As it never was

Peter Kravitz

In March 1979 the people of Scotland were asked whether they wanted their own parliament separate from England. The majority said yes. However, a last minute clause added to the bill stated that 40% of the total electorate had to be in favour. This took non-voters to be saying no. Governments get elected on less.

In 1980 I started reading manuscripts for the Edinburgh publisher *Polygon*. The backlist consisted mostly of books about Scottish failures. There was one on the failure of the breakaway Scottish Labour Party, another on the Scottish Daily News—a failed attempt at newspaper publishing. And there were books about failures that failed to appear. Someone was commissioned to write a fan's diary of the Scottish team's failure in the Argentina World Cup of 1978.

Polygon was also due to publish Neal Ascherson's Devolution Diaries written during the referendum debacle, in which he referred to the post-referendum years as 'the hangover of '79'. In some circles it was known as the 'deferendum' due to the lack of nerve exhibited by the electorate. In the end Ascherson decided they were too frank and instead deposited them in the Public Record Office in Edinburgh under a 'Closed' mark.

Around the time I started at Polygon, publishers released a flood of histories, companions, dictionaries and encyclopedias of Scottish literature. In most cultures these reference works might have had quite a long shelf-life, but the publication of work by Alasdair Gray, James Kelman and others in the early 1980s rendered the volumes that had excluded them obsolete almost as soon as they were published. In retrospect they were marking the end of a former era in Scottish literature and the beginning of a new one.

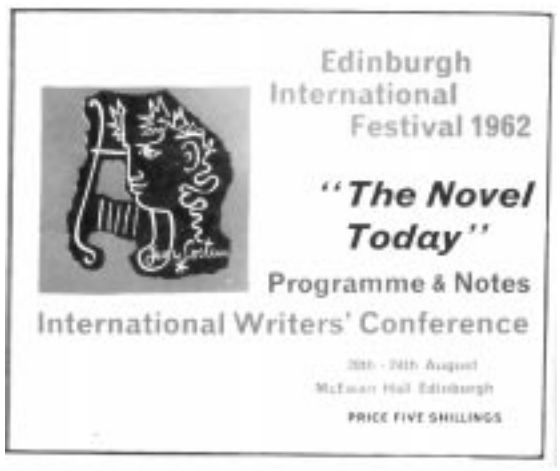
Anyone looking for the country's authors in a Scottish bookshop at that time would have been pointed towards reprints of Neil Gunn and Eric Linklater. Publishers were more interested in resurrecting dead writers as opposed to looking for new ones and grants from the Scottish Arts Council encouraged this. When on behalf of Polygon I sent them Kelman's second novel *A Chancer*, they deemed it unworthy of a grant towards publication costs. They had received a complaint from a Conservative Member of Parliament, Alick Buchanan-Smith; one of his constituents had picked up Kelman's previous novel *The Busconductor Hines*, in an Edinburgh bookshop, and was shocked that taxpayers' money was subsidising such language. Those who claimed to represent culture had lost their collective nerve.

There was the publication of the long-delayed New Testament in Scots in 1982 and the *Concise Scots Dictionary* in 1985. These became surprise (to the bookshops) best-sellers and were products of decades of work W. L. Lorimer's *New Testament in Scots*, like Gray's *Lanark* and Kelman's *Not Not While The Giro* and other stories, were completed long before publication in book form. Lorimer first had the idea of translating it in 1945, began in earnest in 1957 and completed it in 1966. It took until 1983 to raise sufficient interest and funds to secure publication. He uses different forms of Scots to show different authors in the New Testament and when the Old Testament is quoted he uses Old Scots. The book's raciness and hybridity made the attempts by various writers and academics in the decade before to sort out an agreed form of Scots laughable.

Later on in the 1980s books and pamphlets came out glossing Glasgow speech such as Stanley Baxter's *Parliamo Glasgow* and Michael Munro's *The Patter*, which topped the Scottish best-seller charts for months and went into several editions. Words that were being taken out of speech and print in the past couple of centuries were now being put back in (in the case of anglicised Scots), or left in (in the case of others). Derek in Kelman's story 'Events in yer life' says, on turning on the TV one morning, that 'it was only the Scottish accents made it interesting'. Eck in John McRay's play *Dead Dad Dog* has the answer: "It's not ma accent it's your ears." In a nice reversal, Alasdair Gray used a transcription of upper class Oxbridge English for 'The Distant Cousin of the Queen' section in *Something Leather*. Here, your is 'yaw', poor is 'paw', literature is 'litritcha', here is 'hia', nearly is 'nialy' and Shakespeare is 'Shakespia'.

The sudden appearance in print of many of these writers has been called a boom by many commentators. In reality, however, it was more the result of a process: Alasdair Gray, Jeff Torrington, Bill Douglas and James Kelman wrote for more than a decade before being published in book form in Scotland or England. Perhaps it took the failure of the Devolution Bill in 1979 to bring them to a wider public. There is, after all a school of thought that says that when the politics of a country run aground, the people look for self expression in culture. The public acceptance or censorship of vernacular Scots has always been a symptom of political feeling in the country. In reaction to the Act of Union with England in 1707, there was a renewal of interest in the vernacular, followed by a reaction in Edinburgh around the middle of the eighteenth century when a guide book on how to excise Scotticisms from speech became popular amongst the literati. Its stated aim was 'to put young writers and speakers on their guard against Scotch idioms' and its influence is still obvious many generations later in the properly annunciated speech of Miss Jean Brodie. One exception was Robert Burns, whose writing was applauded in the 1780s by the same people who had set about removing Scottish words from their vocabulary.

In Glasgow during 1971 some writers had begun to meet every two weeks in a group co-ordinated by Philip Hobsbaum, a lecturer in the English Department at the university. This was the fourth time he had organised such a group. Besides an earlier one in Glasgow there had been groups in London and in Belfast (to which Seamus Heaney brought his poems) in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Here Gray and Kelman met each other and Tom Leonard and Liz Lochhead for the first time. Other writers at the group included the poets Donald Saunders, Aonghas MacNeacail and Robin Hamilton, and the science-fiction writer Chris Boyce. Each would submit a piece of writing in advance which would then be copied, circulated and read out during the meeting. The value of such encouragement and criticism at an early stage of a writer's career cannot be overemphasized. Leonard's "The Good Thief' had already appeared in the first issue of *Scottish International* back in January 1968. When he had tried to publish poems in *Glasgow University Magazine* the printer declined because of the language. A few years later a typesetter wanted 'foreign language rates' for some of his other Glasgow poems. Leonard was probably the most established writer attending the Hobsbaum group. *Six Glasgow Poems* and *A Priest Came on at Merkland Street* were published to some acclaim in 1969 and 1970. J. B. Caird (one of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools in Scotland) ended a talk to the Association for Scottish Literary Studies in 1972 with the question: "Is there a possibility in fiction—as has been done in verse by Tom Leonard and others—for the phonetic rendering of Glasgow speech in the way Raymond Queneau has used Parisian speech in 'Zazie dans le Metro?'" Like most people, he was not to know that over in Glasgow James Kelman was doing just this.



