SHADES OF GRAY

Science Fiction, History and the Problem of Postmodernism in the Work of Alasdair Gray

Dietmar Böhnke

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Lieber Herr Galda,

hier sollten nun noch die richtige ISBN/ISSN, sowie die Eintragungen der LOC (und ggf. der BL) ergänzt werden. Bitte prüfen Sie auch noch die anderen Angaben!

Die Kennzeichnung als Diss. der Uni Leipzig ist wichtig.

Viele Grüße

Heiko Zimmermann

Die vorliegende Arbeit wurde von der Philologischen Fakultät der Universität Leipzig als Dissertation angenommen.

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LEIPZIG EXPLORATIONS IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE XI

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To my parents

Mir ist jede Farbe recht—Hauptsache, sie ist grau. (Bertolt Brecht)

"Aren't you sick of being a Post-Modernist?" asks a man from the colour supplement of a Sunday newspaper. He is famous for his articles on artistic topics because he refers knowingly to famous foreigners in a way suggesting that no intelligent Briton need bother with them. (Alasdair Gray, Something Leather*, 145)*

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations for works by Alasdair Gray will be used in quotations:

BP	*The Book of Prefaces* (2000)
HM	*A History Maker* (1994)
J	*1982, Janine* (1984)
L	*Lanark* (1981)
LT	*Lean Tales* (1985)
MB	*Mavis Belfrage* (1996)
PT	*Poor Things* (1992)
SL	*Something Leather* (1990)
US	*Unlikely Stories, Mostly* (1983)
WS	*Why Scots Should Rule Scotland 1997* (1997)

Personal Prologue

I started work on this project in 1996, and the study which follows was finally accepted as a doctoral dissertation by the University of Leipzig in 2002. My interest in Alasdair Gray's work, and in Scottish literature and culture, goes back further than that, however. Ultimately, my parents—to whom this book is dedicated—are to 'blame' for having enkindled in me a lasting love for 'English' literature and culture in the widest sense. As translators of literature, they were involved professionally but also enthusiastically with English-language culture at a time and place (in East Germany when it was the German Democratic Republic) where it was difficult and sometimes dangerous to get hold of some of the books from that other part of the world, and almost impossible to actually go there. They managed to do both, however, and shared their appreciation and enthusiasm for that foreign (at that time almost exotic) culture with me—and they have continued to support me in all imaginable ways (including my mother's struggling through the manuscript of this work). My debt and gratitude to them is really beyond words.

I suspect that my upbringing in the GDR and the first-hand experience of what we call the *Wende* here in Leipzig in 1989 might have made me even more sympathetic and alert to the Scottish condition and to the deeply humane qualities of Gray's writing, as well as its ironies and ambiguities. Above all, the changes came at exactly the right time for me to be able, unlike my parents, to spend a period of my studies in Scotland. During my time at Glasgow University in 1992, I finally got that first-hand experience of Scottish culture and certainly got 'infected' with an enthusiasm for Scottish literature that has not left me since. This is in no small degree thanks to my teachers there at the Department of Scottish Literature, in particular Douglas Gifford, Margery Palmer McCulloch and Christopher Whyte. The congenial atmosphere at the Department and the openness and friendliness of the staff and students have made it a pleasure to return there several times during the past few years and to meet and talk to other Gray enthusiasts, among them Johanna Tiitinen and Kirsten Stirling as well as Eilidh Whiteford. It was a particular pleasure and honour for me to be able to get into contact with Alasdair Gray himself and to meet him twice in his Glasgow home (in 1998 and 1999 respectively). He was extremely open and kind and shared

his time and opinions freely in writing as well as in conversation (cf. the Epilogue for some of his reactions to my questions and comments). He also kindly permitted me to use and quote from his work and letters as I saw fit, including the reproduction of his drawings. Most of all, I would simply like to thank him for his wonderful work, which I—along with countless other people—so admire. Without being adulatory or losing a scholar's critical distance, I would like to see this study also as my own personal tribute to the power and influence his writings have had over my own thinking and development (even though I am sure that he will be very sceptical about many of my findings and statements, as can be seen in some of his comments in the Epilogue). And last but not least, I still *enjoy* reading his work after all those years—how much this means will be appreciated by any literary critic or scholar who has ever worked for several years about one single writer.

It would be wrong to give the impression that Scotland and Glasgow were the only or even the central motivation and inspiration for the conception of this study and for my academic development in general. After all, I have only ever spent some ten months there, spread over several years. My hometown Leipzig with its rich history and vibrant culture has always been the centre of my personal and intellectual development, and the people and atmosphere at the English Department of its nearly 600-year-old university were instrumental in shaping this project. I have been connected with the Department for 15 years now, first as a student and now as a lecturer, and have come to think of it not so much as simply a workplace but as an intellectually stimulating meeting place of open-minded and exceptionally affable colleagues, scholars and friends. Above all, Elmar Schenkel, who guided and supervised the work on my PhD thesis, has been a continuous inspiration. Through his enormously wide-ranging (and in many ways ex-centric) interests and reading as well as his writings, lectures, courses and conversations, he has opened my eyes and mind for many new topics and connections. He was particularly influential in my becoming interested in science fiction, and questions of science and literature more generally. I am also grateful for the opportunity to publish this study in the series *Leipzig Explorations in Literature and Culture*, which he co-edits with Stefan Welz. There is also in this Department an unusually comprehensive scholarly interest in Scottish language and literature,

history and culture, epitomised by the Professor for British Cultural Studies, Joachim Schwend. He had guided the work on my earlier project about James Kelman (published as volume 3 in this series in 1999) and was always helpful with his expertise during this one, as well as enabling me to work as a lecturer in his sub-department. In this context, I would also like to thank Gustav Klaus of the University of Rostock for his comments on my thesis. Here at Leipzig University, there were and still are a great number of other people whose company and conversation I have greatly enjoyed and from whose ideas I have profited, including Alexandra Lembert, Jürgen Ronthaler, Betsy van Schlun, Ines Sobanski, Kathleen Starck, Silke Strickrodt, Stefan Welz, and not least Graham Welsh who cast a critical eye on the language of this text written by a non-native (all remaining mistakes and blunders are entirely mine, of course). Another vital source of support was the *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes*, which made the whole project possible in the first place by awarding me a scholarship in the years 1996-99, and whose social and intellectual network I also greatly profited from. Last but not least, my heartfelt thanks are due to my wife Valeska, who accompanied and supported me on this long journey from the very beginning (in more than one sense) in Glasgow in 1992 to the 24-hour working days of the final phase, and with her inimitable creative talent made the following celebrations so memorable.

Since I have called this a personal prologue rather than simply and prosaically Acknowledgements, I would like to make a few remarks on the following text as I see it now, more than two years after it was completed. The most controversial aspect about it is certainly the use of the term postmodernism, in general as well as specifically in relation to Gray's work. I have never been and still am not a 'postmodernist', nor do I simply call Alasdair Gray one. Indeed, as will be obvious from this study, I have been struggling with the term and concept (as far as it exists) from the very beginning, and more than once thought about dropping this terminology altogether, or at least inventing a different term for Gray's 'peculiar postmodernism'. In the end, for reasons that should be clear from what follows, I decided for keeping it as a central if problematic concept for approaching Gray's work. I am aware that some people (Gray himself certainly among them) will dislike my use of this term in connection

to his (or perhaps any) writing. I would like to use this opportunity to ask those readers to pay attention to my own critical distance and careful use of the term rather than rejecting its very use from the beginning. Also, they might want to concentrate more on the two middle chapters on science fiction and history, which are less directly concerned with the postmodern problem (although related to it), and which also contain most of my direct discussion of Gray's texts. Some might even want to entirely skip the first theoretical chapter, since this is perhaps the part that reminds one most of the fact that this book has grown from a PhD thesis (I do think it is an important basis to the following discussion, though).

With this, I have already ventured upon the question of the inevitable time lapse between writing and publishing. Although I have revised the text for publication and updated the bibliography and the occasional comment or footnote, I could not and did not want to rewrite it completely, so that the bulk of it remains as it was written before and including 2001. This means that all books published after mid-2001 (including Gray's latest short story collection, *The Ends of Our Tethers*) could only sketchily be incorporated and that other recent developments might have escaped my notice. Concerning the question of postmodernism, I feel that the past few years have only reinforced the feeling that the more extreme claims of postmodernism are being toned down and that a certain compromise or middle position is gaining ground (cf. e.g. Stierstorfer 2003). Lastly, a word on the texts by Gray that I am focusing on in this study: they are the novels *Lanark* (1981), *Poor Things* (1992) and *A History Maker* (1994), together with a few remarks on some of his short stories and several of the other works. I could certainly have included more about *Something Leather* and *1982, Janine*, especially concerning the postmodern theme. However, I felt that the other three novels best combined the three aspects I am mainly interested in (science fiction, history, postmodernism), and also that in this case restriction is perhaps an advantage, especially since several other books on Gray attempt to survey a much more comprehensive selection of works (e.g. Whiteford 1997, Bernstein 1999, Jansen 2000 and Tiitinen 2004). Let me conclude this prologue with a reference to the series editors' preface by expressing my hope that this study may contribute to the project of breaking out of unproductive oppositions, specifically

between 'theory' and 'literature', and that it bears witness to my attempt to combine academic knowledge with passion and curiosity.

Introduction: Investigating Shades of Gray

The year 2004 marks the seventieth birthday of Alasdair Gray, one of Scotland's foremost writers and now widely seen as the grand old man behind the recent Scottish literary and cultural revival that preceded and accompanied the political developments which led to the (re-)establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Without doubt, Gray is one of the most original and fascinating literary figures currently at work in the United Kingdom. With almost twenty works—mainly novels and short stories—published in as many years he has established a reputation as an experimental, 'postmodern' writer, who freely mixes realism with fantasy, social and political commentary with parody and playfulness, local concerns with universal issues, humour and irony with a serious message. He is also known for illustrating and designing his books in his own unmistakable style, and for his strong opinions on questions of local (i.e. concerning Glasgow) and national (i.e. Scottish) politics and identity. While he is recognised as one of the leading present-day writers in Scotland, he is much less well-known south of the border. On the Continent, his reputation is all but limited to a small group of people interested in Scottish literature and culture, although several of his books have been translated, e.g. into German. Gray's work has long been discovered as a promising and rewarding object of investigation in contemporary literary studies, but I would posit that there are many facets or 'shades' of Gray that clearly merit closer study, some of which have as yet received little critical attention.

The present book therefore proposes a fresh approach to Gray's work, which the title already outlines.[1] First, it highlights one of the

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[1] I have to acknowledge at least two prior uses of the phrase "Shades of Gray" in connection with the work of Alasdair Gray, even if I was not aware of them when I decided on the title of my study: Eilidh Whiteford entitled her introduction to *Political Histories, Politicised Spaces: Discourses of Power in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray* (1997) thus, and an article by Janice Galloway on her reading of *Lanark* is likewise called

hitherto little-studied aspects, the science-fiction element. Though this is among my main interests here and serves to delimit the scope of the study with regard to the choice of novels for analysis, it is by no means the only aspect investigated—nor, it should be added, do the works analysed fit the concept unambiguously. Another central aim is to put Gray's work in the wider context of contemporary literary and cultural theory, with the intention of contributing to an appreciation of its significance beyond the confines of 'Scottish studies'. Significantly, the study of Gray's writing will itself cast a shadow—or rather light—on that context as well as vice versa. The title "Shades of Gray" also encapsulates one of the findings of this study and a vital strand of the analysis: the importance of complexity, pluralism and difference, even of contradiction; the necessity to be aware of 'shades of grey' as opposed to black-and-white explanations, and to eschew monolithic/hegemonic 'discourses' in favour of sometimes paradoxical but arguably morally and politically superior complex or multilateral views.[2]

Gray's Work and Its Critical Reception

Alasdair Gray was born in Glasgow in 1934 where he has lived and worked ever since. He took a degree in mural painting and design from the Glasgow School of Art and went on to work—mostly freelance—as a painter, arts teacher and writer (mainly of plays for

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"Shades of Gray: or Listening to the Oracle in Lanark" (1998). There is also a book about Glasgow entitled *Shades of Grey: Glasgow 1956-1987* (Oscar Marzaroli and William McIlvanney, Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1987).

[2] The connotations of the title of this study could be extended to include Gray's black-and-white line drawings, which are such a distinctive feature of his books, as well as the drab or 'grey' existence that so many people lead in contemporary Glasgow and elsewhere—an aspect with which Gray is also concerned in his works.

stage, radio and television).[3] With the publication of his first full-length work of fiction, the novel *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*, in 1981 he achieved immediate recognition as one of Scotland's most important contemporary writers, and his reputation has been strengthened (if perhaps recently somewhat eclipsed by the greater fame and success—also commercially—of younger Scottish writers such as James Kelman, Irvine Welsh or A.L. Kennedy) with the subsequent publication of four more novels, two novellas, five volumes of short stories, a collection of (literary) prefaces and a few smaller works, most of which are illustrated and designed by himself. Gray is now commonly seen in Scottish literary criticism as the grand old man behind the 'new literary Renaissance' in Scotland since the late 1970s and early '80s. This 'new Renaissance' is indeed often explicitly linked with the publication of *Lanark*.[4] However, the reception outside Scotland has generally been much slower or perhaps more hesitant in acknowledging the quality and scope of his work, and Gray does not figure prominently in most surveys of post-war British fiction. This is one of the motivations of this study, which sets out to put Gray's work in the context of contemporary British literature as well as of wider developments in contemporary theory.

It would be wrong to say that Gray's work has not been noticed outside Scotland, however. Indeed, it has sometimes been used as one (even prototypical) example of postmodern fiction, either for Britain or even for the English-speaking world at large (cf. e.g. Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction*, Alison Lee's *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction*, and Stephen Baker's *The Fiction of Postmodernity*). Nevertheless, it is also true that these are fairly isolated cases and that there is a curious antipathy to the postmodern label in 'traditional', mainly Scottish, criticism of Gray's writing.

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[3] For more information on Gray's life cf. e.g. Charlton 1988 +1991, Jansen 2000, Moores 2002, as well as Gray's own comments especially in Gray 1988. See also my treatment of *Lanark* in chapter 4.

[4] Cf. e.g. Gifford 1990, 1996 + 1999, Walker 1996 and Wallace/Stevenson 1993, especially the introduction. See also footnote 15 below.

