, 'An Interview with James Kelman', *Scottish Studies Review* Vol.5, No.1 (2004), 101-115, 112.

Chapter six

Conclusion

The main message of this book is that in studying class... one cannot escape from history.

- A. Marwick, *Class Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930*⁸⁰

In that sense, the [capitalist] system can be said to be currently victorious – but the word has something of a grotesque ring to it. For how can a system which is at once the most productive history has ever witnessed, yet which needs to keep the great majority of men and women in a state of spiritual and material deprivation, possibly be described as successful?

- Terry Eagleton (1996)⁸¹

Irish-Scottish studies as an inter-disciplinary subject is still in the process of establishing itself. Whilst the historical and linguistic aspects have been written about at some length, there remains a relatively minor engagement with the literary and cultural cross-currents between the two regions. The issue of dialect and the politics of class offer one way in which we might begin to fill this critical gap. Notably, during the time of writing this thesis (2003-2006), the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies at Aberdeen have

⁸⁰ A. Marwick, *Class Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930* (London: Fontana, 1980), 363.

⁸¹ Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne, intro and eds, *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1996), 5.

announced the funding for several literary based research initiatives. These include a comparative study of twentieth-century Irish and Scottish poetry, and another theme, the development of representations of dialect in the novel in Ireland and Scotland in the nineteenth century. This type of extended critical scrutiny is long overdue, the results of which will no doubt be eagerly anticipated.

My own study foregrounds the versatility of dialect as a mode of literary discourse. Yes, dialect is part of an existential politics, bringing those that have been silenced and sidelined within literature back from the margins. However, it is much more than that. It has shown us that working-class experience, working-class culture and working-class speech, are all the appropriate matter for a serious art form. It is both significant and salutary that this thesis has raised almost as many questions as it has been able to answer. In passing it has highlighted numerous other comparisons that merit more detailed examination. The role of dialect within other artistic media is one such case in point. In the theatre, the linguistic politics of Sean O'Casey, Martin Lynch and Tom McGrath could be considered within a similar tri-partite structure. This analysis would doubtless contribute to both the comparative and the class aspects of the discussion above. Similarly, in poetry, an extended comparison remains to be made between the language and political concern of Scottish poets like Tom Leonard and Liz Lochhead, and the very different preoccupations of the same generation of Irish poets. In Scotland, contrasting the use of dialect across a number of different genres might prove to be an illuminating task.

The work of James Kelman allowed us to re-contextualise the so-called Scottish Renaissance in contemporary literature. Whilst Kelman's work did have important things to say about the state of modern Scotland, a culturally nationalist criticism would truncate the scope of his politics. The controversy surrounding the Booker Prize in 1994 only exposed the degree to which class prejudice and elitism remain embedded within the everyday values of British/Scottish/Western society. Gramsci's concept of the Organic Intellectual allowed us to theorise Kelman's artistic manifesto, 'to write and remain a member of my community.' This was achieved through a innovative narrative technique

that would de-territorialize the formal elitism of the classical realist text. Kelman's engagement with working-class culture is not nostalgic. Importantly, the author is not uncritical either, as his treatment of gender and race politics demonstrate. Our discussion provoked a number of issues that await further exploration. The context of Scotland and the half-way house of devolution presents obvious questions. Can an executive with such limited powers manifest a real change for those who have been most affected by the transformations of the 1980s? More importantly perhaps, do they have any real interest in doing so? Furthermore, when the pendulum swings the other way, as it inevitably will, and a Conservative Government is once again back in Westminster, will Scots once again look toward the national question as a remedy for certain enduring economic woes?

In terms of Roddy Doyle, the conflation of class and race in the late 1980s is very much a period piece. It marked the last breath before the Celtic Tiger was let loose within the Republic of Ireland. With the remarkable growth experienced during the 1990s, an assertion of Irish as the niggers of Europe is simply no longer viable. Doyle's work was an attempt to represent the lives of those who had previously been excluded from the mainstream discourse of Irish life. But it was also much more than that. Keeping with the spirit of the age, TV adaptations, screenplays and movie premiers created something of a Roddy Doyle industry. His work became part of the global export of Irish culture. The difference between Doyle and Kelman in this respect impelled us back to the texts. Our aim was to unearth some of the formal and thematic differences that would foster this kind of commercial disparity. In this context, Doyle's ready use of humour in the face of the intolerable signals both a coping mechanism and a potentially problematic form of escapism. Critically, the politics of class and race allowed us to assess the re-emergence of the postcolonial question within Irish Studies during the 1990s. This was part of a more general shift within the field of literary studies with critics increasingly interested in the cultural politics of de-colonisation. However, in Ireland it was something more than this. In the Republic, critics were finally realising what Field Day had asserted over ten years previously. Northern Ireland was not a foreign country. It was and is integral to the story of the Republic, despite Presidential proclamations of a 'new Ireland'. In the Republic of Ireland, the economic growth of the