When Kelman and Gray first met at Hobsbaum's group they did not particularly like each other's writing, but warmed to each other personally. Gray later acknowledged him for helping the first chapter of Lanark read smoother. He included a drawing of Kelman on the frontispiece of Book One of *Lanark* while printing his story 'Acid' in one of the footnotes to plagiarisms in the novel. Gray had been working on *Lanark* since the 1950s. When he completed one of the four books it comprises he sent it to the literary agent Spencer Curtis Brown, who rejected it in 1963. An editor at Quartet bought an option on *Lanark* for £75 after reading a half-complete version in 1972. When Gray finished his work four years later it was turned down because it was 'too long'. Two other London publishers offered to publish it if he split it into two books. During this time Gray made a meagre living selling plays to television and radio. In between he would go back to painting. He did murals in restaurants and churches, and for more than a decade made portraits of Glasgow citizens for the People's Palace Museum. Finally, he offered *Lanark* to the Edinburgh publisher Canongate in February 1977, who accepted it a year later. They went on to publish it in 1981. Lanark had been twenty-four years in the making.

In 1987 Gray used the advances of two books to organise a touring exhibition of the painters John Connolly, Alan Fletcher, Carole Gibbons and Alasdair Taylor, whose work he felt had been unjustly neglected.

Kelman had been writing since about 1967 and by 1971 had enough stories for a book. Through Hobsbaum he met the American writer Mary Gray Hughes. She got a publisher in Maine interested in the manuscript of *An old pub near the* Angel his first book of stories. It was published in 1973 by Puckerbrush Press and was little noticed in Scotland or England. His work was starting to appear in magazines and occasionally in the *Scottish Short Stories* annual volume. By the mid-1970s Kelman had another collection of stories ready, was completing one novel and was well underway with another.

A good deal of co-operation amongst these writers in the West of Scotland began at this time; writing circulated in manuscript and addresses of

hard-to-come-by literary magazines were exchanged. The best of these was *Scottish International* which lasted from 1968 to 1974. At the beginning of the 1970s it ran extracts from *Lanark* and published Alan Spence's stories. Two poets—Edwin Morgan and Robert Garioch—were on the board of the magazine. Morgan sponsored Alasdair Gray's application to the Scottish Arts Council for money to finish *Lanark* (he received £300 in 1973).

Many of the new writers from the West of Scotland found Morgan's poetry an inspiration as it took in urban life (especially Glasgow) and embraced the new. These were themes not often found in combination at that time. *Scottish International* was strange for a Scottish cultural magazine in several respects. Guided by its editor Bob Tait, it treated Hugh MacDiannid as a poet amongst equals instead of installing him high on a throne. It also tried to cover Glasgow comprehensively for the first time.

In 1970, the *Glasgow Herald* did two features on Thomas Healy entitled 'From the Pick to the Pen' and 'Labourer Who Writes Stories'. They reported that Healy 'whose most recent story—The Traveler—reflects his experiences as a navvy on a hydro-electric site in the Highlands, has won at the age of 28, a Scottish Arts Council bursary of £500.' This allowed him to work on a novel of Glasgow in the 1950s. Some stories appeared in an anthology of new writers put out by Faber, who took an option on the novel but never published it. Nothing more appeared in book form. Until in 1988, maybe aware of the work we were publishing, he sent Polygon his novel *It Might Have Been Jerusalem*. He had been writing for more than twenty years without having a book accepted. In his second book, *Rolling*, his hero has a love affair with a schoolboy in Glasgow, gets dysentery in Madrid and ends up, via Germany and Australia, in a marriage of sorts. After publication, Healy was berated for creating a character who made everything secondary to drink. Many Scottish reviewers appear to seek redemption from books by Scottish writers. They approach them with different critical apparatus to that which they might bring to, say, an American writer. Like the councillors of Glasgow they prefer happy endings to hard-won self-determination.

In 1974, Bill Douglas wrote the novel *My Childhood* to raise money to allow him to complete his trilogy of films *My Childhood/ My Ain Folk / My Way Home*, but it never found a publisher. The manuscript resurfaced nearly twenty years later. In 1975 William Mcllvanney, after winning the Whitbread Prize for *Docherty*, said he wanted 'to write a book that would create a kind of literary genealogy for the people I came from.' Meanwhile, Kelman was doing exactly this and getting rejection slips from London publishers who slammed the door on Scottish writers of fiction just as quickly as they had opened it. Not being published in book form, whether in Edinburgh or London, meant they had to build their own links with readers and other writers to avoid complete neglect.

If publishers in Edinburgh and London had their blinkers on when it came to manuscripts from new Scottish writers, the work was not sitting in drawers. Magazines and small presses evolved to plug the gap and they had an influence disproportionate to their size. For a couple of years from 1978 Kelman, Gray, Leonard, Lochhead, Spence and others distributed booklets of their work as the Glasgow Print Studio Co-operative with the help of its director Calum Mackenzie. In 1979 Kelman began the first of two periods as Writer-in-Residence for Renfrewshire District Libraries. In an interview with the *Glasgow Herald* at the time Kelman said "I wanted to help ordinary people to become aware that books and writers are not sacred and unapproachable. Most people have something in them worth writing about if only they realised it, and I intend to have workshops in every local community to encourage people to both read and write." In May of that year, five days after Margaret Thatcher's first election victory, Kelman put on—in his words to a reporter at the time—'the first poetry reading to take place at Paisley Town Hall since W. B. Yeats in 1924'. Among those on the bill were Sorley MacLean, Iain Crichton Smith and Aonghas MacNeacail.

In the absence of interest from publishers or agents, authors in the west of Scotland continued to link up. More and more readings were organised. Here Kelman met Jeff Torrington, who had been a shop steward at the former Talbot/Chrysler car plant at Linwood. Torrington was in the middle of writing *Swing Hammer Swing*, part of which Kelman passed to me in 1983. It led to several Torrington stories appearing in *Edinburgh Review*. Torrington told me that when he first attended one of Kelman's writing groups in Paisley Kelman suggested that he knock all the stained glass windows out of his prose, referring to the adjectives and adverbs. But Torrington's favourite writers include Vladimir Nabokov and Ray Bradbury and as he enjoyed using these words they remained. When Liz Lochhead ran a writing group in Alexandria, north of Glasgow, she met Agnes Owens who gave her the story 'Arabella'. Lochhead showed it to Gray and Kelman who loved it and soon became friends with the author. Several years on, in 1982, Gray passed me the typescript of the novel *Gentlemen of the West* by Agnes Owens, which was published at Polygon.