Moreover, there can be no doubt that in Britain Gray's work is nowhere near enjoying the recognition it has gained in Scotland. In Malcolm Bradbury's *The Modern British Novel* (1994), which treats many contemporary writers in some detail, he gets all of four lines. He is allocated one paragraph in Clive Bloom and Gary Day's *Literature and Culture in Modern Britain, 1956-1999* (2000), and in other surveys he is not mentioned at all.[5]

Studying the work of a living writer, needless to say, has its pitfalls. As Alasdair Gray is still actively producing books, there cannot be any final statement on his work as a whole, and some findings may lay themselves open to being refuted by a future work or statement by Gray. However, if this is taken for granted, there are many reasons for undertaking such a study at this moment. In *The Modern British Novel*, Malcolm Bradbury talks of a "relative neglect of the post-war period" in literary theory [xi] and remarks that despite the fact that "the post-war period has been a quite remarkable and productive one [it is still] insufficiently talked about and recognized." [xii] In the Scottish context, too, the 'first' Scottish literary Renaissance of Hugh MacDiarmid and others in the interwar years has traditionally received much more attention than the 'second' one from the 1970s on, which is called by some the 'real' Renaissance [cf. Gifford 1990].[6] Moreover, the present point in time offers itself as a

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[5] In my opinion, the most glaring of these omissions is in M. Keith Booker's *The Modern British Novel of the Left: A Research Guide* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1998), which duly mentions James Kelman, for example. One reason for this could be the difficulty of pinning down Gray's political convictions because of the playfulness and constant ambiguity inherent in his works. However, as H. Gustav Klaus and others have shown, there are clear indications of his socialist democratic values to be found in his books (cf. e.g. Klaus 1993). These values will also be among my main themes in this study.

[6] For example, in volume 4 of *The History of Scottish Literature*, which is devoted to the twentieth century, there are only five or six essays (out of over twenty) which deal exclusively with the post-war period. [Craig 1987] This tendency was only recently reversed in the magisterial *Scottish*

particularly suitable moment to take stock, because of the changed political situation in Scotland. With the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 a long historical period has come to an end, and it can be hoped that a (partly) self-governing Scotland will be able to overcome some of the problems that this 'nation without a state' has suffered from, not least in the period after the failed devolution referendum of 1979 until the successful one in 1997. The two decades from c. 1980 to 2000 can therefore be seen as a discrete period for study, in politics and society as well as culture and literature.[7] It is this period on which I will be focusing in this study, because it is incidentally (or not) also the same time span in which all of Gray's major works to date were published—from *Lanark* (1981) to *The Book of Prefaces* (2000)—and in which most of the (post)modern developments that I am interested in became influential for English and Scottish literature. For Gray himself, too, the publication of *The Book of Prefaces* in 2000 seems to have marked the end of a period. As with his first published book *Lanark*, he had been working on it for almost two decades; it is just as monumental as the former, and—most conspicuously—it ends with exactly the same eight capitalised lines (printed in red in *The Book of Prefaces* and in bold print in *Lanark*), a prose poem of sorts:

> I STARTED MAKING MAPS WHEN I WAS SMALL
> SHOWING PLACE, RESOURCES, WHERE THE ENEMY
> AND WHERE LOVE LAY. I DID NOT KNOW
> TIME ADDS TO LAND. EVENTS DRIFT CONTINUALLY
> DOWN,
> EFFACING LANDMARKS, RAISING THE LEVEL, LIKE
> SNOW:

Literature [Gifford/Dunnigan/MacGillivray 2002], where the post-1945 period is given pride of place.

7 Several studies have taken the period of Conservative rule in Britain between 1979 and 1997 as their focus: cf. for example Wolfram Motz's investigation of constructions of identity in the Scottish novel during that era [Motz 2000].

> I HAVE GROWN UP. MY MAPS ARE OUT OF DATE.
> THE LAND LIES OVER ME NOW.
> I CANNOT MOVE. IT IS TIME TO GO.
> [L, 560; BP, 631]

It is difficult not to see this as having some kind of valedictory quality, especially when taking into account that Gray has recently remarked that he has no ideas for new fiction and that he would like to paint more, now that he can afford to do so.[8] He has, of course, in the meantime published a new volume of short stories in 2003, which underlines the need to be cautious in relation to Gray's own statements. Be this as it may, his work to date is surely extensive and varied enough to provide material for several volumes of criticism. I will not even pretend to deal with all that he has written so far, but select three novels for more detailed analysis below.

In any case, there exists already a body of criticism of Gray's work that few other contemporary Scottish writers can emulate. There are at least seven published book-length studies of his work, several special issues of literary journals, and numerous articles and chapters in scholarly publications. However, there are conspicuous gaps, as well as extensive emphases on recurrent single issues, such as Gray's 'Scottishness' or the role of Glasgow in his work. Two of the longer studies on Gray were published as long ago as 1991 (Witschi; Crawford/Nairn) and accordingly cover only the work of the 1980s and before (with a strong emphasis on *Lanark*), and one of the more recent studies (Jansen 2000) takes a rather curious approach—apart from being written in German—and only just manages to include *Poor Things* (1992).[9] One other recent study (Bernstein 1999) is

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8 It is in fact only since fairly recently that Gray has been able to live by his writing, also due to a pension he has been awarded. He has said in an interview that one of his greatest (probably not to be fulfilled) wishes was to paint a mural in the new building of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh (which is currently being erected), and he has also started to renovate some of his old murals in Glasgow. [cf. Bowditch 2000]

9 I was slightly perplexed by Carola M. Jansen's treatment of Gray's work in *Disnaeland: Die Welten und Mikrokosmen des Alasdair Gray*. Apart

perhaps the most extensive one to date, including all of Gray's novels up to *Mavis Belfrage* (1996). Theoretically speaking, Bernstein's book is fairly traditional in its approach, taking issues such as fantasy, realism, (counter-)history and memory as points of reference. It is attentive to symbolism and imagery in the novels as well as the underlying socio-political concerns. His reading makes for interesting insights and illuminates many less obvious details in the respective works. The individual chapters (one for each novel) are fairly self-contained, which makes it difficult at times to get a sense of the overall achievement of Gray and of the links and connections between his works. I have tried here, in contrast, to look at three of Gray's novels together, including the two most recent ones, in order to trace the same themes, concerns and aspects in all of them. I am also deliberately not attempting to avoid the issue of 'postmodernism'—as Bernstein does—because I think that despite all the problems that are inherent in the concept and despite Gray's own dislike of the term, it can be very useful in addressing the wider significance of Gray's work. This is important precisely because there is such a strong emphasis in criticism of his writing on Scottish (and Glaswegian) issues. This is absolutely legitimate and also necessary, given Gray's intense concern for Glasgow and Scotland,[10] but it can also be limiting

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from the strange title, the approach she takes seems to treat the protagonists of Gray's novels as real people, whose motivations and feelings are then analysed. The creative literary mediation hardly ever comes into consideration, apart perhaps from a strangely formalist introductory chapter on narratological structures. At times, this is a listing of (surface) elements of Gray's writing without any real conclusions being drawn from that (as far as I could see). Despite the date of publication, the analysis is also almost exclusively focused on Gray's writings until 1990. This is also reinforced by the otherwise useful chapter on Gray's life and work, based on the material in the National Library of Scotland, which becomes extremely cursory after 1990, including some obvious blunders (according to Jansen, Gray won the Booker Prize in 1992!).

[10] Most of Gray's works are set in Glasgow or at least Scotland and he is very concerned with local issues, as his criticism of the circumstances of Glasgow's year as Culture Capital of Europe in 1990 proves, which also influenced his novels *Something Leather* (1990) and *Poor Things*. His nationalist sympathies are equally well known, best expressed maybe in

if it becomes the dominant approach, and it sometimes obscures the more universal concerns and references in his work. This local/national focus is obvious in Beat Witschi's *Glasgow Urban Writing and Postmodernism*, even if he tries to show exactly Gray's transcendence of the Glasgow writing tradition through his postmodern literary techniques. It is also present in many of the essays in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray* (Crawford/Nairn 1991)—a very useful collection in most respects. The same holds true for some of the articles collected in special issues of literary journals, such as number 3 of *The Glasgow Review* (1995); volume 15, number 2 of *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (1995) or numbers 50-1 (1987) and 97 (2000) of *Chapman*. There is one more recent full-length study of Gray's work that I had the chance to read, which tries rather successfully to combine the local/national concerns with a wider theoretically informed approach: Eilidh Whiteford's *Political Histories, Politicised Spaces: Discourses of Power in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray* (1997). However, this study remains as yet unpublished.[11]

As I have pointed out in the prologue, the three most recent studies of Gray's work [Moores 2002, Juan 2003, Tiitinen 2004] came too late to have been properly incorporated in my analysis. While the

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his political pamphlet *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland* (1992; 1997) or in his campaigning for a 'Yes' vote before the devolution referendum in 1997.

[11] My latest information is that Dr Whiteford is preparing the study for publication with Manchester University Press. I am grateful to her for the permission to use the unpublished PhD thesis and quote from it in my study. My approach differs from hers in so far as I am trying to take a more detached view of the theoretical background (as far as possible) and concentrate on three novels throughout (she deals with almost all of Gray's fiction and usually concentrates on two or three texts in each chapter), as well as focusing on different aspects from hers. The underlying emphasis on politics and power as well as postmodern discourses, however, connects well with my own priorities.

collection of essays edited by Phil Moores contains many interesting and valuable contributions by diverse people (many of them writers in their own right, including Will Self, Jonathan Coe and Angus Calder), as well as Gray's own "Personal Curriculum Vitae" and an updated bibliography, it does not concentrate on the issues that I am mainly concerned with. By contrast, both Luis de Juan's *Postmodernist Strategies in Alasdair Gray's Lanark* and Johanna Tiitinen's *"Work as if You Live in the Early Days of a Better Nation": History and Politics in the Works of Alasdair Gray* focus on aspects which are close to my own priorities. Juan discusses *Lanark* in detail from a postmodern perspective and makes interesting comments on aspects such as metafiction, (personal) identity, ideology and politics that partly coincide with my own. However, apart from concentrating exclusively on Gray's first novel, it seems to me that he also neglects the problematisation of Gray's postmodernism and of postmodernism in general, which is one of my central concerns here. Tiitinen, on the other hand, is more sceptical about postmodernism and stresses the political and nationalist impulse in Gray's work. Her discussion of history in his writings is certainly much more comprehensive than mine, but there are also obvious parallels (since we have met several times over the past few years and discussed our views, this is not much of a surprise). In any case, because of the extensive coverage of the 'Scottish' aspect in criticism of Gray's work, I will somewhat neglect it in large parts of my study, coming back to it more explicitly only towards the end (it will still be present as an underlying theme, no doubt, and also come to the surface every now and again). Instead, as I have pointed out, I will try to gain a different perspective on his writings, one which perhaps takes only a small part of his work into consideration but which marks itself out in other ways from some of the existent criticism, maybe by taking an 'outsider's' view, which in turn may also be more 'international'.

Internationalising Scottish Studies

There is certainly a connection to be found between the stress put on issues of Scottishness by (mainly) Scottish literary critics today and the new vitality in Scottish literature and culture since the late 1970s.

Due to the neglect that Scottish literature has suffered as one of the 'regional' traditions that were subsumed under the great tradition of 'English Literature',[12] with only a few names and works being allowed into the 'English' canon, there has been a growing desire from the 1960s and '70s on to 'devolve' English literature and to see Scottish literature as one of the 'new literatures in English' that were beginning to develop all over the crumbling British Empire.[13] This understandably involved an emphasis on national characteristics in literature. Since the 1970s, but particularly in the 1980s and '90s, interest in the national literary tradition of Scotland has been growing, expressed not only by the publication of several surveys of Scottish literature[14] but also by the reprinting of largely forgotten or out-of-

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[12] T.S. Eliot's (in)famous question in a review in 1919, "Was There a Scottish Literature?" really says it all [cf. Craig 1987, 2]. Even today, the status of Scottish works among the 'classics' of literature in English is precarious. The recently completed "Everyman Millennium Project", in which sets of 250 books from Everyman's hardback classic series have been donated to every secondary school in the United Kingdom, included only four books by Scottish authors (one Hogg, one Scott, two Stevenson) [cf. Sutherland 2001].

[13] Cf. e.g. Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (^{2}2000). Scotland's position in this context is certainly ambiguous and has to be examined more closely and with care. I will come back to this aspect in the fifth chapter of this study.

[14] The first of these was probably F.R. Hart's by now almost classic *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (1978). It was followed by many overviews in the next two decades, among them A. Bold, *Modern Scottish Literature* (1983); T. Royle, *The Macmillan Companion to Scottish Literature* (1983); R. Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (1984); I. Murray/B. Tait (eds.), *Ten Modern Scottish Novels* (1984); H. Drescher/J. Schwend (eds.), *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Nineteenth Century* (1985); the four-volume *History of Scottish Literature*, ed. C. Craig (1988); J. Schwend/H. Drescher, *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century* (1990); G. Wallace/R. Stevenson (eds.), *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies* (1993); C. Whyte (ed.), *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature* (1995); S. Hagemann (ed.), *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present* (1996); M. Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707* (1996); D. Gifford/D. McMillan (eds.), *A History of Scottish*

print Scottish works (e.g. in Canongate's *Classics* series, started in the mid-1980s), by the intensification of academic research (cf. the foundation of the Department of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow) and by the promotion of talented new Scottish writers, also furthered by a newly autonomous Scottish Arts Council (from 1994). This is the context in which we have to see the 'new Renaissance' and Gray's exalted place in it.[15]

Recently, however, voices have been raised that demand a broader view, now that the field of Scottish literature and Scottish studies is

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Women's Writing (1997); C. Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (1999); C. Anderson/A. Christianson (eds.), *Scottish Women's Fiction, 1920s to 1960s* (2000); A. Christianson/A. Lumsden (eds.), *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (2000); D. Gifford/S. Dunnigan/A. MacGillivray (eds.), *Scottish Literature: In English and Scots* (2002). The same period also saw the foundation of several book series on Scottish studies outside Scotland, such as the *Scottish Studies (International)* series at Mainz/Germershein (Germany, from 1983) or the series *Études Écossaises* at Grenoble (France, from 1992).