Celtic Tiger shows little signs of abating. However, with the increased inequality, we are left to ponder whether it offers a real solution to the historic problems confronting both Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In terms of Northern Ireland, the politics of class alerts us to the crucial but terminally neglected aspect of the post '69 conflict. The Troubles cannot be understood out with a whole host of specifically socio-economic questions. As such, the North ceases to be an anomalous state. Instead, it may be relocated within a series of broader narratives pertaining to the late twentieth century. In modern times, the idea of Catholics as second-class citizens is simply no longer tenable. Reconvening the economic narratives upon which the conflict emerged is particularly poignant in light of the recent Peace Process. The potential for either the Celtic Tiger of Third Way capitalism to successfully redress these problems remains to be seen. Summer 2006 has witnessed a repeat of the 'Yes we have no bananas' incident of 1932. Postal workers in Belfast from both religious communities took to the streets to protest over working conditions. Healing old wounds through greater class solidarity is a difficult path to travel. As with so much else in the North, it is a development that will be watched closely.

As both historical event and a set of ideological assumptions, Thatcherism attempted to sound the death knell for a class-based understanding of contemporary society. As we have demonstrated, these issues are far from settled. Instead of a conclusion in the traditional sense, it is perhaps more in the spirit of the discussion to end by looking forward. Whilst classical Marxism is no longer capable of mapping the totality of global relations, the need for a committed politics is more pressing than ever. Irish-Scottish Studies was born out of an academic initiative. However, it is part of a wider political narrative, one that addresses vital issues like Scottish Devolution and the Northern Ireland Peace Process. The challenge facing the critic/academic is to contribute to these debates in a meaningful way. In this context, Gramsci's ideas about the committed intellectual have enduring relevance.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Take away all that the working class has given to English Literature and that Literature would scarcely suffer.¹

- Virginia Woolf (1940)

In that sense, the [capitalist] system can be said to be currently victorious – but the word has something of a grotesque ring to it. For how can a system which is at once the most productive history has ever witnessed, yet which needs to keep the great majority of men and women in a state of spiritual and material deprivation, possibly be described as successful?²

- Terry Eagleton (1996)

¹ Virginia Woolf, 'The Leaning Tower' (1940) quoted in Ian Hayward, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers Ltd), 1.

² Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne, intro and eds, *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1996), 5.

Irish-Scottish studies as an inter-disciplinary subject is still in the process of establishing itself. Whilst the historical and linguistic aspects have been written about at some length, there remains a relatively minor engagement with the literary and cultural cross-currents between the two regions. Dialect and the politics of class offer one way in which we can begin to fill this critical gap. Notably, during the time of writing this thesis (2003-2006), the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies at Aberdeen have announced the funding for two literary based research initiatives. These include a comparative study of twentieth-century Irish and Scottish poetry, and another theme, the development of representations of dialect in the novel in Ireland and Scotland in the nineteenth century. This type of extended critical inquiry is long overdue and the results will no doubt be eagerly anticipated.

The work of James Kelman allowed us to consider the so-called Renaissance in contemporary Scottish literature. We saw that whilst Kelman's work does have important things to say about the state of modern Scotland, a culturally nationalist criticism would inevitably misread its politics. The controversy surrounding the Booker Prize in 1994 exposed the degree to which class prejudice and elitism remain embedded within both Scottish and British society. Gramsci's concept of the Organic Intellectual allowed us to theorise Kelman's manifesto, 'to write and remain a member of my community.' This was achieved through an innovative narrative technique that de-territorialized the formal elitism of the classical realist text. Kelman's engagement with working-class culture is not nostalgic. Crucially, the author is not uncritical of this culture either, as his treatment of gender and race demonstrated. Our discussion provoked a number of important questions. The context of Scotland and the half-way house of devolution presents obvious issues. Can an executive with such limited powers manifest real change for those most affected by the transformations of the 1980s? More importantly perhaps, do they have any real interest in doing so? Furthermore, when the pendulum swings the other way, as it inevitably will, and a Conservative Government is back in Westminster, will Scots once again look toward the national question as a remedy for their enduring economic ills?