I also heard about Janice Galloway from Kelman. He had been judging a short story competition and photocopied some of her entry for me. I went on to publish several stories in *Edinburgh Review* and her novel *The Trick is To Keep Breathing* at Polygon. Later, Kelman was to bring Torrington and McLean to the attention of his publisher at Secker & Warburg. Galloway published the first work by *Irvine Welsh* as one of the editors of *New Writing Scotland*. He went on to be published by The Clocktower Press and then in Kevin Williamson's *Rebel Inc*. McLean suggested Welsh and later Alan Warner to the same editor at Secker & Warburg. There is a common strand here of writers using their own reputations to bring to people's attention the work of other writers. Just look at the cover puffs and you'll see how one writer praises another who in turn introduces another new writer's work. In his 'diplags' and 'implags' in the margins of Lanark, Gray uses a satire on academic footnotes to admit he has plagiarised sentences or parts of sentences from the work of Kelman, Lochhead, Leonard, Spence and McCabe. This was an unselfish support network proving the validity of Ezra Pound's comment that *no single work of art excludes another work of art*. Tom Leonard made a huge magic marker banner of this phrase and put it along one wall of the room where his writing groups met in Paisley.

Scotland will be free when the last Church of Scotland minister is strangled by the last copy of the Sunday Post

Tom Nairn (1970)

When I see one of these Free Church ministers on the street in Lewis, I feel like walking across the road and hitting him in the face.

Iain Crichton Smith (1989)

Most of the themes in these works—the art of keeping a fragile hold on sanity, struggles against moral intolerance and the causes and effects of drinking too much—would have made sense to another Glasgow writer, R D. Laing. His work has been an influence on some of the writers refered to here. What many of them have in common with him is rage, intelligence, humour and a curiosity and frustration about the central role of guilt in the Scottish psyche. Laing's first book *The Divided Self* published in London in 1959 after he left Glasgow, is a psychological look at the everyday occurrence of split personality. He felt that guilt develops when anger is not expressed but sent inward and two selves are created. Scotland can lay some claim to being one of the best purveyors in world literature of the doppelgänger or double. Since James Hogg's *Confessions of A Justified Sinner* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* many Scottish writers have explored this theme. Yet, what is remarkable about so much Scottish writing of the past fifteen years is how the double has disappeared. There is very little splitting. Some of the characters may be struggling to recover from damage but they are whole. They may be alienated from the values of society, but they are not alienated from themselves. They may be angry, but this comes out as rage and is not left buried to form cycles of bitterness and depression. They fight madness and avoid suicide: Patrick Doyle in Kelman's *A Disaffection*; Roy Strang in Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*; Jock McLeish in Gray's *1982, Janine*; Joy Stone in Galloway's *The Trick is To Keep Breathing*; Helen Brindle in AL Kennedy's *Original Bliss* and Ralph in Iain Crichton Smith's *In The Middle of The Wood*. For these characters sanity is not given, but won. Then they are whole, not split people.

For his *Radical Renfrew* anthology Tom Leonard compiled a thematic list of contents which could be a thumbnail history of Scotland. The first five of the sixteen sections are religion, alcohol, emigration, employment and unemployment. Institutionalised religion still has a powerful hold on Scotland. Monty Python's *Life of Brian* is still banned from every cinema in Glasgow and in the early 1980s Glasgow University Union denied students permission to form a Gay Society. In Alan Sharp's *A Green Tree in Gedde*, Moseby began to understand what being West Coast Scottish meant, with its preoccupations with guilt and sex and sin. Twenty-five years later, in *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing*, Janice Galloway sums up the prevailing ethos of Scottish schooling: 'apportion blame that ye have not blame apportioned unto you.'

There are more antecedents of these themes in the work of Glasgow writer Ivor Cutler. In *Life In A Scotch Sitting Room Vol 2* his mother smells burning:

"Who's been playing with the matches? asked Mother, looking into the box and shaking the contents. I looked through a hole in my plate.

You could have boiled a kettle on my cheek ALL the children were busy looking guilty. It was our custom."

Not that long ago children in Scottish schools were still being punished by the tawse. *The Concise Scots Dictionary* defines it as

"a whip with tads; the lash for a whipping top; a leather punishment strap with thongs (since 1983 rarely and only in certain regions); also a child's word for penis."

Schools can oppress their teachers as much as their pupils. Teachers appear in contemporary Scottish fiction as people for whom sanity is no longer a given. Ralph in Iain Crichton Smith's *In The Middle of The Wood*, Joy Stone in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, Patrick Doyle in *A Disaffection* ("He just wanted something different. To not be a teacher perhaps") are all burdened with the pressures put on the country's educational system. Whether because of Calvinism or Catholicism, Scotland has had hangups in abundance—especially around sex and drink. Then there is anger. Then there is guilt about this anger. Then the depression that follows when anger is internalised. Nowhere is this clearer than in the rage of Scottish men. A good deal of contemporary Scottish fiction shows the pressure put on Scots men to be real hard men. In *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, in my opinion Irvine Welsh's best book so far, Roy Strang is abused by his racist uncle. A few years later he helps commit a gang rape. Strang has been 'running away from sensitivity: a fucking schemie, a nobody, shouldnae have these feelings because there's fucking naewhair for them tae go.'

In the 1970s two plays dealt with this theme overtly. Tom McGrath wrote *The Hard Man* about convicted murderer Jimmy Boyle and Bill Bryden's play *Benny Lynch* tells the story of the Glasgow boxer who lost it all to drink William McIlvanney's novel *The Big Man* traces the life of a man who loses his job in contemporary Ayrshire and turns to bare-knuckle fighting to earn a living. Even the title of his collection of short stories—*Walking Wounded*—tells us that we are entering the arena where damaged men do damage to each other and have damage done to them. It is as if only a decade, not centuries, has elapsed since the wars with England. The word 'manliness' occurs very regularly in Thomas Healy's fiction and it is not surprising that his most recent book *A Hurting Business*, is a memoir of being a lifelong boxing fan in Glasgow. In the novel *Gentlemen of the West* by Agnes Owens:

"Proctor's answer was to hurl a glass through the mirror behind the bar. My mother gave a moan of fear. This excited Paddy's chivalrous instincts. He hurried up to Proctor and smashed a lemonade bottle on the counter over his head."

The main character of the book, Mac, describes the scars on his face, saying 'they were status for me'. Owens presents violence as a straightforward fact of everyday life, with little comment or judgement. Violence and anger (and fondness, which can sometimes make the switch hilarious) come out in language too. Most violence between people never results in a fight but remains in language. Kelman has given the example of writing about a few men in a pub. You can either write using the dialogue that they might actually use or you can write using language they wouldn't use. If you do the latter then you end up censoring their whole existence. A writer has to make other decisions, such as: Does the narrator use the same language as the characters? In the prose of some writers mentioned here, there is no such split. In 1988 a magazine for English teachers in Scottish schools printed a review of *Gentlemen of the* West which concluded that the book's "usefulness as a school text is unfortunately limited by the realistic inclusion in the dialogue, of language associated with 'bouts of drinking and occasional houghmagandie'". The reviewer finished by warning teachers that 'the parents of your average S grade candidate would certainly be moved to protest.'