15 Gray's importance for contemporary Scottish literature and the impact of *Lanark* in particular is stressed in most surveys of the field, e.g. in the introduction to Wallace/Stevenson's *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies* (1993), where Gavin Wallace writes in reference to the new Renaissance: "The considerable impact of this bold enlargement of Scottish creative potential remains symbolised by the publication in 1981 of Alasdair Gray's novel *Lanark*, whose still-reverberating effects on Scottish literature can be likened to earlier enduring literary landmarks like *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) and *Sunset Song* (1932)." [3] At another point in the same book *Lanark* is called "*the* great Scottish novel of the second half of this century" [Spring 1993, 213], and Dave Manderson remarks that "Alasdair Gray's early work is sometimes seen as the starting point of contemporary Scottish literature." [Manderson 2000, 51] Douglas Gifford also sees Gray's work in general and *Lanark* in particular as a watershed of sorts in modern Scottish literature [cf. e.g. Gifford 1996, 1999 + 2002]. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Canongate celebrated the 100th volume in their *Classics* series with a de luxe reprint of Gray's *Lanark*.

sufficiently established, in order to circumvent the danger of a parochial, inward-looking nationalism. Susanne Hagemann, for example, writes in the introduction to *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*:

> [A]t the current stage of Scotticist literary criticism and historiography, when the legitimacy of the subject seems securely established (for the time being), circumscribing Scottishness with a clear and closed line is no longer politically necessary. Scotticists can now afford to cast their nets wider, dealing with whatever has any relevance to Scotland. Scottishness can thus come to mean, very generally, "the condition of having a bearing on Scotland". [1996, 8]

She adds a little later that "the need to internationalize Scottish studies has become a catchphrase in recent Scotticist criticism." [11] It is very much my aim in this study to contribute to the internationalisation of Scottish studies, to 'cast my net wider', so to speak, and I hope that what I catch will not be indigestible, but perhaps even nourishing. In this way I see myself following the programme set out by Robert Crawford in an article significantly entitled "Dedefining Scotland", in which he writes with foresight on the needs of a new autonomous Scotland (the article was published in 1997 and therefore written before the devolution policies got under way):

> Scottish culture seems to have moved into a post-British phase. [...] Culturally, [Scots] have already declared independence. It seems inevitable that where the imagineers and voters have led, the politicians and the civil servants will follow. At such a juncture, having helped to define a new Scotland, it is time for artists and students of Scottish culture both in Scotland and beyond to go on with that complicating, enriching, and necessary work of 'dedefinition' which will ensure that no definition of 'Scottishness' becomes oppressively monolithic and that Scotland [...] remains imaginatively and intellectually freed-up—supplied with many visions of itself as well as many ways of looking at, engaging with, and being perceived by an increasingly interested world beyond. [...] If the growing internationalization of British Studies directs more non-Scottish attention to Scotland, then it will be performing a service beneficial to Scottish Studies, in further multiplying perspectives on Scotland, enriching it by dedefinition. [Crawford 1997, 95]

If this study can help to 'dedefine' Scotland by adding new perspectives on the work of one of its foremost contemporary writers, if it can help to internationalise Scottish studies by attempting to interconnect his works with wider theoretical debates in literature and culture in the Western world today, then my goal will have been achieved.

What will be attempted in the following, therefore, is an analysis of three of Alasdair Gray's novels in conjunction with three broad issues or themes that are currently being discussed in literary and cultural theory. It is hoped that this will enable a fresh look at Gray's work, a 'non-Scottish view', perhaps, and that it will do justice to the literary value of his writing while 'using' it for a feedback on theoretical debates. There are several reasons for my choice of the novels to be analysed: all three—*Lanark*, *Poor Things* and *A History Maker*—include science-fiction elements, which is a formal reason for selection. Moreover, the first one is still Gray's best-known book as well as, arguably, his *magnum opus*, on which his reputation rests, so that I think it is impossible to pass it by in any study of his work. I also believe that it is his best book to date, but that is my personal view. The other two are his most recent novels (if one counts *Mavis Belfrage* as a collection of short stories rather than a novel, as Gray cheekily admits it is on the cover), which have as yet received far less critical attention than either *Lanark* or *1982, Janine* (1984), his other 'big' novels. *Poor Things* is also his commercially most successful novel and has won both the Whitbread Novel Award and the Guardian Fiction Prize. Strictly speaking, it is also Gray's only 'original' novel after those two earlier ones, because *Something Leather* (1990) and *A History Maker* (as well as the novellas *The Fall of Kelvin Walker*, 1985, and *McGrotty and Ludmilla*, 1990) are reworked from older material (usually TV/radio plays).

Concerning the theoretical context, I have decided to start in my first chapter with a fairly detailed overview of current theoretical debates and discussions in literature and culture, mainly grouped around the concept of 'postmodernism'. This serves to draw out the main aspects I will subsequently address, among them the three fields which will form the background for the main chapters of the study. The postmodern theme will be addressed directly in chapters two and

five, enclosing the more substantial analysis of Gray's texts in connection with the themes of science fiction and history in chapters three and four respectively. This procedure seems legitimate in the light of current methodological pluralism and of Terry Eagleton's assertion that "[i]t is not a matter of starting from certain theoretical or methodological problems: it is a matter of starting from what we want to *do*, and then seeing which methods and theories will best help us to achieve these ends." [Eagleton 1983, 210] What I want to do in this study is to investigate 'Shades of Gray', in the way, and with the aims, outlined in this introduction.

Chapter One: Shades of Theory

Thanks for the Theory

Arguably, writing a theoretical introduction to a literary study like this one has never been more difficult than today. It has become a mainstay of introductions to literary theory to remark that the subject does not, in fact, exist—and neither does literature itself, apparently (or at least a generally accepted definition of what it entails) [cf. Eagleton 1983, Earnshaw 1996, Culler 1997]. On the other hand, over the past decades there has been an unprecedented explosion of 'theory' in literary and cultural studies—that is the use of all kinds of theoretical perspectives and approaches from outside the field proper, ranging from psychological and historical analyses to (post)structuralism, feminism and postcolonialism. The result of this 'paradigm shift' (as it is called by some), which started sometime in the 1960s, is a situation in which no single person can possibly keep track of all the developments in the multiplicity of different theoretical movements. Jonathan Culler has nicely illustrated this development in his *Literary Theory*:

> [T]heory is intimidating. One of the most dismaying features of theory today is that it is endless. It is not something that you could ever master, not a particular group of texts you could learn so as to 'know theory'. [...] Theory is thus a source of intimidation, a resource of constant upstagings: 'What? you haven't read Lacan! How can you talk about the lyric without addressing the specular constitution of the speaking subject?' [...] At times, theory presents itself as a diabolical sentence condemning you to hard reading in unfamiliar fields, where even the completion of one task will bring not respite but further difficult assignments. ('Spivak? Yes, but have you read Benita Parry's critique of Spivak and her response?') [Culler 1997, 14-5]

Moreover, another result of these recent developments, especially following the spread of deconstruction(ism), has been the problematisation of theory and systematic enquiry itself, questioning the very possibility of the 'view from above', of systematising and hierarchising as well as finding valid criteria for judging a range of

different phenomena. In a climate like this it is not surprising that resistance to theory has been growing, so that it is now common to find academics split into two groups: the 'theorists' on the one hand and those who are 'against theory' on the other. However, this has certainly as much to do with the frequently adversarial nature of academia as with anything else, and a wholesale rejection of 'theory' as such is surely no solution to the problem. Besides, as Terry Eagleton has pointed out, "[h]ostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an oblivion of one's own." [Eagleton 1983, viii] The apparently 'neutral' or 'common-sense' approach is usually just a more established theory that passes as 'natural'. In the case of literary studies this is commonly referred to as 'liberal humanism' and often linked with the critic F. R. Leavis or with American New Criticism. Furthermore, there is also a fairly common recognition of the usefulness of many of the new approaches, of the way in which they enable fresh insights or generally make you "reflect on your reading in new ways", giving you "a better sense of the implications of the questions you put to works you read." [Culler 1997, 16]

What, then, is the way out of this predicament? Given that theory seems to be securely established in literary and cultural studies today and cannot—or should not—just be ignored, and that it is impossible to master it in its entirety (because an 'entirety' in this sense does not exist), a certain degree of selection seems to be called for. This is legitimate and necessary, but it comes with the crucial qualification that one should make clear exactly what one's premises and also limitations are. This might seem obvious, but I would argue that it is a rule too frequently violated in academic studies, which often seem to reach rhetorically for some higher, ultimate truth. If the need to state one's alliances is granted and observed, there is nothing wrong with choosing one particular approach for your analysis, such as a feminist perspective on *Jane Eyre*, for example, or a psychoanalytic reading of *Hamlet*. This is, in fact, frequently the current practice in contemporary literary studies. It would be quite mistaken, however, to claim a universal significance for such an approach and its resultant findings—which used to be the usual practice with 'liberal humanist' readings à la Leavis, and still sometimes occurs in the context of one of the more fashionable recent theories. Even a combination of several approaches in one and the same study, an alternative that is becoming

increasingly popular, cannot lay claim to the final truth. Indeed, very often different approaches yield mutually exclusive or contradictory results, and in theory a liberal humanist approach should have the same rights as a deconstructive one. Any attempt to survey different perspectives in order to find the magisterial view is therefore similarly mistaken: "seeking to understand everybody's point of view quite often suggests that you yourself are disinterestedly up on high or in the middle, and trying to resolve conflicting viewpoints into a consensus implies a refusal of the truth that some conflicts can be resolved on one side alone." [Eagleton 1983, 199] Once again, the eschewal of this 'hegemonic' attitude is vital. If this is borne in mind, however, a combination of different approaches or perspectives can be very helpful in the attempt to reveal the complexities of a literary work.

This leads directly to another fundamental problem of the current situation, for the literary work itself is indeed frequently in danger of being marginalised in contemporary literary studies. The growth of theory has led to a situation where it sometimes seems more important to explain and illuminate the theoretical approach which is being used or some social, cultural or historical aspect, rather than the actual work of literature under discussion. This tendency goes hand in hand with the change of emphasis from purely literary to 'cultural' studies: "Freed from the principle that has long governed literary studies—that the main point of interest is the distinctive complexity of individual works—cultural studies could easily become a kind of non-quantitative sociology, treating works as instances or symptoms of something else rather than of interest in themselves". [Culler 1997, 47] If this danger is certainly real, I would argue that it need not necessarily have only negative implications. Arguably, regarding literary works as expressions of wider cultural contexts does not always mean treating them as mere symptoms and neglecting their distinctive complexity as individual works. On the contrary, it can even highlight the way in which the author/literary work engages with precisely those issues with which the respective theoretical approaches deal themselves. It is here that the juxtaposition of theory and literary practice can be very fruitful and illuminating. But it is important that it does not become a one-sided imposition of theory on literature but rather a dialogue capable of making underlying parallels and continuities visible. This would preserve the integrity of literature

while granting the importance and usefulness of the recent developments in theory, since "we cannot talk or write as if the explosion in 'theory' of the last twenty or thirty years had not happened." [Walder 1990, 6] Such an approach would try to respect the creative energies behind and inside the literary work as well as the personal aspect of the reading experience. It is therefore in tune with the demand by Susan Sontag in *Against Interpretation* (1964) cited by Dennis Walder: "the kind of criticism we now need is the kind that 'would serve the work of art, not usurp its place'. [...] Worthwhile criticism sharpens and extends our 'sensibilities', our thoughts and feelings about works of art or literature." [ibid., 5] Walder goes on to point out that this also involves scrutinising our own approach to these works, which is echoed in Steven Earnshaw's suggestion that theory be subordinated to the 'reading experience':

> Surely it is the reading experience and our desire for knowledge into the human condition that should inform our study of Literature to a greater rather than lesser extent, and that should be the context within which theory operates. [...] Literature is one practice amongst others that provides a place for discussing and analysing human existence, and it is more often than not its dominant concern. This is one of its values for the study of Literature as it is circumscribed by the larger cultural concerns of academia and society. [Earnshaw 1996, 158]

It is in this context that I would like to see my own approach in this study, seeking to investigate how certain aspects of human existence are discussed and analysed in the literary works of Alasdair Gray, while at the same time suggesting how this might relate to the larger cultural concerns of academia and society as they are expressed in different theoretical debates. With this, I hope that it will be possible to show the parallels and convergences which exist between the literary and the theoretical analyses of human existence, and therefore to correlate their different findings and positions, so that the writing of Alasdair Gray might be seen to have repercussions on theoretical debates as well as vice versa.

While this describes my general approach to the subject of this study in the context of current developments in (literary) theory, the more specific question of how to describe these developments and

debates remains as yet open; it is clear that I cannot deal with the theoretical analyses of human existence in their entirety. The problems involved in choosing one particular approach and also to some extent in trying to fuse several different ones have been outlined above. It is certainly possible today to counter almost any argument based on the writings of one important modern theorist or school with an argument based on another, equally prestigious theory. Moreover, since Alasdair Gray is a truly complex and multifaceted writer, as well as being rather sceptical of many academic interpretations of his work, such an approach would be limiting and would prevent a more comprehensive understanding of his achievement. Therefore, I have decided on a slightly different strategy here. Rather than taking one or several of the theoretical approaches as a 'tool' with which to 'work on' the literary 'object of investigation', I will start by attempting to survey the current theoretical debates in literature and culture in order to draw out themes and issues which could be productively related to the concerns which emerge from the writings of Alasdair Gray (as formulated by the existing body of 'Gray criticism', my own reading experience as well as Gray's statements in interviews etc., including personal letters from Gray from December 1997 and March 2004 [cf. also the Epilogue] and personal interviews which I had the opportunity to hold with him in Glasgow in February 1998 and November 1999).

It is needless to say that this opens my study up to a number of criticisms. It might be argued, for example, that it will compromise the objectivity of my analysis to allow the texts by Gray and my reading experience of them to influence the 'theoretical approach', or maybe even that it introduces a certain circularity into my argument. However, I would posit that this element is to some degree present in any literary study, since literature speaks to us as individual persons. I have pointed out above that it is important to recognise this aspect and take it into account, even and perhaps especially in an academic study like this. Concerning 'objectivity', it should be evident that no literary study can be objective in the sense that a scientific study is. In fact, many of the debates in literary theory today argue precisely against this image of literary theory as striving for objectivity and scientific methods. The more general aspect of 'objectivity' is thus very much part of those debates which I wish to survey. A more important criticism concerns the viability of surveying such a vast field,

especially since I have myself pointed out above that it is all but unmanageable. It is certainly untenable to aim at a comprehensive overview of all the different theoretical movements which have influenced literary studies during recent decades, or even of all the current developments. However, for all their differences many of the debates and theoretical views on literature and culture that can be observed today share similar concerns (which is all too often obscured by the adversarial nature of the debates in question). In *Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry writes: "These different approaches each have their separate traditions and histories, but several ideas are recurrent in critical theory and seem to form what might be regarded as its common bedrock. Hence, it makes some sense to speak of 'theory' as if it were a single entity with a set of underlying beliefs, as long as we are aware that doing so is a simplification." [Barry 1995, 34][1] He goes on to outline these underlying beliefs and then sums up this "basic frame of mind which theory embodies" in five points: "for theory: politics is pervasive, language is constitutive, truth is provisional, meaning is contingent, human nature is a myth." [ibid., 36] Even if this is really simplified in the extreme and on its own can certainly not serve as a backbone for my investigation, it does identify key concerns that are relevant to a discussion of Alasdair Gray's work (it also echoes fairly closely Culler's "broad challenge to common sense, [...]