In terms of Roddy Doyle, the conflation of class and race in the late 1980s is very much a period piece. It marks the last breath before the Republic plunged headlong into the era of the Celtic Tiger. With the remarkable growth experienced during the 1990s, the Irish as the niggers of Europe is simply no longer true. Doyle's work attempted to represent the lives of those who were excluded from the mainstream discourses of Irish life. But it was also much more than that. Keeping with the spirit of the age, TV adaptations, screenplays and movie premiers created something of a Roddy Doyle industry. His work became part of the global export of Irish culture. This contrast between Doyle and Kelman impelled us back to the texts. Our aim was to unearth some of the formal and thematic differences that would foster such disparity. In this context, Doyle's ready use of humour in the face of the intolerable signaled both a coping mechanism and a potentially problematic form of escapism. Critically, the conflation of class and race allowed us to reassess the emergence of the postcolonial question in Irish Studies during this period. This development was part of an international shift within literary studies with critics increasingly interested in the cultural politics of postcolonialism. However, in Ireland it was something more than this. In the Republic, critics were finally realising what Field Day had asserted over ten years previously. Northern Ireland was not a foreign country. It was and is integral to the story of the Republic, despite Presidential proclamations of a 'new Ireland'. In the Republic of Ireland, the economic growth of the Celtic Tiger shows little signs of abating. However, with the increased inequality, we are left to ponder whether it offers a real solution to the historic problems confronting both Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In terms of Northern Ireland, the politics of class alerted us to the crucial but terminally neglected aspect of the post '69 conflict. The Troubles cannot be understood outwith a whole host of specifically socio-economic questions. To do so is to skew the debate. The North is not an anomalous state. Instead, it may be relocated within a series of broader narratives pertaining to the late twentieth century. In modern times, the idea of Catholics as second-class citizens is simply no longer tenable. Reconvening these economic narratives is particularly poignant in light of the recent Peace Process. The potential for either the Celtic Tiger or Third Way capitalism to successfully redress

Northern Ireland's problems remains to be seen. Summer 2006 has witnessed a repeat of the 'Yes we have no bananas' incident of 1932. Working-class postal workers in Belfast from both religious communities took to the streets to protest over working conditions. Healing old wounds through greater class solidarity is a difficult path to travel. As with so much else in the North, it is a development that will be watched closely.

This thesis has foregrounded the versatility of dialect as a mode of literary discourse. Virginia Woolf's quote from 1940 is certainly no longer tenable. Dialect is part of an existential politics. It brings those that have been silenced and sidelined back from the literary margins. However, it is much more than that. As we have seen, working-class experience, working-class culture and working-class speech, are all appropriate matter for literary art. If this thesis has raised more questions than it has been able to answer then this is not altogether a bad thing. In passing we unearthed numerous other comparisons that merit more detailed examination. The role of dialect in other artistic media is one such case in point. In the theatre, the linguistic politics of Sean O'Casey, Martin Lynch and Tom McGrath could benefit from a similar form of tri-partite analysis. This kind of study would doubtless contribute to both the comparative and class aspects of our own discussion. Similarly in poetry an extended comparison remains to be made between the language and politics of Scottish poets like Tom Leonard and Liz Lochhead, and the very different preoccupations of the same generation of Irish poets. In Scotland, comparing the use of dialect across a number of different genres (poetry, prose and drama) would be an equally illuminating project.

As both historical event and a set of ideological assumptions, Thatcherism attempted to sound the death knell for a class. As we have seen, these issues are far from settled. Instead of offering closure and a conclusion in the traditional sense, it is fitting that we end the discussion by looking forward. Whilst classical Marxism is no longer capable of mapping the totality of global relations, the need for a committed politics is more pressing than ever. Irish-Scottish Studies was born out of an academic initiative. However, it is part of a wider political narrative that includes issues like Scottish Devolution and the Northern Ireland Peace Process. The challenge facing us as critics is

to try and engage in these debates in a meaningful way. In this context, Gramsci's notion of the committed intellectual has enduring significance.

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