Censorship can take many different forms. I came across a peculiarly misguided example when I was editing *Towards The End*, a novel by the Glasgow writer Joseph Mills published in I989 by Polygon. The job of an editor is to understand the author's intention and play devil's advocate to both the writer and to his or her own instinctive response. Although I didn't like some of Mills's florid metaphors, what made the book compelling was its attention to detail, its focus on the particular lived moments of the protagonist's life. Yet, whenever the character moved about the city, the Glasgow place and street names had been tippexed out on the manuscript.

"I'd like you to think about reinstating these names.'

'Are you sure?"

'Yes.'

'It's just that the publisher in London that almost took the book said if I took them out it would have more universal appeal.'

Needless to say he was delighted to reinstate them.

In December l990, the *Scots Magazine*—a favourite read among Scots abroad—published an article by Maurice Fleming entitled 'Scotland the Depraved'. In it he called for a return to the values of the comic classics of Compton Mackenzie and more publicity for writers who could celebrate Scotland as opposed to those he labels 'the terrible twosome': Kelman and Welsh, joined by Duncan McLean. He describes his targets as 'desperate to plumb even deeper depths of depravity'. These writers, he said, 'appear to view Scotland with undisguised and malicious disgust [portraying the place as] a nation of drunks, drug addicts and dropouts.'

In 1992 the *Daily Record* printed the headline:

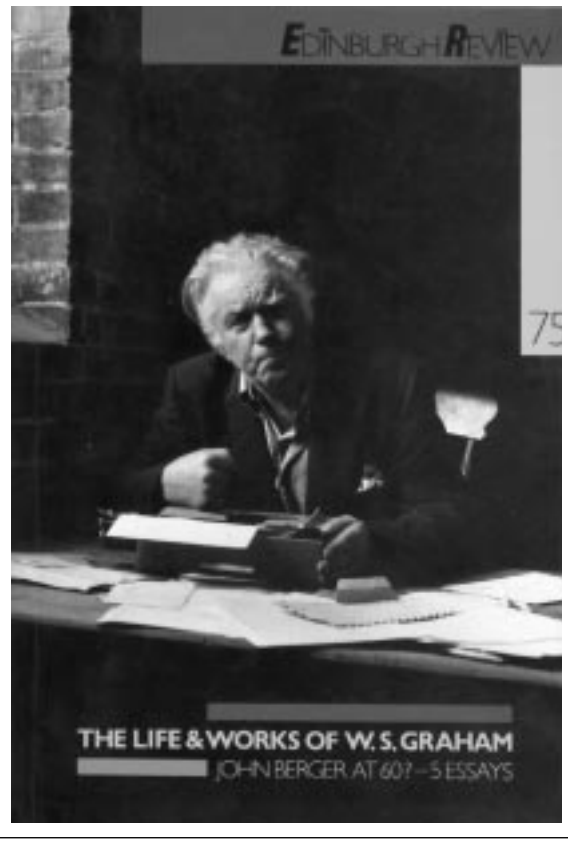
SEX SHOCKERS ON SCHOOL'S READING LIST

and continued with reference to 'dirty books' and 'classroom porn shockers'. In response to the action of a retired chemistry teacher on the Johnstone High School board five books were removed from the library's shelves for sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds. The books were *A Chancer* and *Greyhound for Breakfast* by James Kelman; *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker; *The Cider House Rules* by John Irving and *Perfume* by Patrick Suskind. The reason given was that they contained obscene language and/or depictions of rape and/or child abuse and/or violence. As a follow-up the paper had sent copies of pages from these books to the Strathclyde Region's Director of Education who commented I am shocked and appalled... and taking urgent steps to ensure that they are not available to children anywhere in the region.'

The next day, under the headline

CLEAN UP AT PORN SCHOOL

The director of education commented: "It was utterly unacceptable that such filth should ever have become available in the first place." Subsequently, Robert Gould, the Leader of Strathclyde Region, told the school to take all post-1970 grown-up fiction off the shelves to be vetted. He was later quoted in a paper as saying "I'm not much of a reader. No one talks like that, f-ing and blinding all over the place. You can't use language like that in public; if I spoke like that I'd be f-ing hounded out of office.'



This is not that different from those who only want a rosy image of their city written or painted or filmed. A standard criticism from this direction in Scotland was trotted out during the 1990 Year of Culture and then for the film of *Trainspotting* and goes something like this: 'Yes I'm sure the book/film accurately represents life as it is lived for a proportion of the population, but to put this out as art or entertainment makes me feel uneasy. The book/film seems to condone all that is bad about our society. He needn't have written it because we see it every day in our streets and estates'.

Many newspapers still put in asterisks or dashes or blanks when they take exception to what is simply language. The *Glasgow Herald* would print stories in censored versions—removing the words from view and leaving nothing in their place—even after guarantees to the author. These writers were too important for the paper to be seen to be ignoring them but that didn't stop them doctoring the language. Several anthologies published with the school market in mind have obviously gone out of their way to pick a Kelman story or a Leonard poem with no language they don't like in it. The radio stations in Scotland still omit words without bleeping them: "Well,' they seem to be saying, 'would you prefer not to have your story broadcast at all?'

The *Scots Magazine* got one thing right and that is the connection between the so-called culprits. Duncan McLean has said, only half jokingly, that he sees himself as the missing link between Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Kelman. McLean may come from rural Aberdeenshire but he has written about life in and around Edinburgh in a way that would simply not have happened unless he had come across Kelman's *Not Not While The Giro* and *The Busconductor Hines*. Some Scots do not believe a book is worth reading unless it has been praised in London. It often has to be published there as well. Bill Forsyth said his film *Gregory's Girl* was not given a proper cinema release in Scotland until it had the seal of approval from London. Many journalists, broadcasters and academics north of the border poured scorn on Kelman's experimentation and use of language until *A Disaffection* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

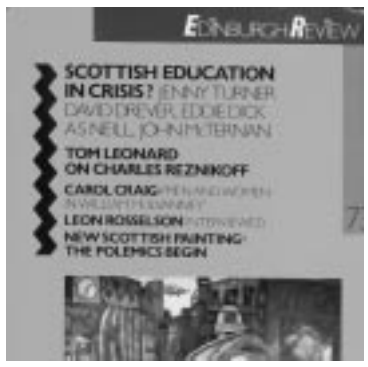
Whereas Kelman looked to America and Europe for a literary tradition, McLean, together with Gordon Legge, Alan Warner and Irvine Welsh and to a lesser extent Janice Galloway and A. L Kennedy—have been influenced by Kelman and Gray, in part for their tenacity and in part for formal and technical breakthroughs in their use of language. McLean says, "When *The Busconductor Hines* came out in 1984 it just blew my mind. It was the voice. For the first time I was reading a book about the world I lived in. I didn't know literature could do that." Welsh also credits Kelman with "setting the whole thing out so that people like myself can have more fun." A. L Kennedy has said that people like John Byrne, Tom Leonard and James Kelman "made my generation of writers possible ... gave us permission to speak ... made us more ourselves—gave us the reality, life and dignity that art can at a time when anything other than standard English and standard address was frowned upon."