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[1] Jonathan Culler sounds a similar note in the preface to his *Literary Theory* when he writes: "Many introductions to literary theory describe a series of 'schools' of criticism. Theory is treated as a series of competing 'approaches', each with its theoretical positions and commitments. But the theoretical movements that introductions identify—such as structuralism, deconstruction, feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and new historicism—have a lot in common. This is why people talk about 'theory' and not just about particular theories. To introduce theory, it is better to discuss shared questions and claims than to survey theoretical schools. It is preferable to discuss important debates that do not oppose one 'school' to another but may mark salient divisions within movements. Treating contemporary theory as a set of competing approaches or methods of interpretation misses much of its interest and force, which come from its broad challenge to common sense, and from its explorations of how meaning is created and human identities take shape." [Culler 1997, n.p.]

explorations of how meaning is created and human identities take shape").

Moreover, this gives us a cue on how to approach our survey, for these are characteristics commonly associated with a concept of contemporary literature, culture and society which we can take as a point of reference to focus our discussion: the concept of 'postmodernism'. In fact, as I have pointed out in my introduction, Gray's work is frequently seen by critics as 'postmodern'. Postmodernism is a concept at once comprehensive (or complicated, maybe even confused) enough to include the main developments of the 'paradigm shift' in literary and cultural theory as well as broader social and cultural aspects, and yet more limited than simply 'theory'—if not necessarily much more manageable, as we will see below. It will hopefully allow me to give a (necessarily simplified) overview of different issues and themes that are currently being debated in the fields of literature and culture, in order to draw out the topics which I will then look at in more detail in this study in relation to the work of Alasdair Gray.

The Trouble with Postmodernism

My use of quotation marks around the terms 'postmodern' and 'postmodernism' above indicates a hesitation to see them as straightforward or self-explaining concepts. Indeed, I believe that there can hardly be any more confused and confusing concept than this in contemporary literary and cultural theory. In fact, in most contexts I would prefer not to use it at all. There are also reservations about applying the term to the writings of Alasdair Gray, as we shall see. However, the alternative would be to shut oneself off from all the discussions and debates that are conducted under the label, and many of the issues raised there are very interesting and important indeed, as well as deeply pertinent to Gray's writing. Moreover, if investigation of Gray's work is to throw light on the problems of literary and cultural theory today, the concept of postmodernism will be hard to avoid. Past analysis of Gray's work has also frequently made use of the concept, from Beat Witschi's study *Glasgow Urban Writing and Postmodernism* (1991) to Stephen Baker's *The Fiction of*

Postmodernity (2000) and Luis de Juan's *Postmodernist Strategies in Lanark* (2003).[2] This is further substantiated by the realisation that many of the central aspects of his writing as they emerge from the reading of his works and have been described by various commentators including Gray himself—the playfulness and irony, intertextuality, his constant foregrounding of ambiguity and dislike of monolithic/dogmatic explanations, as well as the concern with power, politics and those marginalised by society—are in fact among the staple issues in discussions of the postmodern. Thus the concept offers itself as an important point of reference for this investigation. Before it can be linked to Gray's work, however, there has to be a more detailed survey of the concept in general, particularly because it is so confusing and easily misunderstood, and also in order to find aspects which could in turn be addressed and illuminated by a reading of Gray's fiction.

Introducing Postmodernism: Confusions and Convictions

It might be advisable, in order to circumvent some of the confusions and complexities of the postmodernism debate, to restrict myself to the discussions about postmodernism and literature. For the most part, I will try to do this. However, neither is it tenable to separate this aspect clearly from the larger philosophical and socio-historical arguments nor is it really advisable to attempt to do so. Much of the confusion and irritation caused by the debate results exactly from this sort of unwillingness to engage properly in the complex theoretical discussions and to take opposing arguments seriously on their own

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[2] Other examples include Randall Stevenson, "Alasdair Gray and the Postmodern", Roderick J. Lyall, "Postmodernist otherworld, postcalvinist purgatory: An approach to *Lanark* and *The Bridge*", Dominique Costa, "Decadence and Apocalypse in Gray's Glasgow—*Lanark*: A Postmodernist Novel", and treatment of Gray in books such as Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) and *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992) as well as Alison Lee's *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction* (1990) [cf. the bibliography for full details]. I will deal with some of these interpretations later on in this study.

terms. Furthermore, as I have just indicated, some of the issues of this general debate—e.g. questions of power and politics—are particularly important for Gray's work and thus relevant to my literary analysis. Therefore, I will try to give an overview of some of the central issues of the debate on postmodernism in this chapter before I concentrate on the more strictly literary aspect and the fiction of Alasdair Gray. This is not a matter of a one-to-one relation between theory and fiction, as Linda Hutcheon has pointed out:

> A poetics of postmodernism would not posit any relation of causality or identity either among the arts or between art and theory. It would merely offer, as provisional hypotheses, perceived overlappings of concern, here specifically with regard to the contradictions that I see as characterizing postmodernism. It would be a matter of reading literature through its surrounding theoretical discourses [...], rather than as continuous with theory. [...] The interaction of theory and practice in postmodernism is a complex one of shared responses to common provocations.[3]

I would like to think of my approach as somewhat akin to that, reading literature through its surrounding theoretical discourses and looking for the shared responses and common provocations.

To survey these surrounding theoretical discourses is in itself all but impossible, of course, and could easily fill several volumes. What will be attempted here can only be a very limited 'summary of summaries', or introductions, to postmodernism. In the 1980s and 90s literature on postmodernism has proliferated, so that there are now any number of readers, anthologies and monographs available on the topic. I have used several introductory works and surveys, among them *The Fontana Postmodernism Reader*, ed. Walter Truett Anderson (1996), Steven Connor's *Postmodernist Culture: An*

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[3] Hutcheon 1988, 14. In this passage, Hutcheon refers to an article by Christoph Cox: "Barthes, Borges, Foucault, Utopia" from *Subjects/Objects* 3: 55-69. It might be indicative that except for Barthes, the names/terms of the title will all reappear in the course of this study.

Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary (2nd ed. 1997), Hans Bertens's *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (1995), and Lawrence E. Cahoone's massive *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology* (1996). It is clear from these works, among others, that the trouble with postmodernism starts already with the term itself. It has become commonplace to remark at the outset that there is simply no agreed definition or even a reliable guide as to what the concept includes:

> Postmodernism is an exasperating term, and so are postmodern, postmodernist, postmodernity, and whatever else one might come across in the way of derivation. In the avalanche of articles and books that have made use of the term since the late 1950s, postmodernism has been applied at different levels of conceptual abstraction to a wide range of objects and phenomena in what we used to call reality. Postmodernism, then, is several things at once. [Bertens 1995, 3]

Something to this effect is to be found in virtually all the texts on the phenomenon. The confusion about the term includes its origin (various suggestions range from the 1870s to the 1960s—cf. Cahoone 1996, 3),[4] the distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity, the relation of postmodernism to modernism/modernity, and sometimes even the actual writing of the term (postmodernism vs. post-modernism or Postmodernism etc.). This problem is certainly aggravated by the use of the term in different fields of knowledge (such as culture and the arts, philosophy, politics, economics, sociology, even science) and increasingly—especially since the nineties—by journalists for everyday phenomena in our 'postmodern' world. Furthermore, its relation to other late twentieth-century (cultural and political) phenomena such as feminism or postcolonialism is controversial. Some people even doubt the legitimacy of theorising on the contemporary at all.

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[4] Cf. also the entry for "Modernism and Postmodernism" in Hawthorn 1994, which quotes a not entirely serious guess by Charles Jencks locating the first use of 'postmodern' in the Third Century [p.122].

In this context, it is not surprising to find almost as many different uses of the term as there are texts about the phenomenon. As Thomas Docherty writes in the introduction to his *Reader*: "The term itself hovers uncertainly in most current writings between—on the one hand—extremely complex and difficult philosophical senses, and—on the other—an extremely simplistic mediation as a nihilistic, cynical tendency in contemporary culture." [Docherty 1993, 1] Here we have one of the prime reasons for the controversial and confused character of the whole debate: as postmodernism is used in so many different contexts and with contrasting meanings, it is always possible to condemn a particular instance of its use and then take it as the phenomenon 'as such'. In such a climate, the sense of the discussion is indeed open to question. However, the importance of the concept for any discussion of contemporary culture and the need to seriously address the inherent problems despite the vexed nature of the term is almost universally stressed by commentators on the postmodern. I agree that it is indeed possible—and necessary—to look for and react to the underlying serious and important issues of the postmodernism debate, always bearing in mind the complexity and controversial nature of the topic. Certainly, the solution cannot be to ignore it completely or polemically attack a straw puppet of evil and nihilistic 'postmodernism', as I think Terry Eagleton does in his *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996) when he speaks of "the culture or milieu or even sensibility of postmodernism as a whole", of "'popular' brands of postmodern thought", of "a kind of received wisdom" [p.viii].[5]

A starting point for a more balanced consideration of postmodernism could be a list of shared assumptions, some sort of 'lowest common denominator' of postmodern themes and tenets, even

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[5] To be fair, Eagleton forestalls this criticism when he writes "I accuse postmodernism from time to time of 'straw-targeting' or caricaturing its opponents' positions, a charge which might well be turned back upon my own account." [ibid.] Also, it is clearly necessary to target the 'vulgar' manifestations of postmodernism, precisely because they have become so widespread and popular. But referring to them as "postmodernism as a whole" is polemical and only adds to the confusion.

if it must remain precarious and provisional. The basic conviction is certainly that of entering (or having entered) a 'new' period that is somehow distinct from (even if, many argue, dependent on) that which precedes it, signalled in the prefix 'post-'. Whatever the exact relation to the preceding period is or whether it is just a new stage of the same period depends on the definition of that period as well as the field of interest. There is also agreement on a rough time frame, especially on the importance of the 1960s (and the events of 1968 in particular) for the emergence of postmodernism. Whether this also points to the significance of the aftermath of the Second World War for the phenomenon is more controversial. Concerning the actual contents of the concept, agreement is much less universal. Nevertheless, postmodernism is widely seen as "antifoundational" in many respects, as mounting a radical critique (which is echoed in Barry's five points constituting the 'common bedrock' of theory which I have quoted above). It is commonly regarded as undermining, questioning or problematising all kinds of concepts and positions, including the very foundations of the 'modern' worldview: notions of progress, the unitary subject, meaning, truth, reality, representation etc. Connected to that is postmodernism's perceived emphasis on fragmentation, multiplicity and pluralism, its focus on surface rather than depth (which is not meant as a qualitative judgement here). This is about as far as the consensus goes. Even if this list remains very general and fragmentary, it does give an impression of the main character of postmodernism as well as pointing to the reasons for opposition and criticism against it.

Systematising Postmodernism: Three 'Types'

To be able to discuss postmodernism in less essentialist terms and to avoid the pitfalls of "straw-targeting" it is necessary to pay more attention to the different fields and contexts in which the term is used, and to distinguish between basic 'types'. It should be stressed that the concept does not lend itself easily to systematisation, precisely because of its emphasis on fragmentation and pluralism and its denial of hierarchical systems. However, the distinction of different "postmodernisms" [cf. Lord 1996, 9] as opposed to one monolithic system of Postmodernism is surely preferable. This tendency towards recognising differences (a very postmodern term) can be observed in

recent writings on the phenomenon. Walter Truett Anderson, for example, distinguishes what he calls "four corners of the postmodern world", four fields in which the postmodern transition is most clearly visible: "self-concept", "moral and ethical discourse", "art and culture", and "globalization" [Anderson 1996, 10-11]. This points to the three more general domains of philosophy/thought, arts/culture and politics/economics/history. These are, I think, the three basic sites of the discussion that we have to address and distinguish (if not clearly separate). From a slightly different perspective, Lawrence E. Cahoone opts for a distinction between "historical postmodernism" (the claim of a new era starting), "methodological postmodernism" (radical antirealist and antifoundationalist questioning of traditional methods of rational inquiry), and "positive postmodernism" (positive reinterpretation of phenomena on the basis of this methodological critique, offering an alternative vision) [1996, 17-8]. Several authors differentiate simply between more or less radical versions of postmodernism [e.g. Blocker 1994, 679; Bertens 1995, 242-3] or between 'serious' and 'vulgar' types [cf. the distinction between *präziser* (precise) and *diffuser* (confused) *Postmodernismus* in Welsch 1993, 2]. Others insist on the distinction between postmodernism (relating mainly to culture and the arts, sometimes also to philosophy) and postmodernity (relating to an historical transition in the political and economic fields) [McGuigan 1999, 2].[6] All of these classifications are certainly reasonable, and simply listing them goes some way to showing the sheer variety of possible perspectives in the postmodernism debate, as well as highlighting several important themes which will be taken up below. In the following, I will stick to the three-part classification implicit in Anderson's four aspects, because I believe that most of the other distinctions can be integrated into it (apart maybe from the qualitative judgement of 'serious' vs. 'vulgar' postmodernism, to which I will return later). It is also very close to Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh's following assessment:

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[6] McGuigan also distinguishes three different "modes of reasoning" to be found in postmodern discourses: instrumental, ironic, and critical reason [151].

> [Postmodernism] is now used variously as a term to describe the cultural epoch through which we are living (often apocalyptically, sometimes as the logic of Late Capitalism); an aesthetic practice (viewed as co-extensive with the commodified surfaces of this culture or as a disruption of its assumptions from within through a 'micropolitics' or 'politics of desire') or as a critique of the foundationalist assumptions of Enlightened political and philosophical thought. [1996, 289]

However, when investigating the themes and arguments of postmodernism with the help of this three-partite classification (cultural/socio-historical epoch—aesthetic practice—philosophical critique), it must not be forgotten that the three 'types' or 'fields' are by no means clear-cut, and that there will be a lot of cross-references and links between them. Since this study is about literature, I will start with postmodernism as an aesthetic practice.

One origin of the term 'postmodernism' as it is used today goes back to American literary criticism of the 1960s. Before starting to use the term itself, critics such as Susan Sontag, Ihab Hassan and Leslie Fiedler were noticing the emergence of a new kind of literature which was markedly distinct from earlier, modernist texts.[7] These works were characterised by their playfulness and irony, their resistance to interpretation, self-reflexive narrative techniques (e.g. in the form of parodic metafiction) and mixture of different genres, often borrowing from the 'disreputable' forms of the detective novel or science fiction. Arguably, much of this can also be said about the French *nouveau roman* of the 1950s and '60s, especially about the work of its best-known practitioner and theorist Alain Robbe-Grillet. At roughly the same time, what was later to be called the 'boom' of Latin-American fiction started, associated with names such as Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes or Julio Cortázar. Their

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[7] Examples of authors would be John Barth, Donald Barthelme, William S. Burroughs, Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Pynchon or Kurt Vonnegut, to name but a few.

writing was soon summarised under the label of "magic realism". One of the forefathers of this movement as well as a strong influence in the USA was the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges. Another movement of the time was that of the emerging national literatures in former colonies (not only) of the British Empire which were becoming independent around the 1960s. This was first described as "Commonwealth literature" and later as "New Literatures in English" or "postcolonial literature(s)". If we add to these developments the appearance of writers elsewhere who were also writing 'new' literature, such as Günter Grass, Italo Calvino or Milan Kundera, it is not difficult to see why there was a feeling of a new (literary) period starting and why the term 'postmodern' was coined as a way of referring to it.

Although the term only came into common use in the 1970s (again first in American literary criticism), it was the above names and movements that became associated with it (the inclusion of the *nouveau roman* and postcolonial writing is controversial, however). Although much in postmodernism—such as the close relation to popular culture and literature[8] and the complication of generic integrity—seems indeed opposed to (high) modernism, there are also notable continuities, such as the widespread rejection of realism or the importance of irony. Thus the question about postmodernism's exact relation to modernism has become one of the most hotly debated issues in the field.[9] On balance, it seems sensible to retain a link while

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[8] It is often remarked that the high-cultural avant-garde so typical of modernism faces a crisis by becoming normative in the second half of the twentieth century, and that postmodernism reacts to that by becoming 'low-cultural'.

[9] For example, several critics have compiled lists of binary oppositions between modernism and postmodernism [cf. the example in Connor 1997, 118-9], which have subsequently been criticised for perpetuating the 'modernist' binarism they saw as overcome by postmodernism. Another model of 'progressive history' that is often posited is the three-part development realism—modernism—postmodernism [cf. Hawthorn 1997]. However, this suffers from similar problems, if we think, for example, of the use of (magic) realism in postmodern (and modern, for that matter)

allowing for a new creative development, which is a position also taken by several critics [cf. Cahoone 1996, Lord 1996]. In this reading, postmodernism installs its "other", modernism, at the same time as subverting and problematising (or even overcoming) it. This contradictory attitude is in fact one of the hallmarks of postmodernism, as Linda Hutcheon, for example, stresses time and again in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). This book, together with McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* and Christopher Nash's *World Postmodern Fiction* (Longman: London and New York, 1987/1993) is a sign that by the late eighties the concept of postmodernism in literature was sufficiently established to elicit several attempts at a general survey of the phenomenon.

If the phenomenon can therefore be recognised as an important (or even the dominant) force in late twentieth-century literature, the same is certainly also true for many other arts or types of aesthetic practice, above all architecture.[10] In fact, many accounts trace the emergence of the term and concept in the 1970s to (among others) the architect Charles Jencks and his book *The Language of Post-Modern*

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works. Moreover, it has been noted that many of these 'structuralist' approaches are again guilty of (deliberately or not) constructing their own 'straw' opponents, e.g. by misconceiving a monolithic, simplified modernism. Another example of such an artificial opposition would be Brian McHale's distinction between the epistemological (modernist) and ontological (postmodernist) dominant in fiction in his *Postmodernist Fiction*. Nevertheless, certain distinctions can be made. Thus, while both modernism and postmodernism stress fragmentation and the complexity of reality, there seems to be a nostalgia for (lost) faith and authority in modernism that can hardly be found in postmodernism. The former is therefore often seen as more pessimistic, while the latter is characterised by a more welcoming, celebrative attitude towards the complexity or absurdity of existence in the modern world.

[10] Cf. for example Connor's treatment of architecture, art, photography, theatre, dance, music, film, fashion etc. in his *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (1997). In the visual arts, Pop Art is maybe the most conspicuously 'postmodern' development.

Architecture (1977)[11] It is maybe also in architecture that the term is least controversial, referring to the relatively clear break with Bauhaus modernism and the International Style from c. the 1960s/70s. As a cultural/aesthetic practice, then, postmodernism is clearly on the contemporary agenda. Despite the arguments in this field the term is now widely accepted as a legitimate critical concept and probably less controversial here than elsewhere. I will therefore start my investigation below by concentrating on such literary aspects as metafiction, intertextuality, or science fiction in the work of Alasdair Gray. However, there is a considerable overlap with the other 'fields' or types, so that they cannot be ignored. This is particularly true for the domain of '(philosophical) thought/critique', not least because many of the foremost theorists in this field have actually come from or are still active in the field of literary studies.

Postmodern theory, as opposed to aesthetic practice, is most often connected with French poststructuralism, which also became prominent in the 1960s. Names that are frequently mentioned include Roland Barthes, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Jean Baudrillard. However, on the one hand many of these theorists would not call themselves 'postmodern' and on the other postmodern theory cannot be restricted to these names alone. There were preceding or roughly contemporaneous movements which have become important for postmodernism, such as—obviously—structuralism, or the Frankfurt School connected especially with the names of Adorno and Habermas. Also, poststructuralism and what was beginning to be called postmodernism was taken up by critics and theorists elsewhere (not always or necessarily endorsing it), such as the 'Yale School' and people like Fredric Jameson in the USA, Catherine Belsey and Terry Eagleton (who opposes it) in Britain, but also for example the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco. Again, these developments do point to a

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[11] Jencks has become an important theorist of the postmodern: cf. e.g. Charles Jencks, ed., *The Post-Modern Reader*, London: Academy Ed. (1992); and *What is Postmodernism?* (1996).

"paradigm shift" in (cultural) theory, to quote another important theorist who can be seen to form part of the movement: Thomas S. Kuhn and his theory about *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962).

Needless to say a summary of all the different positions and theories cannot be attempted here, and there are enough books devoted to that already [cf. Sarup 1993, Barry 1995, and the many anthologies and readers on postmodernism]. However, I can try to point out some of the central themes of the debate in order to test its relevance to (British) literature and the work of Gray. Here too, there is a (often radical) questioning of the modern tradition, in this case going back at least as far as the Enlightenment. This critique of the "Enlightenment project" involves Lyotard's "incredulity towards metanarratives" such as liberal humanism, Marxism or the progressivist Whig view of history [cf. his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Engl. translation 1984] as well as Derrida's method of "deconstruction" of texts and Foucault's emphasis on the "discursive formation of knowledge" and its relation to power structures. There is a strong emphasis on language and its self-referentiality ("free play of signifiers") and a fundamental suspicion against such modern or Enlightenment concepts as origin, presence, hierarchy, totality and universality, progress, unity, transcendence, rationalism etc., and instead a focus on plurality, representation, absence, the marginal or ex-centric, surface/phenomena, immanence and indeterminacy.

The political edge to this antifoundational critique is an integral part of it, since the criticism of liberal humanism and Western "logocentrism" is directed above all against its use by capitalist societies to dominate the "other", as was seen for example in the rise of imperialism. From this perspective the relevance of the 1960s in the development of the movement is certainly not coincidental. Thus, there is a strong association of postmodernism with the Left, although its relation to Marxism is ambiguous, to say the least.[12] It is here that

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[12] Lawrence Cahoone specifically links the decline of Marxism to the rise of postmodernism and calls the latter "a wayward stepchild of Marxism"

another link to the work of Alasdair Gray suggests itself, since he is also frequently regarded as a left-wing or socialist writer.

It is important to stress, as Thomas Docherty does, "how philosophically serious and difficult much of the [postmodern] argument is" [1993, xiii], also because it draws on so many different fields of knowledge (Derrida's interest is probably above all linguistic, Foucault's historical/sociological and Lacan's psychological, to give some prominent examples) and tries—sometimes artificially—to bring them together. It also frequently uses a language and style that can be all but impenetrable to outsiders, a problem that is often exacerbated by the necessity of translating French texts into English to make them available to the wider (not exclusively) Anglo-American public. Moreover, one aspect of the postmodern debate is exactly the problematic status of theory itself:

> Theory [...] now enters into crisis itself. Not only has knowledge become uncertain, but more importantly the whole question of how to legitimise certain forms of knowledge is firmly on the agenda: no single satisfactory mode of epistemological legitimation is available. [...] In the postmodern, it has become difficult to make the proposition 'I know the meaning of postmodernism'—not only because the postmodern is a fraught topic, but also because the 'I' who supposedly knows is itself the site of a postmodern problematic. [ibid., 4-5]

This is also why a mere listing of concerns can be no adequate expression of the debate as a whole. Yet I hope that it can indicate the radical nature of the challenge that postmodern theory constitutes and maybe also point to the direction it is taking, so that it might be possible to understand the criticism and discussion that has developed around the concept, as well as detecting important aspects for my

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[1996, 10]. The term "post-Marxism" has also come into fairly general use in the past decades. However, many (neo-)Marxist critics, such as Fredric Jameson, are ambiguous about postmodernism, if not outright hostile, such as Terry Eagleton.

discussion of Gray's works. Before that, however, I will briefly survey the third 'type' of postmodernism, which relates the concept to a broader cultural or socio-historical epoch.

It is clear from the foregoing that the 1960s have a special importance for the emergence of postmodernism. As we have seen, there were new movements in diverse fields of cultural practice as well as theory, starting almost simultaneously during or around that decade. It is not surprising, therefore, that attempts have been made to broaden the meaning of the term to embrace a more comprehensive concept of a change in society at large, even of a new historical period, often called 'postmodernity'. There is certainly no shortage of momentous events and developments that can be advanced as a foundation for this claim. I have already mentioned the particular importance of the year 1968, with its different revolutions, the civil rights movement, emergent ecologism and growing awareness of imperialism. Decolonisation is surely one of the more significant developments of the time, together with the increased immigration movement and resulting multiculturalism, the communications and information revolution, globalisation and Americanisation, or deindustrialisation (another popular term for the contemporary condition is "post-industrial society"). Similarly important is the development of consumer capitalism/society, and the simultaneous fragmentation and homogenisation, particularly after the breakdown of the state-socialist system. We will find many of these developments reflected in my analysis of the works of Alasdair Gray.

It goes without saying that all of that did not happen overnight but was a gradual process; nevertheless it seems that there is a concentration and acceleration of developments in the second half of the twentieth century that justifies the postmodern label.[13] There is

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[13] This view is not uncontroversial, however. As with the discussions about (literary-cultural) postmodernism's relation to modernism, some see postmodernity as a new stage of modernity rather than a completely new era. Cf. for example Jim McGuigan's use of the concept of "accentuated modernity" [1999, 3], which he takes over from Anthony Giddens. From a

also much here to explain some of the focal points in postmodern culture (as Jameson has done in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991) and theory (the emphasis on fragmentation and the "other" or the resistance to universalising "metanarratives", for example).[14] This broader claim for the term 'postmodernism' followed its early uses in culture and theory approximately in the late seventies and eighties, with Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition* as one of the first texts to advance such a view.[15] Since that time the use of the term has become endemic, having seeped into journalists' everyday vocabulary by the 1990s. It is now being used for almost anything from party election campaigns to advertisements for the latest electronic gadgetry. If this is a sign of the general acceptance of the term and concept, it is also a serious problem for any complex and balanced academic discussion of the phenomenon. This 'vulgar' or 'confused' postmodernism, usually associated with either relativism and nihilism or simply with the contemporary, increasingly obscures the more judicious use of the concept and is a travesty of the deeply—and committedly—critical and antifoundational theories and practices which were originally referred to as postmodern (or which I would like to regard as 'properly' postmodern). With this we have already entered the current

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socio-economic perspective, it is certainly reasonable to argue for a new, global phase of capitalism rather than a completely new postmodern paradigm.

[14] An undoubted material influence on the growth of theory and its impact in the 1960s and '70s was the explosion of universities and institutions of higher learning during those decades. [cf. Bertens 1995, 244]

[15] Not surprisingly, it was and is particularly popular with (neo-)Marxist critics, who always emphasise the material conditions of any intellectual and cultural development. If this view is not advanced as a hegemonic, universalist explanatory framework, I think that it has a lot to recommend itself. In fact, Alasdair Gray himself has been seen by some as holding Marxist views. This is certainly not entirely wide of the mark, given his concern for the disadvantaged and suppressed sections of society—it is debatable only in so far as Marxism often carries the connotation of universalism and essentialism.

debate about the concept of the postmodern, which I will try to outline next.

Criticising Postmodernism: Academia at War

To be sure, academics are as guilty as anybody of contributing to the inflation of the postmodern. From the 1980s on there has been almost a craze for the concept, in literary and cultural studies in particular. This naturally made the movement susceptible to criticism. With its influence in the academic world growing, postmodernism was increasingly seen as the greatest metanarrative of all. A contributing factor was that scholars from the humanities increasingly encroached on other fields of knowledge, most controversially the natural sciences. After the theories of Paul Feyerabend and Thomas S. Kuhn had drawn attention to the social and cultural determination of scientific practice, there were a number of studies focusing on the sociological aspects of science, on the nature of scientific texts (the role of metaphors and other 'literary' tropes in them, for example), the history and philosophy of science, and the general relationship between science and society or culture, including literature.[16] Most of these investigations were sincere attempts to close the gap between what C.P. Snow in the late 1950s had called "the two cultures" [Snow 1959/1993, cf. also Cordle 1999]. Once again, these efforts can also be explained with the help of material conditions, because one of the effects of the 'historic' changes from the 1950s/'60s on was certainly the growing impact of science and technology on people's everyday lives. This is exemplified by the communications and information revolution (sometimes called the "second scientific revolution"), but

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[16] Cf. Daniel Cordle, *Postmodern Postures: Literature, Science and the Two Cultures Debate* (1999), for a good survey of this development as well as examples of individual studies. A parallel development observable at around the same time was the emergence of popular science writing, books often written by eminent scientists (such as Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking or Steven Pinker) but directed at the general public and frequently very successful on the book market.

also by advances in molecular biology and medical science, even space technology or the nuclear arms race. So it was perhaps only logical that there was a growing interest in 'postmodern' science.[17] However, due to the radical antifoundationalism inherent in postmodernism, these endeavours were soon perceived to undermine the very basics of scientific enquiry, negating even the existence of scientific facts or 'reality', seeing science as just another cultural construction, on a level with literature or philosophy.

The resulting debates came to more general public notice in the 1990s with the so-called "science wars", also sometimes seen as part of more comprehensive "culture wars".[18] Although both sides in these conflicts raise important points and argue them convincingly, there is a lot of "straw-targeting" going on. Reading the introduction to *Science Wars* alongside the 1998 preface of *Higher Superstition*, for example, there is hardly any sign of self-critical practices on either side. 'Postmodernism' is frequently equated by its opponents in this debate with relativism, nihilism and antirationalism.[19] Daniel Cordle

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[17] The term was probably first used in this sense in Stephen Toulmin's *The Return to Cosmology: Postmodern Science and the Theology of Nature* (1982).