The Busconductor Hines, Kelman's first published novel did not reach the Booker Prize shortlist. However, Richard Cobb (the chairman of the judges), did express his shock that 'one of the novels seemed to be written entirely in Glaswegian' as if that was enough to pass judgement on it. Anne Smith, editor of the (then Edinburgh-based) *Literary Review* said of it, 'Who wants to read 300 pages about the life of a busconductor where nothing much happens anyway?' When Kelman won the Booker Prize for *How Late It Was, How Late*, Simon Jenkins of *The Times* said the Booker Prize judges were glorifying a noble savage, a glib and conde-

scending way of sidelining work that disturbs.

The *Edinburgh Magazine* once described Burns as 'a striking example of native genius bursting through the obscurity of poverty and the obstructions of laborious life.' The same sentiments in more modern language greeted many of these writers on their first publication. More than a few of them have been described in profiles as coming from non-literary backgrounds, using Leith or Grangemouth or Gorbals or whatever argot, dialect, patois or demotic. Most critics go to extraordinary lengths to avoid using the word 'language'. The result is that writers are marginalised outside a constructed literary canon, built by those who think middle class people in the English home counties have no accent whatsoever. Similarly, when Alasdair Gray gets described as 'eccentric' critic and reader can collude in not taking his political or historical arguments seriously.

In 1985, Douglas Dunn concluded his *Glasgow Herald* review of Kelman's *A Chancer* with a plea for a good middle class novel set in the west of Scotland. Things have come a long way from the day when Neil Gunn, writing in the same newspaper nearly fifty years before, wrote that 'Glasgow needs a working class novel written from the inside'. Elsewhere, in his *Oxford Book of Scottish Short Stories*, Dunn talks of the 'bruising candour' of Kelman and McLean. His argument is that just as in the nineteenth century many Scottish writers escaped into writing kailyard (cabbage patch) stories of rural idylls, so now unfortunately, the emphasis on urban working-class stories can appear to be as exaggerated as the agrarian stresses of the past.' He goes on to refer to Alasdair Gray's "eccentric, astonishing intelligence" ... "the politicised demotic challenge of James Kelman" and "feminist purposes of Janice Galloway."



These are writers from a country where more people leave or die than stay or arrive. Scotland's biggest export in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been people. The net emigration that has been happening for most of this century stopped abruptly at the end of the 1980s. Now less Scots are leaving and more are coming back. The Public Record Office in Edinburgh has so many archives and exhibitions on the theme of emigration that it should consider changing its name to The Museum of Those That Went Away. Jim Sillars, the main force behind the breakaway nationalist Scottish Labour Party in the late 1970s, has made the point that "going to Canada or Australia or Rhodesia or into the armed forces was an accepted fact of life. If you wanted to get on then you had to get out."

The Scots, like the Jews and the Irish, are a small nation dispersed all over the world. They form a higher-than-average proportion of Interpreters, mediators, football managers, athletics coaches and translators. Great writing was found at the margins amongst Scottish translators like Willa and Edwin Muir (Kafka), C. K. Scott-Moncrieff (Proust), Alastair Reid (Borges), Hamish Henderson (Holderlin and Gramsci), Stuart Hood (Pasolini, Buzzati and Busi) and Edwin Morgan (just about everyone).

Emigration is a theme that appears in the fiction of many contemporary Scottish writers. In Thomas Healy's *It Might have been Jerusalem*, Rab is looking for somewhere to live and a job and the conversation turns inevitably to where to go to achieve his aim: 'tae London,' he tells his friend. Renton in *Trainspotting* says: 'Ah huv tae get oot ay Leith, oot ay Scotland. For good. Right away, no jist doon tae London fir six months.' The impossibility of staying and the difficulty of leaving is a constant refrain in Kelman's fiction. In *A Chancer* John asks Tammas:

Ever thought about emigrating?

Emigrating? Course.

Whereabouts?

Any fucking place!

And in *How Late It Was, How late*, Sammy Samuels tells his son Peter:

I'm thinking of heading.

Aw da.

Back to England

Da.

Trying to get a job and that ye know?

In 1983 a book was published in France entitled *L'Ecosse: une nation sans stat*. A year later, *Invisible Country* by James Campbell was published in London. He visits his native Scotland to discover why he had left the place a couple of years before. He gave it that title—which infuriated reviewers in Edinburgh and Glasgow at the time—because he felt that at the heart of the place was a political void. These were the years immediately after the 'failure' of the referendum on devolution. Campbell wrote that 'in this queer stagnation, prospects for a thriving modern literature are pretty dismal'. Allan Massie's novel, *One Night in Winter*, came out in the same year as Campbell's travel book. In it, Ebenezer exclaims that Scotland is a 'withered culture'. He says, 'Let Scotland be as independent as they wish, it will not alter the fact that there's little ... to keep talent here. Of course a political framework would retain a few—but how many?'

Both echo the 1936 essay 'Scott and Scotland', where Edwin Muir argued that the writer who wants to stay in Scotland and add to the culture 'Will find there, no matter how long he may search neither an organic community to round off his conceptions nor a literary tradition to support him! Any writer working in Scotland today certainly has the community and tradition to draw on for support. Alasdair Gray has said that during the 1950s and most of the 1960s the only writers living in Glasgow he knew were Joan Ure and Archie Hind. In the years that have passed a lot has changed. An outsider reading some of the new writing coming out of Scotland could be forgiven for thinking that independence had already come. Cultural self-determination is assumed like never before in the nation's history.

Maybe it's because of size that Scotland works well as a literary centre. People can meet face to face relatively easily. Through the Hobsbaum group, the Print Studio Press, readings at the Third Eye Centre, and the small magazines, writers met one another frequently for mutual support and disagreement. This happened more in Glasgow than in Edinburgh. Some hostility between the two cities remains even though they are only 45 minutes apart by train. Glasgow is a large city, but at any one time there tended to be half a dozen pubs where people connected with literature could meet for a chat. This helped to create a context outside the institutions of higher education and away from the distractions of London, where writing could be talked about in full seriousness.

"There is very little written, acted, composed, surmised and demanded in Scotland which does not in some strand descend from the new beginning he made."