[18] This was/is a usually polemical exchange of broadsides between scientists on the one hand, who defend the integrity and relatively value-free nature of science, and what is often collectively called 'postmodernist' scholars from the humanities on the other, who investigate the social and cultural implications of science. One of the high points of these 'wars' was the "Sokal hoax" in 1996, an allegedly relativist but in fact nonsensical article planted by the theoretical physicist Alan Sokal in *Social Text*, one of the leading American journals in cultural studies. Cf. Paul R. Gross/Norman Levitt, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science* (1994/8); Andrew Ross, ed., *Science Wars* (1996); Alan Sokal/Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures: Postmodern Philosophers' Abuse of Science* (1997/8); Daniel Cordle, *Literature, Science and the Two Cultures Debate* (1999).

[19] Cf. e.g. Gross/Levitt's statement that "a once-vigorous intellectual tradition of radical dissent is slipping into irrationality" [1998, x] and their

sums up the general problem of the debate when he writes of Sokal and Bricmont's attack on 'postmodern' philosophy:

> [T]heir characterisation of postmodernism as a simplistic relativist philosophy [should] be strongly contested [...]. There are, undoubtedly, those who both advocate postmodernism and preach relativism, but these voices distort the postmodern culture they claim to portray. To polarise the discussion into a conflict between scientists and postmodernists simplifies a complex debate, just as the theorists objected to by Sokal and Bricmont misread and simplify one or two trends in science, generalising them beyond the boundaries of their applicability. Moreover, objecting wholesale to postmodernism robs us of a useful term for characterising some distinctive trends in late twentieth-century culture. [Cordle 1999, 168]

On the whole, I tend to agree with this judgement, but the problem of relativism is a very real one and should not be neglected. Furthermore, criticism of postmodernism is by no means restricted to scientists or the "science wars", as we will see.

At first sight these debates seem far removed from the concerns of Gray's work, but I will attempt to highlight in this study the parallels which exist to his views (not only) on science and to his criticism of scientific, military and political power. I have also chosen this conflict as an example mainly because it was well publicised (especially but not exclusively in the USA) and because it is one of the most recent expressions of 'anti-postmodernism' (or more generally of the stance 'against theory'). It was by no means an isolated development, though. On the contrary, with the growing influence of postmodernism in the humanities in the 1980s and especially in the

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concern about "the sesquipedalian posturings of postmodern theory and the futility of the identity politics that so often travels with it" and "the spread of relativism and antirationalism". [ibid. xi] Also, in an article on the Sokal hoax, Paul Boghossian writes of "the pernicious consequences and internal contradictions of 'postmodernist' relativism" [Boghossian 1996].

'90s, criticism of it has proliferated from a variety of directions. The past decade or so saw the publication of a series of books which are strongly critical of postmodernism, from Christopher Norris's books *What's Wrong With Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy* (1990) and *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War* (1992) to Nicholas Zurbrugg's *Critical Vices: The Myths of Postmodern Theory* (2000) and *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism*, ed. by José López and Garry Potter (2001); as well as the books by Gross/Levitt and Sokal/Bricmont mentioned above.[20] This should be sufficient proof of a considerable body of serious criticism of postmodernism. I can only summarise here a few of the recurrent points made in these and similar writings against postmodernism. The most frequent charge brought against it is certainly the one of ultimate relativism and nihilism. Given the radical questioning of all kinds of deeply held beliefs of the modern Western tradition by postmodernism, this is not too easily refuted. Somewhat cryptically, Taylor and Winquist write:

> While postmodernism is described by many inside and outside academia as a popular contemporary nihilism, Lyotard provides a qualified contradictory view that presents postmodernism as a critical concept with *both* the potential to dismantle the rules upholding the traditional organization of knowledge and to 'impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable'. [1998, xi]

Walter Anderson is a lot clearer: "The radical relativism [...] doesn't have to go away, because it was never here. Nobody really believes that everything is equal, because the human mind doesn't work that way; whatever else it is doing, it is always tirelessly, relentlessly

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[20] Other examples include *Universal Abandon?: The Politics of Postmodernism*, ed. Andrew Ross (1989); Henry S. Kariel's *The Desperate Politics of Postmodernism* (1989); Terry Eagleton's *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996); Stefan Morawski's *The Trouble with Postmodernism* (1996); Mary J. Devaney's *"Since at Least Plato..." and Other Postmodernist Myths* (1997); and *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths about Science*, ed. by Noretta Koertge (1998).

evaluating." [1996, 7] This sounds reasonable, even if many of the critics of postmodernism might disagree.

Related to the charge of relativism is the criticism of postmodernism as self-contradictory, as undermining its own discourse by its method of enquiry. Put differently, this includes the accusation of being itself a metanarrative, of suppressing "difference" and "otherness" by its increasingly dominant position. Steven Connor addresses exactly this problem when he writes:

> If postmodern theory insists on the irreducibility of the difference between different areas of cultural and critical practice, it is ironically the conceptual language of postmodern theory which flows into the trenches that it itself gouges between incommensurabilities and there becomes solid enough to bear the weight of an entirely new conceptual apparatus of comparative study. It would be easy to see this paradox as evidence of the essential fraudulence of the postmodernism debate, but such a response comes from a failure to attend closely to that debate's form and function rather than its content. True, given this kind of contradiction, it cannot be that postmodernist culture is quite the thing that postmodern theory contends it is, but this is not to say that the whole debate is without meaning or function. If, for example, one sees postmodernism as inhering precisely in these forms of contradiction, then it becomes possible to read postmodernism as a *discursive* function, whose integrity derives from the regularity of its contexts and effects in different discursive operations, rather than from the consistency of the ideas within it. [1997, 9]

This, together with Connor's emphasis on the material relationships of academia as the basis for the postmodern debate, illuminates the central paradox: if it is one of the aims—maybe the central aim—of postmodernism to foreground ambiguity and contradiction (which has become almost a commonplace), it has to be self-contradictory to some extent, to undermine its own discourse, in order to make its point—but it *does* want to make a point. It is this paradox that makes it so difficult to survey the postmodernism debate. One is immediately drawn into it, thus becoming part of what one wants to discuss. It is also this paradox that many critics—the (neo-)Marxist ones in particular—are deeply disturbed by, and that leads them to attack

postmodernism for its self-indulgently playful and cynical nature, its apolitical stance or even its (economic) complicity with (late) capitalism. It is of course exactly the attempts by these and other theorists at overarching, all-including explanation—these "metanarratives"—that postmodernism wants to challenge, to "deconstruct".

In the end, the debate is again about politics and power, as well as ethical and moral issues. While postmodernism is generally seen as left-wing ("1968 and all that"), we have remarked that its relationship to Marxism is ambiguous, and it has frequently been criticised as unethical and immoral. One of the most frequent charges used to challenge postmodernism is the problem of 'objectivity' or relativism in the field of history. In particular, the denial of the Holocaust is often used to discredit postmodern views of history.[21] Terry Eagleton also regards fascism as the ultimate test for postmodernism and thinks that the evidence "would tell heavily against it" and that "postmodernism is in the end part of the problem rather than of the solution." [1996, 134-5] On the other hand, the Holocaust is frequently seen as one of the prime reasons for the realisation of the failure of metanarratives and the following radical critique of Enlightenment rationalism (of which the Holocaust can be seen as a consequence, if not necessarily an indispensable one). Seán Hand therefore sees the postmodern "as the moral conscience of philosophy as it approaches a new century, and reflects on the past one hundred years of technological change, mass destruction, absolute dehumanization and totalitarian systems." [1998, 77] The reason is exactly its self-critical, paradoxical discourse: "[I]t is precisely this improper nature that the postmodern approach to philosophy would stress as an ethical awareness." [ibid., 81] Somehow, the postmodern

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[21] Another area of discussion is the debate about the (first) Gulf War and its representation in the media. This is often linked to Baudrillard's hyperreality thesis and his (in)famous denial that the Gulf War actually happened (cf. the criticism of this view, e.g. in Christopher Norris's *Uncritical Theory*). I will come back to this problem and its relation to the work of Gray in the fourth chapter of this study.

paradox really seems to be part of the debate itself. Nevertheless, the importance of questions of politics, ethics and morality seems to be a central aspect of the theoretical debates, which is a point we have to bear in mind for our further investigation in this study.

Balancing Postmodernism: Towards a Compromise?

What, then, can be made of this supremely paradoxical postmodern debate, and how can we use it for our purposes? First of all, the general problem of theorising on the contemporary is evident in the debates outlined above, and this is certainly part of the problem. However, the realisation of an important change in diverse fields since c. the 1960s and the decision to refer to it as 'postmodern(ism)' ("a makeshift word we use until we have decided what to name the baby" [Anderson 1996, 3]) seems reasonable enough. It seems to me also that very slowly, but perceptibly, a certain compromise or balanced position is emerging (certainly not endorsed by any of the more deeply involved opponents in the debate), that puts postmodernism into perspective. This attitude is clearly observable in many of the general surveys of the phenomenon.

For one, there is an emphasis on the importance of distinguishing between different 'types' of postmodernism, of paying attention to the different contexts in which the term is used. As we have seen, the failure to do so is responsible for a great part of the confusion in the debate. It is also obvious that several opposing theories and arguments have in fact very similar underlying presuppositions or goals that are ultimately obscured by their adversarial nature. Moreover, it is noted that for all its radical rhetoric, many aspects of postmodernism are not so new after all. Thus, the long tradition of sceptics and Enlightenment critics (including Hume, Kant and Nietzsche[22]) is often

[22] The latter has arguably been particularly influential for postmodernism. Other more recent names could also be mentioned, such as Wittgenstein or Heidegger—who are seen by some as all but postmodern themselves. From another point of view, even Marx and Freud could be added to the list.

invoked to show the connections of the postmodernists with 'traditional' philosophy. Also, even if postmodernism challenges Enlightenment rationalism, it has not replaced—and in all probability will not replace—it (there is also the problematic aspect of the use of terminology: to be sure, few people outside the postmodern camp associate the terms 'Enlightenment', 'rationalism' or 'humanism' with the negative connotations that usually go with them in this context). Likewise, this Western tradition is not the only existing one, as Walter Anderson points out: "So, as it turns out, we have not one Enlightenment project, but three: a Western one based on rational thought, an Eastern one based on seeing through the illusion of the Self, and a postmodern one based on the concept of socially constructed reality. And despite their many differences, they share the common goal of liberation." [Anderson 1996, 219] Even if this sounds a little simplistic, and not everyone would necessarily find an "Enlightenment project" in postmodernism,[23] it does somewhat relativise the radical nature of postmodernism.[24]

This more pragmatic, common-sense approach seems slowly to be gaining ground. At the end of H. Gene Blocker's essay "An Explanation of Post-Modernism" in Castell 1994, the editors write:

> Blocker's suggestion that we take a pragmatic approach is echoed by Laudan. In other writings Laudan (and others) argue that commonsense and the need for getting on in the world demand that some answers and some general approaches be rejected. Laudan would call for us to turn from extreme relativism if only because it leads to chaos in everyday life and would make what we all identify as science impossible. Rorty can live his life untroubled, Laudan would

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[23] Anderson says it "is more a concept of cultural evolution, based on the belief that the whole human race is involved in a huge learning process [, which] is difficult, painful, and conflicted; [and] involves learning about learning, discovering something new about our own reality." [ibid.]

[24] For the non-Western response to modernity and postmodernism, cf. also Cahoone 1996, 272-3.

> point out, only because Rorty does not actually live according to the rules that postmodernism would beget. [682]

The last point is, I think, significant, even if Rorty seems an odd choice here (given his ambiguous position within postmodernism because of his own rather pragmatic approach [cf. Cahoone 1996, 271—there is a note to the effect that Rorty has in fact renounced the term]). So there really appears to be a still-evolving new consensus, a more moderate paradigm superseding radical postmodern theory. Hans Bertens writes: "Radical postmodern theory must be regarded as a transitional phenomenon, as instrumental in the creation of a more moderate new paradigm that is already building upon its achievements while ignoring its more excessive claims." [1995, 242-3] And he concludes:

> After an overlong period in which Enlightenment universalist representationalism dominated the scene, and a brief, but turbulent period in which its opposite, radical anti-representationalism, captured the imagination, we now find ourselves in the difficult position of trying to honor the claims of both, of seeing the values of both representation and anti-representation, of both consensus and dissensus. Postmodern or radicalized modern—this is our fate: to reconcile the demands of rationality and those of the sublime, to negotiate a permanent crisis in the name of precarious stabilities. [ibid., 248]

Signs for this new consensus are also detected by Lawrence Cahoone (which may lead to what he has referred to as "positive postmodernism"):

> Many contemporary philosophers, while resistant to postmodernism, are sensitive to its critique of the philosophical search for foundations. Best termed nonfoundationalists, rather than antifoundationalists, [they] would largely agree with Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Rorty that philosophy cannot achieve Cartesian certainty, that it can turn to some kind of pragmatism or common sense or some

> other method, thereby avoiding both foundationalism and postmodern excess. [1996, 271][25]

As we can see, in this new balanced position, the distinction between modern and postmodern is also problematised, a development that was already to be observed in the postmodern debate proper. So can we now speak of the "end of postmodernism", of a "post-postmodern" period?[26] This certainly does not make much sense, if we think of the

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[25] Cf. also McGuigan's plea for critical reason (as opposed to instrumental or ironic reason) [1999, 151], Hutcheon's emphasis on the continued relevance of the real and representation in postmodernism (arguing against Baudrillard's "simulation"/"hyperreality" thesis) [1988, 229ff.], Cordle's appeal for "provisionalism" ("a knowledge that both confidently asserts its view of the world, whilst embracing sceptical interrogation and reorganisation of that perspective") rather than relativism [1999, 191], as well as Welsch's concept of *transversale Vernunft* ("transversal reason"), which recognises different types of rationality and their differences/boundaries but at the same time does not negate the possibility of communication, trying to enable passages and points of contact between these different types [1993, 7 + 295ff.; cf. also 1996]. Even Lyotard is said by some to have "eventually rediscovered the merits of the Enlightenment", when, in *The Inhuman*, he "fell back on a classically modernist, foundationalist notion of 'the human', admirable and unique in his capacity for individual agency." [Patrick West in the *TLS*, 22 June 2001]

[26] Some instances of this are already observable: cf. the above-mentioned volume *After Postmodernism* [López/Potter, 2001] or *The End of Postmodernism: New Directions*, ed. Heide Ziegler (Stuttgart 1993), as well as *Beyond Postmodernism* [Stierstorfer 2003]. Even Linda Hutcheon has added a new Epilogue to her 2002 edition of *The Politics of Postmodernism*, entitled "The Postmodern...In Retrospect", which starts with the question "What Was Postmodernism?" [Hutcheon 2002, 165ff.]. Malcolm Bradbury, too, in his *The Modern British Novel* [Penguin edition with a new "Afterword from the Nineties", 1994] writes: "Perhaps the problem of the contemporary writer, and not just in Britain, is that we have reached the end of postmodern times, and are entering an age that has no clear shape, no clear prospects, and no clear name." [458] Similarly, a recent *Commentary* in the *TLS* [23 February 2001] was entitled "All quiet on the postmodern front" and treats postmodernism

problems inherent in the term 'postmodernism' itself and the difficulties in pinning down the concept behind it. In addition, most of the more moderate positions mentioned above are nevertheless put forward under the label of 'postmodern(ism)'. Therefore, I would like to think of these developments as a certain 'coming of age' of postmodernism, a more inclusive and at the same time less radical interpretation of the term. What is crucial is to preserve its "mood" of antifoundational (or non-foundational) critique and radical self-questioning, which makes it deeply political as well as supremely ethical.

It is this balanced view of postmodernism which I would call 'serious' or even 'proper', in contrast to the 'vulgar' version of relativist nihilism which is so often taken for the whole concept by its critics. It is also this view of postmodernism that seems most suited to the writing of Alasdair Gray. Needless to say some will see in this interpretation an improper narrowing (or broadening) of the concept, probably led by a wish to make it fit the aims (even perhaps the predetermined results?) of this study. As I have pointed out at the beginning of this section, the alternative would be not to use the term at all. However, apart from being at a loss as to what to use in its stead, I do wish to deal in my study with many of the topics discussed under the label 'postmodernism'. To use the term (and maybe "question it from within", in postmodernist fashion) therefore offers itself as the most reasonable or even only possibility. In the field of contemporary literature, moreover, it is (still) almost universally applied, even if there, too, a more moderate position seems to be emerging. Therefore, while I frankly admit that I am indeed at least partly guided in my view of postmodernism by my object of study, which is the fiction of Alasdair Gray (after all, which

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(particularly in the field of history, but with general implications) as all but dead (thus, all the references to postmodernism are formulated in the past tense). However, later this year, the same paper published another *Commentary* which argued the complete opposite, under the title "A quiet victory: The growing role of postmodernism in History" [26 October 2001].

investigation/study can deny that?), I do believe that many aspects of the postmodernism debate point in the (compromise/balanced) direction sketched above, as I have—more or less 'objectively'—tried to show in the foregoing section.

This rather detailed but of necessity still cursory look at the postmodernism debate has highlighted several themes in contemporary theoretical debates which will form the background for my analysis in the following chapters, sometimes explicitly, such as postmodern literary techniques or the topic of (postmodern) history, and sometimes as an implicit underlying theme, such as the issue of the radical challenge to notions of truth, meaning and identity or the question of political and moral engagement, which are both present in all of the following chapters. Most importantly perhaps, what this overview has made clear is that some sort of ethical stance must be adopted in any intervention in this complex and paradoxical field, in order to circumvent the dangers of irresponsible relativism and nihilism and of cheap polemicism. I will attempt to be guided by this insight in the following.

Chapter Two: Postmodern Possibilities

Scottish Literature and the Postmodern 'Paradigm Change'

Although I have described the postmodern developments in the previous chapter as an international phenomenon, there are bound to be national differences as to when and in what specific form they have come to influence each culture. The UK as a whole, and Scotland in particular, certainly occupy a fairly marginal position in most general overviews of postmodernism. In a British context, the late 1970s seem to be a more fitting date for a paradigm change in literature, culture and society than the 1960s. By then, the decline of the British Empire was all but complete and decolonisation virtually finished (with the Falklands 'throwback' just around the corner); Britain had joined the European Community and was slowly trying to come to terms with its diminished role in the world, while at the same time its society was becoming ever more multicultural. In 1979 Margaret Thatcher's ascent to power meant the end of the post-war consensus and heralded a period of neo-liberal economic policies and ever-growing disparities between the richest and the poorest sections of society. The same year also saw the failure of the devolution referendum in Scotland (and Wales), which inaugurated a period of national (identity) crisis as well as unprecedented cultural and especially literary productivity. The latter development was soon to be dubbed the 'new Renaissance' in reference to the interwar revival of the 1920s and 1930s connected above all with the name of Hugh MacDiarmid. The year 1981 saw the publication of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* as well as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which took the Booker Prize that year. The two decades which followed were years of immense changes and insecurity in Britain as a whole but also in Scotland, marked by disasters such as the Miners' Strike in 1984-5 and continuing deindustrialisation, especially in the north of England and in Scotland (and there in the Clydeside area in particular) and resulting growth of unemployment. On the other hand, they were also characterised by a new creativity in culture and the arts and tinged with hope, perhaps best personified in the new Prime Minister in 1997 and leader of New Labour, Tony Blair. These hopes were nurtured by the instigation of the devolution process for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

(together with the peace process there) in the same year, followed by the opening of assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. How justified the hopes are is difficult to say at this moment, but it is clear that a new (socio-historical) era has already begun, whether we want to call it postmodern or not.

It is debatable how far Britain really lagged behind the developments in other parts of the world. The roots for many of the later changes certainly lay in the 1960s: the growing problems of the Welfare State or the growth of Scottish nationalism with the success of the SNP and the discovery of North Sea Oil, for example. However, concerning literary development, Britain is often said to have only reluctantly taken up postmodern innovations, and it is the (late) seventies that are usually seen as the start of a new literary period in England or Britain as a whole as well as particularly in Scotland.[1] It is customary in studies of post-war British fiction to remark that the realist tradition was still very dominant here and that a certain hesitance or even hostility to (post)modernist innovations prevailed. [cf. e.g. Elias 1993, Bradbury 1994, Lord 1996, Earnshaw 2000] Whether this has to do with some idea of national characteristics or identity, such as innate traditionalism or conservatism, as Geoffrey Lord suggests, is of secondary importance—but it can go some way to explaining the apparent 'delay' in taking up postmodernism. From another angle, however, this can even appear as an advantage, because it could be seen as in some ways a more 'sophisticated' stance which avoids the postmodern excesses. In fact, it is perhaps akin to the more balanced position that I have tried to propagate above. Crucially, it is also held to express a *moral* attitude:

> [T]he majority of British novelists have found a middle ground that renders [...] a division between 'realist' and 'experimental' redundant. [...] [T]he attachment to some version of realism bespeaks a moral sense on the part of these

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[1] Cf. Bradbury 1994, chapter seven ("Artists of the Floating World, 1979 to the present"), as well as Gifford 1996 + 1999.

> writers which is often taken as absent (because also outmoded) from other fiction. It is true that a philosophical and political belief in 'realism' does not necessitate any particular type of fiction, as is sometimes claimed, but there does appear in the British novel a clear connection between a particular type of world we inhabit, one that is taken to be empirically verifiable, and the evaluation of moral behaviour. In the British novel the tradition is one where the novel is a laboratory for analysis of manners and mores within a liberal humanist framework, and it is this, as much as any empirical turn of mind, which constrains the British novel post Second World War to steer a middle course in reaction to modernist and postmodernist dominance. [Earnshaw 2000, 65]

If this middle course between the realist and experimental modes is characteristic of British literature as a whole and therefore provides us with an apparently ideal test case for the more general aspects outlined in the survey of the postmodern debate, in Scottish literature it has become almost a cliché under the name of 'Caledonian antisyzygy'. This term was first used by G. Gregory Smith in his study *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919) and subsequently taken over by MacDiarmid as one of the key terms in his concept of Scottish national identity. Since then it has been "grossly overused" [Cowan/Gifford 1999, 1] as a concept to describe the perceived contradictory nature of the Scottish character, "a fundamental Scottish dualism", expressing the "antithetical characteristics inform[ing] all of Scottish culture" [ibid.].[2] It is not difficult to relate this "conjunction of opposites", the "love of detailed realistic fact and [...] of fantasy and the grotesque" [Walker 1996, 14] to the writing of Alasdair Gray, especially if one thinks of *Lanark* or *Poor Things*. In the light of my discussion of postmodernism, it is therefore significant to read that, in Smith's own words, the Caledonian antisyzygy involves "the admission that two sides of the matter have been considered" and

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[2] Edward J. Cowan and Douglas Gifford adopt Smith's idea of "the 'polar twins' of the Scottish Muse" in the recent collection of essays *The Polar Twins* (1999) to explore especially the relation between Scottish history and literature. For a more general discussion of the concept in Scottish literature cf. Walker 1996, 14-6.

"that disorderly order is order after all." [quoted ibid.] If, furthermore, we can believe Marshall Walker that "it is this conflict which ignites the humanitarian elements in [Scottish] writers to burn so brightly" [ibid.], then it will become evident how Gray's writing and the theoretical background interrelate.

If there is obviously a specifically British (and Scottish) brand of postmodernism, which this study sets out to illuminate through its manifestations in the work of Alasdair Gray, the literary means used in these postmodern British works are very similar to those of other postmodern writers. It is usually these more strictly literary/stylistic features which first began to appear in the late seventies/early eighties (in reaction both to the theoretical developments in literary and cultural analysis[3] and to the 'postmodern' literary movements elsewhere) that have attracted most attention. It was this "breakdown of the conventional borders of genre and narrative type", the "[s]tylistic promiscuity—the mixing and merging of various styles, genres, and cultural levels, the intertextual layering of free play with traditional narrative [...] [a]nd similar manners, of heightened factionality and literary play [that] now became part of the going convention of contemporary British fiction" [Bradbury 1994, 407-8] which were—and still are—described under the heading of British postmodern fiction. These elements can be seen as an expression of the 'paradigm shift' in literature, since with their radical questioning but simultaneous use of literary traditions they parallel the similarly radical yet paradoxical nature of the wider developments. Alasdair Gray has been hailed as the 'postmodern' voice of Scotland precisely because of his extensive use of these playful, metafictional and intertextual devices. A closer analysis of his use of these elements is no doubt necessary, in particular since they all too easily lead to a view of an irresponsible, ludic postmodernism—which is strongly counterbalanced by Gray's political and ethical convictions.

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[3] Malcolm Bradbury points out the influence of Deconstruction and contemporary philosophy and literary theory on Peter Ackroyd and his writing, for example, as well as mentioning the "postmodern trickiness" of other writers such as Martin Amis. [1994, 406-7]

After the publication of *Lanark* in 1981 Alasdair Gray soon acquired the epithet of the "postmodern Scot". This was reinforced by the reception of his next two works, *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* and *1982 Janine*, which followed soon after (in 1983 and 1984 respectively). By the early 1990s, a considerable body of criticism already existed which looked at Gray's work from the angle of postmodernism. As Eilidh Whiteford remarks [1997, 23], it was critics from outside Scotland, in particular, who aligned him with postmodernism, sometimes even using his work to exemplify the movement [cf. McHale 1987, Lee 1990; see also Juan 2003]. What is also conspicuous is the almost exclusive focus on *Lanark* (and sometimes *1982 Janine*) in most discussions of Gray's postmodernism. While the novels and novellas of the later 1980s were certainly less obviously 'postmodern', Gray's two novels of the early 1990s, *Poor Things* and *A History Maker*, can with some justification be seen as examples *par excellence* of this category. However, they have as yet received only scant attention in the postmodern context. This is one more reason for my choice of these two novels, besides *Lanark*, for analysis. Another reason for revisiting the apparently well-trodden field of the postmodern approach to Gray's work is the strong if not exclusive emphasis that is usually put on the purely *literary* expression of the postmodern in his writing, focusing on the playful, self-conscious style that is one of the hallmarks of Gray's fiction. Less frequently do we find an engagement with the underlying *ideological* and *political* issues which we have seen to be so important to the postmodernism debate (a very notable exception is Eilidh Whiteford's study). However, these problems must also be addressed in order to arrive at a comprehensive picture of Gray's place within or at the margins of the postmodern 'tradition'. They will also lead to a consideration of the problems that emerge by putting his work in this context, not the least of which is Gray's own intense dislike of the label 'postmodern' when applied to his work. In this chapter, however, I will start with a survey of Gray's literary and stylistic postmodernism, and use the later chapters to proceed to the more comprehensive political and ideological view, including the problematisation of the concept in Gray's work. My aim here is mainly to add my own perspective to the already existing 'postmodern' criticism of Gray's work by emphasising the serious (perhaps even traditional) message that can be detected in or behind Gray's postmodern literary games. I will be

mainly referring to the three novels that are the object of my study, mentioning other works when necessary and appropriate.[4]

Gray's Postmodern Writing: Metafiction, Intertextuality, Inter-Art Discourse

Gray's Self-Conscious (Meta)Fiction

The aspect most commonly used in describing a work of literature as 'postmodern' is a self-consciousness about its own status as literature, a deliberate foregrounding of its conventions, of language and style. This feature is often referred to as 'metafiction' and frequently involves a degree of irony or parody, as Steven Connor stresses when he writes that "the most influential accounts of postmodernist fiction stress the prevalence of parodic 'metafiction', or the exploration by literary texts of their own nature and status as fiction." [1997, 129] One of these 'influential accounts' is certainly Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction*, and it is here that we find one of the first treatments—and probably the most influential one outside Scotland—of *Lanark* as a postmodern work *par excellence*. As in many other such interpretations, special attention is paid to the Epilogue, arguably the most obviously metafictional passage in Gray's whole oeuvre, including one of the staples of postmodern metafiction, the interview between the author and one of the characters in the novel, in this case Lanark [cf. McHale 1987, ch. 13, esp. 213ff.].

In addition, there are several metafictional elements in the novel besides and before the Epilogue, which only comes near the end of Book 4. The first of these is the structure of the novel as such, the ordering of the four 'Books', together with the Prologue and Epilogue.

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[4] In something like a 'Grayish' time structure, most of my more detailed comments on the novels, including some plot summaries, will follow in the later chapters, particularly chapters three and four.