Leader, *The Scotsman*, 9th September 1978, after the death of Hugh MacDairmid

Scottish writers often employed an alias. Hugh MacDiarmid was born Christopher Murray Grieve, George Douglas published as George Douglas Brown. James Leslie Mitchell used the pen-name Lewis Grassic Gibbon. Robert Sutherland called himself Robert Garioch. Thomas Douglas Macdonald wrote as Fionn MacColIa and Morris Blythman as Thurso Berwick. If such a distancing mechanism was necessary for them to write in a free way, others sought geographical space. There was Alexander Trocchi (who had written *Young Adam* and some hack pornography under the pseudonym *Frances Lengel*) in Paris and New York, W. S. Graham in Cornwall. Muriel Spark in New York and Rome, Alastair Reid in New York and the Dominican Republic and Alan Sharp in Los Angeles and then New Zealand.

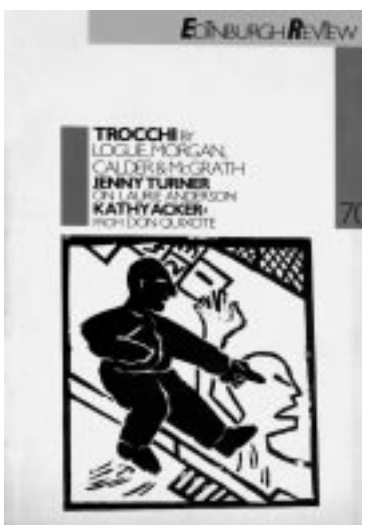
MacDiarmid had a memorable face off with Alexander Trocchi during the International Writer's Conference at the 1962 Edinburgh Festival. This was organised by the publisher John Calder who invited seventy writers from twenty countries. Trocchi had lived outside Scotland for many years and was familiar to the authors attending from France and America but was little known in the country of his birth. The debate came to an operatic climax when he said that anything that had any merit in the Scottish Literature of the preceding twenty years had been written by him. MacDiarmid countered by calling him 'cosmopolitan scum'. Trocchi replied, 'I am only interested in lesbianism and sodomy'.

Americans, including William Burroughs and Henry Miller, lined up in support of Trocchi and East European Communist Party writers backed MacDiarmid. On the surface this could be read as Trocchi the internationalist versus MacDiarmid the nationalist, or modernist versus traditionalist. Yet MacDiarmid had experimented with language in his poetry and drawn on sources from all over the world. Maybe their differences were more cultural and generational: beatnik and bard, heroin and malt whisky, black polo-neck and tweed tie. Thirty-five years on the division seems to endure with Irvine Welsh calling Trocchi 'a Scottish George Best of literature' and MacDiarmid 'a symbol of all that's perfectly hideous about Scotland.' The problem may lie not so much with MacDairmid as with those that cling only to his aura.

For most of the twentieth century, there was such a lack of debate in Scottish letters that MacDiarmid would start arguments with himself changing his mind from month to month as if only to open up areas to debate. In making all this noise he was being more deliberate than most thought. He once wrote that what Scottish literature needed most was bulk. MacDiarmid spoke at times as if he was the country personified, the embodiment of the spirit of Scotland. At the age of seventy-two he told his friend George Bruce that he felt his job had always been

'to erupt like a volcano emitting not only a flame but a lot of rubbish'

He certainly kept his foot in the door when those outside were trying to slam it shut.



A by-product of this massive effort to hold Scottish literary culture up and protect it from all comers was firstly to prioritise poetry at the cost of fiction, and secondly, to prioritise MacDiarmid in front of everybody else. After his death it was not always easy to get close to his work. MacDairmid's own words about Burns in 'A Drunk Man Looks At the Thistle' could well be applied to himself:

'Mair nonsense has been uttered in his name

Than in ony's barrin liberty and Christ'.

Young male disciples and sycophants created an aura around his life and work which meant you inevitably came to it with massive preconceptions either in favour or against. A cultural magazine—Cencrastus—was named after one of his poems and a book of tributes was published called, not surprisingly, *The Age of MacDiarmid*. For writers interviewed in the early 1980s an early question would be, 'What do you think of MacDiarmid's poem about or essay on... ?' Especially after the 'failure' of the devolution referendum his legacy was a lifeboat for young men. Now, his halo has receded and it is possible to appreciate his writing free from encumbrances. It is hard to exaggerate the influence of his personality on those around him. At his funeral Norman MacCaig said that MacDiarmid would walk into his mind 'as if it were a town and he a torchlight procession of one.' Seven years later when signing a copy of his own collected poems he at first wrote 'Hugh MacDiarmid', crossing it out just before he reached the end of the surname. He was a standing stone that cast a large shadow. For several decades Scottish literature appeared to the world as a group of male poets sitting round a table covered in malt whiskies in The Abbotsford Bar in Edinburgh. A writer only got admitted if one of them died. And if you weren't a poet you might as well wait at the door. For three decades or more Scottish Literature was Scottish Poetry, and Scottish poetry was claimed by Edinburgh. The poets met in Edinburgh in one of three literary bars after a reading. The atmosphere is best captured in a classic, often reproduced, photograph of Hugh MacDiarmid, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Norman MacCaig and Douglas Young, cigarette in one hand, malt in the other. The scene has become something of an archetype—also appearing in a novel, a painting and being echoed by more recent photographs of writers. In Alasdair Gray's 1982 Janine Jock McLeish goes into a basement bar in Hanover Street for a pie and a pint:

'The bar was crowded except where three men stood in a small open space created by the attention of the other customers. One had a sombre pouchy face and upstanding hair which seemed too like thistledown to be natural, one looked like a tall sarcastic lizard, one like a small sly shy bear. "Our three best since Burns," a bystander informed me, "barring Sorley of course."

I nodded as if I knew what he meant then went out and bought a picturecard view of the castle.'

In his painting *Poet's Pub* (also the title of an Eric Linklater novel) Alexander Moffat merged three drinking places—Milo's Bar, The Abbotsford and the Cafe Royal—into one. It formed the centrepiece of the 1981 exhibition 'Seven Poets' and he put MacDiarmid in the middle of a single canvas with lain Crichton Smith, George Mackay Brown, Edwin Morgan, Sorley MacLean, Norman MacCaig and Robert Garioch. In hindsight this mythic combination marked the end of an era where poetry eclipsed prose, Edinburgh lorded it over Glasgow and women were left outside the pub of Scottish literature. The idea that you could fit Scotland's best writers round one table is inconceivable now. Yet a sincere attempt was made in 1995 when the New Yorker sent Richard Avedon to Glasgow to capture Scotland's best in a single posed team shot at the Clutha Vaults, a pub in the East End of Glasgow. In the sixteen years between Moffat's painting and Avedon's photograph the public landscape of Scottish writing has changed beyond recognition.

A few months later the *New York Times* magazine had a reporter set up a similar scene in Robbie's Bar in Leith. The piece appeared with the headline 'the Beats of Edinburgh' and the subheadline 'from the margins of Scottish society comes a new, beer-soaked, drug-filled, profanity-laced, violently funny literature.'

Scotland doesnae mean much tae Glesca folk

Robert McLeish, The Gorbals Story (1948)

There was no feeling of being Scots. I was from Greenock and that was different even from being from the Port or Greenock or Glasgow.

Bill Bryden (1977)

James Kelman's autobiographical note to the Three Glasgow Writers anthology (published by Molendinar Press in 1976) reads:

I was born and bred in Glasgow

I have lived most of my life in Glasgow

It is the place I know best

My language is English

I write

In my writings the accent is in Glasgow

I am always from Glasgow and I speak English always

Always with this Glasgow accent

This is right enough

In 1982 his story 'Not Not While the Giro' was published in Penguin's first *Firebird* anthology. Contributors provided sixty- or seventy-word author biographies. He wrote:

James Kelman is a citizen of Glasgow. In the pages that follow about a third of the writers are from Glasgow. When my first issue as editor of Edinburgh Review came out at the end of 1984, the reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement said that there were so many writers from the west of Scotland it should be renamed the Glasgow Review. If there was a scepticism of centralised power in London, there was barely less suspicion of the power that Edinburgh presumed itself to have. To much of the outside world Glasgow was still a city of murderers and drunks.

This image had started to change through new representations of the place by writers and artists. The city fathers sought to accelerate the process by paying public relations experts vast amounts of money to dream up rapturous tautologies like 'Glasgow's Glasgow' and 'Glasgow European City of Culture' and 'What's Glasgowing On' and 'Glasgow's Miles Better'. The latter was trying to point out that Glasgow was smiling again (the decline of heavy industry made for cleaner air but massive unemployment) and that it was miles better than Edinburgh. When the slogan was booked by an ad agency for the side of Edinburgh's maroon buses, the capital's politicians refused permission at the last minute.

While many Glasgow writers see themselves as natives of that city first and of Scotland second, the city's burghers have been far from happy to take them on board. A member of the Festivals Office during Glasgow's year as European City of Culture was asked by a journalist why so few writers were involved. He told him that:

'The writers were too difficult to work with'.

A piece in the *New York Review of Books* by expatriate historian Gordon Craig took the side of the writers. This was followed swiftly by a long letter from Glasgow City Council leader Pat Lally rubbishing his argument. When the city fathers have included them it has been in a belittling fashion. In 1995 Glasgow's Department of Performing Arts distributed a lavish colour brochure consisting of folding out posters in four languages. I picked up my copy on the Gourock ferry. The section entitled 'Glasgow People' is so awful it is worth reproducing in its entirety:

Glaswegians prefer life lived on the verge of the surreal. Theirs is a gallows humour - exuberant, extravagant, grotesque but sparkling like the sun on frosty glass. As Ken Dodd put it 'the trouble with Sigmund Freud was that he never had to play the Glasgow Empire on a Saturday night' It could have changed history.

Look at some of the people GLASGOW has produced.

James Watt

Lord Lister Lord Kelvin Tobias Smollett James Bridle

James Kelman Jimmy Maxton Billy Connolly

Liz Lochhead Charles Rennie Mackintosh

Peter Howson

SOME TEAM! as Glaswegians might say! But Glaswegians are prone to talk about themselves in a language that could bamboozle visitors.

During this promotional hubbub Edwin Morgan commented that 'it's much harder to write about central Glasgow today, which has had its face lifted—this doesn't give rise to feelings from which poems come.' A lifetime of being ignored, spoken for, used and abused and patronised would be hard enough for one person to bear. The city of Glasgow was done in by England and Scotland... and by the burghers of Glasgow.

On the frontispiece of Book One of *Lanark*, Alasdair Gray rewrote the Glasgow city motto. Instead of

'Let Glasgow flourish by preaching the word'

it reads

'Let Glasgow flourish by telling the truth.'

The truth about Glasgow is that it has the highest density of lung cancer, heart problems, suicides and alcohol use in western Europe. In Jeff Torrington's story 'The Sink" Brogan tells Jordan that his neighbour has been sent home from hospital as incurable: 'Liver's like a chunk of cardboard. An alky. Telling you, if they cremate him he'll burn for a fortnight!' In Torrington's novel *Swing Hammer Swing* Burnett suggests to Clay that a Gorbals House of History should be erected. Clay muses to himself that 'at Sales Points patrons would be able to purchase wee model slums that tinkled "I Belong Tae Glesca" when their roofs were raised.'

Fuckin failures in a country of failures. It's nae good blamin it oan the English for colonising us. Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can't even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by. No. We're ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the

fuckin low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation. Ah don't hate the English. They just git oan wi the shite thuv goat.

Ah hate the Scots.

from Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting (1993)

The Scottish National Party used this monologue by Renton for a recruitment form in September 1996. The Commission for Racial Equality received a complaint about it from a Labour Member of Parliament and it was referred to a lawyer who said that they might be in contravention of the Malicious Publications Act. The editor of *Chapman*, one of Scotland's literary periodicals that comes out most in favour of devolution and independence, has said,

'I'm not a patriot, Scotland's a rotten country.'

This berating of Scotland from within shows a new self-confidence. Scottish writers are more comfortable criticising their own country than ever before. This can only come from a degree of cultural security, moving beyond the see-saw of self-love (in the form of blind patriotism) and self-loathing. This was not the case twenty years ago.

During 1995, Mainstream Publishing had a runaway success with the guidebook *Scotland the Best*. A year later Canongate, another Edinburgh publisher, released its sequel *Scotland the Worst*, a clear sign of cultural health. Frank Kuppner sent a cycle of poems called 'Albanian Folk Songs' to the London Review of Books. The Scots-born editor asked why he was writing about a distant south-eastern European country and he had to point out that Alba was the Gaelic for Scotland. An interviewer once asked him, 'Kuppner—that's not exactly a Scottish name is it?' To which he replied, 'Well, it is now.'

Muriel Gray in her speech on being elected Rector of Edinburgh University said: 'I am no staunch defender of the couthy heedrum hodrum brand of marketable mock Scottishness.' She called her production company Gallus Besom. There used to be another called Big Star in a Wee Picture. When Duncan McLean was part of the Merry Mac Fun Co theatre company in the mid 1980s they wrote plays with titles like *Macattack* and *Psychoskanter*.

In the Highlands on the road to Fort Augustus there is a grey concrete litter bin on which someone has written in huge black letters the words TARTAN TOURS BOX OFFICE'. Football fans, rugby fans and pipers busking on Princes Street in Edinburgh or Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow now paint the Braveheart-trademark St Andrew's Cross on their faces as a humorous and powerful rather than nationally obedient gesture. 'Roam the globe, not the glens' screamed a recent advert for the newspaper *Scotland on Sunday*.

In 1981 Barbara and Murray Grigor organised an exhibition called Scotch Myths. They gathered ephemera—from shortbread tins to whisky bottles—which showed the whole range of representations of Scottish-ness. A recent promotional postcard from the British winemerchants Oddbins would have fitted nicely into their polemic. It highlights a range of rare malt whiskies 'bottled from precious and dwindling collections, each has been nurtured to perfection and carefully selected. Most are unlikely to be seen again.' This combines the two recurrent myths of visitors to rural Scotland. On the one hand it has some of the last stretches of wilderness left in Europe and somehow by peat bog through highland spring water we can sample this purity through a malt. On the other hand with more tourism and development you are less likely to be alone, or in the words of the Oddbins promo 'So small is each bottling that this may represent your first and last chance to see, let alone taste, them.' The reverse of the postcard has a Ralph Steadman drawing of three men with red hooked noses and beards leaning over a malt potstill, with the faces of two more like them wafting ghostlike into the air above the boiling pot.

For an insight into the competing myths that part of Scotland claims as its own, buy copies of *The Field* and *Country Life* in the month of August (the month the shooting season begins). Then look at the *Scots Magazine* with its ads for Burns paperweights, cassettes of music with titles like 'Blood in the Heart' and, understandably for a country that so many people leave, articles on tracing your Scottish ancestry by CDROM. They make odd bedfellows. What they have in common is a desire to keep Scotland as it was. Or as it never was.

As a nation we have what the Germans call eine unbewaltigte Vergangenheit—a past with which we haven't completely come to terms. (In this we are quite unlike the English, who have come to terms with their history so well that they have largely forgotten it.)

Hamish Henderson in the Scotsman (1966)

We have to become independent so that we become more Scottish and less anti-English.

Dick Gaughan (1995)

England player: You Scotch are just a shower of bloody animals. Scotland player: Aye, and don't you bloody well forget it.

(conversation reported between players at a Rugby international)

Scotland continues its fight for statehood in an era where nations are breaking up into ethnicities, satellite broadcasting and internet communication mock national boundaries, and individuals are united more by their enthusiasms than by the colour of their passports. Yet its intellectuals are broadening their parameters to cope with this. The historian Angus Calder says that you can be counted as Scots if you support one of the country's sporting teams. What nationality does that make a Chicago Bulls fan in Aberdeen (or Moscow for that matter)?

In 1994 a new cultural journal was launched called *Scotlands*. Its editorial foreword described the magazine as an atlas to the plural identities that form contemporary Scotland. When Alan Warner was interviewed in the style magazine *I-D* in a feature on young talent to watch for in 1995 he said, 'There are many Scotlands within Scotland. I wanted to capture the strangeness of the one I know.' This embracing of the plurality that is Scotland is a characteristic of the new writing coming from the country which goes way beyond a table in The Abbotsford Bar.

The relationship between Scotland and England is still commemorated from Jedburgh to Orkney in the annual 'Ba Game'. In a cross between the running with the bulls in Pamplona and the Eton wall game, a leather ball is moved through the streets. The 'ba' is said to represent an Englishman's head. Football matches between Scotland and England at Wembley were war by another name. Major pitch invasions followed the Scottish victories of 1967 and 1977. The Scottish National Party wanted to use footage of these in a political broadcast but were refused permission.

Scottish business embraced the Union because it offered access to riches to be mined, picked and exploited in the foreign lands throughout the British empire. The Scots were the empire's most loyal administrators, engineers, teachers, doctors and key missionaries, like David Livingstone. The image and reality of the Scot as the trusted subaltern lives on in characters like Scottie, the loyal servant in Star Trek As the empire began to decline, the English aristocracy, accelerating a process that began with Queen Victoria building Balmoral, turned ever larger parts of rural Scotland into the huge sporting estates which still constitute a third of the country's landmass. People were evicted from their homes for the sake of sheep and sport. What would the population of Scotland be now if the Highland Clearances had never happened?

While travelling around Scotland in 1995, the journalist George Rosie had a chance meeting with a senior English civil servant from Whitehall. As they sat in a hotel overlooking Ben Loyal and the hills of Sutherland, Rosie asked him why English governments have been so unwilling to hand Scotland back to the Scots. The official ticked the reasons off on his fingers:

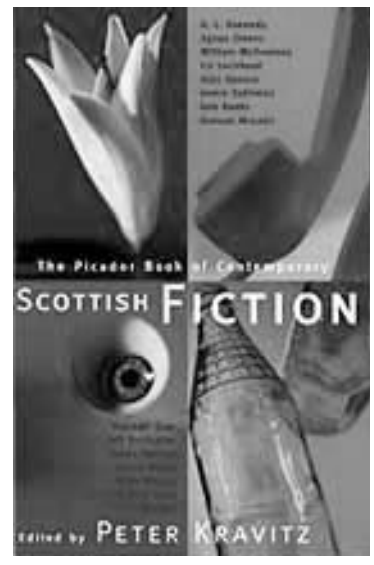
'One, oil. Two, gas. Three, fish. Four, water. Five, land. The oil and gas are self-explanatory, even now. Fish might not mean much to the British but it is a superb bargaining counter in Europe. Water will be important one day. I suspect. And as for all this [gesturing to the hills] well, this is our, how shall I say it, breathing space. That bit of elbow room that every country should have.'

There were clearances of another sort in the 1960s when planners and developers bulldozed tenements and sent the people up into modern but damp flats or to the new towns like Cumbernauld, Glenrothes or East Kilbride. In *Swing Hammer Swing* Jeff Torrington writes that:

'Whole tribes of Tenementers had gone off to the Reservations of Castlemilk and Toryglen or, like the bulk of those who remained, had ascended into Basil Spence's "Big Stone Wigwam in the Sky"'.

This was a time when—in the words of Burns Singer—Glasgow felt it was too big for its own boots and set about shaving down its foot to fit.

Scotland missed out on the great nation-building of the nineteenth century because the middle classes had such a good economic deal out of being England's junior partners in the empire. As the empire fell apart and former colonies won their independence, the Scots lost the foundation of their British identity. This led to the first real electoral impact of Scottish Nationalism in the late 1960s. Scotland would have been given back to the Scots by now had it not been for the discovery of North Sea oil. As the oil depletes, so does Scotland's chance of self-government increase. There is a strange dynamic at work here, though. The Scots have Scottish nationalism, the Welsh have Welsh nationalism, but English nationalism is about being British.



Scotland entered the Union with England in 1707 as some people enter an arranged marriage—without enthusiasm. David Black has said that

'She recognised in her partner qualities she needed to develop in herself, qualities of stability and tolerance.'

Now it may be too late for marriage guidance. As this relationship nears its end, the two countries require a course of separation counselling. The place can no longer be described, in the words of one Scot who edited an anthology in the early 1980s, as 'a nation which has lost much of its original culture and invented or romanticised more.' For the first time in centuries of insecurity and strife, Scotland has begun to stop defining itself by what it is not—England—and is with good humour facing up to what it is, both bad and good. Future generations will applaud the contribution which the writers played in this process.

A version of this text appears in the introduction to the Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Fiction