The novel falls into two parts, Books 1 and 2 being the realistic, *Portrait of the Artist*-like story of the childhood, adolescence and young adulthood of Duncan Thaw in Glasgow, with more than just accidental parallels to Gray's own biography. In contrast, Books 3 and 4 (which we find at the beginning and at the end of Gray's novel respectively, enclosing the realistic narrative in the middle) relate the life of Lanark, who is and at the same time is not Thaw's alter ego, from his arrival in the dark and dystopian world of Unthank until his death there, with an interlude in the subterranean "Institute" and the "Intercalendrical Timezone" as well as a visit to a town called Provan. A lot has been written on the complicated relation between the two parts, on whether Lanark's is a parallel life to Thaw's or whether it is a kind of hell/purgatory following Thaw's possible suicide etc. All I will say here, however, is that they are certainly intricately interwoven and offer multiple (sometimes pseudo-) parallels which allow a variety of possibly contrasting interpretations.[5] I would argue that this largely accounts for the appeal of the book as a whole, and is one of Gray's greatest achievements. More importantly in our context, this structure immediately signals to the reader that Gray is playing with the medium, that he is involving the reader in the construction of the narrative. In Book 3, with which the novel starts, there are some metafictional or intratextual passages that will either go unnoticed or will not make sense to the reader because they refer to passages that come only later in the structure of the novel, for instance in the Thaw narration of Books 1 and 2. At one point Lanark is trying to remember his name but can only vaguely think of something starting with "Th-"

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[5] To add to the confusion—or to the rich complexity—of the book, we also find a Prologue (after Book 3 and before Book 1) which is the life story of the "oracle" who tells Lanark the story of Duncan Thaw (i.e. Books 1 and 2), an Interlude between Books 1 and 2 "to remind us that Thaw's story exists within the hull of Lanark's", and the extremely funny and yet seriously important Epilogue four chapters before the end of Book 4 (and thus of the novel itself), where the author figure of Nastler enters the narrative and discusses the plot with Lanark and where in addition we get 'scholarly' footnotes by a certain Sidney Workman as well as the hilarious "Index of Plagiarisms"; to say nothing of Gray's own illustrations, which reflect as well as interact with the contents of the book.

or "Gr-" [L, 20]. In chapter four, Lanark meets a girl at a party whom he thinks he recognises and shocks her by asking "I killed you, didn't I?" [28]. This can be read as a reference to the end of Book 2, where Thaw (possibly) commits a murder. Similarly, in the corridors of the Institute Lanark hears fragments of conversations that are taken from other parts of the novel, including the last words from both the Thaw and the Lanark narrative [62, 64]. Also, at one point, Lanark sees from one of the windows of the Institute a city (of which he has been told before that "it lies in the past" [60]) which is very like Glasgow, and he observes a scene where a young boy leaves home for school:

> Directly opposite Lanark a thin woman with a tired face appeared between the curtains of a bay window. She stood watching the boy, who turned and waved to her as he reached the street corner and banged the side of his head into a lamppost. Lanark felt inside himself the shock, then amusement, which showed on the mother's face. The boy went round the corner, rubbing his ear mournfully. The woman turned and looked straight across at Lanark, then lifted a hand to her mouth in a startled puzzled way. He wanted to wave to her as the boy had waved, to open the window and shout something comforting, but a milk cart pulled by a brown horse came along the street, and when he looked back from it the bay window was empty.
>
> This vision hit Lanark poignantly. [75-6]

After having read the whole novel, it is not difficult to see in the boy the young Duncan Thaw and in the woman his (and therefore Lanark's?!) mother, even if there is no directly corresponding scene in Book 1. This is clearly a metafictional game played by Gray which can only really be appreciated by the reader when he rereads the novel. It is also, significantly, more than a mere 'game' because it can be read as a very subtle hint to the importance or subconscious presence of Thaw's/Lanark's mother in his life. Chapter 19 in Book 1 (with the interesting title "Mrs. Thaw disappears"—a link to the later [or earlier, in the sequence of the novel] disappearances in Unthank) relates the early death of Thaw's mother and opens with a diary entry by Thaw which contains the words: "If Mum died I honestly don't think I'd feel much about it." [L, 190] When she does, he seems curiously unmoved by it, but the last sentence of the chapter is: "Grief pulled at an almost unconscious corner of his mind like a puppy trying

to attract its master's attention by tugging the hem of his coat." [L, 203] It is among the hallmarks of Gray's writing that he lets his characters' personality reveal itself almost unnoticed by the reader, in such asides or scenes like the one described above where Lanark sees his mother, in a vision which "hit[s him] poignantly". There are many more of these seriously playful devices before we reach the Epilogue, such as the Prologue before Book 1 and the Interlude after it.

However, it is in the Epilogue that Gray displays the most complex metafictional techniques,[6] and it is also here that we may glimpse the larger significance of his self-conscious writing, beyond the mere playfulness and irony so often associated with it. The material structure of the novel as a printed book is stressed already when the reader, together with Lanark, literally 'enters' the Epilogue: "The Red Girl led him along the outer corridor till they came to a white panel without hinges or handle. She said, 'It's a door. Go through it.' [...] As Lanark pressed the surface he noticed a big word on it:" [L, 478] The next page in the novel is blank with only one word in fat print: "**EPILOGUE**". This emphasis on the material nature of the text and thus on the fictionality of the narration, so typical of postmodern metafiction, is upheld and elaborated throughout the Epilogue. A little later the man Lanark meets in the 'Epilogue room' says:

> "[...] I have called myself a king—that's a purely symbolic name, I'm far more important. Read this and you'll understand. The critics will accuse me of self-indulgence but I don't care."[7] With a reckless gesture he handed Lanark a

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6 Cf. Juan's extensive treatment of the Epilogue in his chapter on *Lanark* as a metafictional text [Juan 2003, esp. 298ff.]. See also Gray's own comments in the Epilogue to this study.

7 At this point the first of the footnotes of the Epilogue—according to the table of contents by a certain "Sidney Workman"—is inserted, reading: "To have an objection anticipated is no reason for failing to raise it." The device of the footnotes further complicates the logic of narrative levels because they comment on and often contradict Nastler/"the author" while he himself says that he is working on the epilogue, which "contains critical notes which will save research scholars years of toil." [483] As can

> paper from the bed. It was covered with childish handwriting and many words were scored out or inserted with little arrows. Much of it seemed to be dialogue but Lanark's eye was caught by a sentence in italics which said: *Much of it seemed to be dialogue but Lanark's eye was caught by a sentence in italics which said:* Lanark gave the paper back asking, "What's that supposed to prove?"—"I am your author." [481]

This device, often called *mise-en-abyme* and discussed by McHale under the heading of "Chinese-box Worlds" [McHale 1987, ch. 8, e.g. 124ff.], is another typically postmodern technique meant to problematise the issue of realistic representation by transgressing the logic of narrative levels.[8] Thus Alison Lee points out in *Postmodern*

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be expected, the footnotes themselves are far from authoritative and are certainly not Gray's own 'corrections' (as Carola Jansen seems to suggest [2000, 19]).

8 Interestingly, a very similar passage can be found in a novel by the grand old dame of Scottish fiction (and postmodernism?) Muriel Spark as early as 1957, as Cairns Craig points out: "In Spark's first novel, *The Comforters* (1957), the central character, Caroline, who is writing a book on *Form in the Modern Novel*, but is 'having difficulty with the chapter on realism' (57) comes to believe that she can hear the typewriter which is composing her own thoughts as a character in a novel: 'A typewriter and a chorus of voices: What on earth are they up to at this time of night? Caroline wondered. But what worried her were the words they had used, coinciding so exactly with her own thoughts. Then it began again. Tap-tappity-tap: the typewriter. And again, the voices: Caroline ran out on to the landing, for it seemed quite certain the sound came from that direction. No one was there. The chanting reached her as she returned to her room, with these words exactly: *What on earth are they up to at this time of night? Caroline wondered. But what worried her were the words they had used, coinciding so exactly with her own thoughts* [...] (43-4)'" [Craig 1999, 172-3]. The similarity to Gray's passage, even down to the italicising, is striking. I do not want to suggest that Gray has actually used Spark's novel (or even read it), but it is at least noteworthy that she applies these allegedly 'postmodern' techniques at that time and as a Scottish writer. On the other hand, one can always find earlier instances of these techniques if one looks for them. Flann O'Brien's *At-Swim-Two-*

British Fiction: "The final level of auto-representation, the Epilogue, is certainly the most fascinating. [...] The Epilogue gives the illusion that the reader has been allowed to co-create parts of the novel which Nastler has not written, but which the reader has read", and in reference to the passage quoted above: "The chapter is, in fact, being created through the very process of reading as is pointedly revealed by the lines which both Lanark and the reader read" [Lee 1990, 111]. This dimension of reader involvement is often seen as one of the decisive aspects that distinguish postmodern fiction from other/earlier types of literature. In fact, this, too, is commented on directly by "the author" when he tells Lanark:

> I'm like God the father, you see, and you are my sacrificial son, and a reader is a Holy Ghost who keeps everything joined together and moving along. It doesn't matter how much you detest this book I am writing, you can't escape it before I let you go. But if the readers detest it they can shut it and forget it; you'll simply vanish and I'll turn into an ordinary man. We mustn't let that happen. [...] [U]nluckily the readers identify with your feelings not with mine, and if you resent my end too much I am likely to be blamed instead of revered, as I should be. Hence this interview. [L, 495]

It is in passages like this one that the metafictional element becomes more than mere playfulness, because there is obviously an important truth behind it. Among other things, this presents the actual ending of the novel in a new light, where apocalypse is (if perhaps only momentarily) averted and Lanark is "a slightly worried, ordinary old man but glad to see the light in the sky." [560] Stephen Bernstein, analysing the central question of perspectives in *Lanark*,[9] also stresses the importance of the Epilogue and the quoted passage in particular:

Birds (1939) is an obvious example, but this can easily be extended back to Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-7).

9 In his chapter on *Lanark* in *Alasdair Gray* [1999, 35-58], Bernstein offers a perceptive reading of the novel from the point of view of perspective, emphasising the importance of elevated points of view, such as the Ben

> [T]he epilogue offers yet another elevated perspective ("the upper foliage of a chestnut tree" is visible from Nastler's "tall bay window" [480][10]), it also suggests more clearly than any previous section how Lanark can complete the triangulated mapping his narrative requires. All he has ever wanted, Lanark tells Nastler, is "some sunlight, some love, some very ordinary happiness" (484). Against this humble request Nastler warns of the sentimentality of optimistic narrative closure and its likeliness in disappointing a third or more of the holy trinity he pieces together [...] Comically as they are presented, it is this narrative triangle and Lanark's triad of wishes that change both Lanark's world and his subsequent approach to it. [...] What Nastler offers Lanark is an elevated perspective that can demonstrate that the sunlight, love, and happiness he craves are inextricably linked with processes of cyclic change such as the rotation of the earth or the mortality of generations. [Bernstein 1999, 55]

Similarly, the Epilogue also offers the reader of the novel a kind of elevated perspective, from which he can get a more comprehensive view of the complicated structure and dual narrative of the book as well as its genesis and 'influences'. I will say more in later chapters about the autobiographical information contained here, and also about how the "Index of Plagiarisms", running down the margins of the Epilogue on pp. 485-99, is at once a savage satire and a serious source of information. In addition, the last footnote, which concludes the Epilogue, is really an 'Acknowledgements' section for the whole

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Rua mountain or the Necropolis in the novel, as well as the motif of mapping and triangulation, where a third perspective is needed to get a comprehensive view of the land/life/the novel (e.g. in reference to the two perspectives of Thaw and Lanark), and suggests that the Epilogue is the site of such a holistic perspective.

[10] The passage quoted here by Bernstein incidentally illuminates another of Gray's hidden intratextual references, when we now reread something that Rima tells Lanark in the Institute in Book 3: "Yes, I dreamed a lot of strange things in that armour. You were called Thaw, or Coulter, and we stood on a bridge at night with the moon above us and an old man watching from among some trees. [...]" [103]

novel: "As this 'Epilogue' has performed the office of an introduction to the work as a whole (the so-called 'Prologue' being no prologue at all but a separate short story), it is saddening to find the 'conjuror' omitting the courtesies appropriate to such an addendum." [L, 499] There follows a list of real people who have helped Gray in preparing the book for publication, including his typist Florence Allan, the writer James Kelman and the editor Stephanie Wolf Murray. The note ends: "And what of the compositors employed by Kingsport Press of Kingsport, Tennessee, to typeset this bloody book? Yet these are only a few out of thousands whose help has not been acknowledged and whose names have not been mentioned." [ibid.] This, then, is another turn of the metafictional screw, so to speak, since information like that clearly 'should' be placed elsewhere. It also shows—and this is significant—Gray's concern for the people involved in the process of making books who are not usually noticed by the reader. Attention is paid to the ordinary, common people whom he is focusing on so frequently in his works—which could be precisely why this information is not tucked away somewhere where nobody will read it but comes here, in arguably the most central part of the book.[11] There can be hardly any doubt, therefore, that *Lanark* proves Gray's postmodern qualities (by most definitions of the term in a literary context), while simultaneously showing his creative use of these techniques to his specific ends, pointing to a deeper truth and eschewing mere hedonistic playfulness.

As we have seen in *Lanark*, Gray's postmodern self-consciousness extends beyond the confines of the written text to the actual reception of his work by the reading public and by academic literary criticism. What started with the Epilogue in *Lanark* continued already on the book covers of *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* or *1982 Janine*, where Gray

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[11] This is a strategy that Gray uses in most of his books, usually in the form of an epilogue, such as the "Epilogue for the discerning critic" in *1982 Janine* [343ff.] (which also mentions the names of the typesetters) or the "Index of Helpers" from *The Book of Prefaces* [632ff.], complete with 33 "Portraits of Contributors" drawn by Gray himself.

began to place hilarious mock reviews and comments on his books. This has remained something of a stock-in-trade of Gray's work down to *The Book of Prefaces*, which has an "Author's Blurb" with the heading "Our Editor Confronts Critics" and a "Publisher's Blurb" where "Our Editor Evades Critics" (on the dust jacket). One of the nicest examples of this are certainly the blurbs "for a popular paperback" and "for a high-class hardback" on the cover of *Poor Things*. What Gray is doing here is really meta-metafiction or metacriticism, if such a word can be used. In this book in particular he is playing with the conventions of the novel form. The pretence of Gray being the editor and not the author of the book goes as far as having a short biography of the alleged author Dr Archibald McCandless printed on the first page of the book, followed by only five lines on the 'editor' Alasdair Gray. I will say more on this aspect in my chapter on history, where proof will be found that the metafictional strand is present to the very end, and that the problem of the relation of fact and fiction and with that the issue of representation is central to the book. This is, of course, another mainstay of postmodern fiction: "Through metafictional techniques the [postmodern] novel creates levels of fiction and 'reality' and questions the Realist assumption that truth and reality are absolutes." [Lee 1990, 3]

As if Gray wanted to make sure that this point really cannot be missed by readers of *Poor Things*, he inserts even before the title page a page of critical comments on the novel (in the 1993 Penguin edition) where extracts from real reviews of the book are mixed with Gray's own very funny mock criticisms from fictional papers such as "Private Nose", "The Times Literary Implement" or "The Skibereen Eagle". To make matters worse—or more metafictional still—an 'erratum slip' is printed over the page, which reads: "The etching on page 187 does not portray Professor Jean Martin Charcot, but Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac."[12] Jean Martin Charcot is of course an historical figure, who also appears as a character in *Poor Things*. The

[12] Cf. the Appendix for reproductions of this page [fig. 1] and other examples of Gray's illustrations and typographical games.

ontological nature of the portrait that the reader finds on page 187 is already complicated enough as it is; apart from being clearly by Gray himself but bearing the initials "W.S." (for William Strang, as McCandless's memoir is allegedly illustrated by this—once again historical!—Scottish artist), there is the ambiguity of whether it is a likeness of the historical Charcot or a pure product of Gray's imagination. This is further complicated by the reference to the obscure 'Count' (who does not appear in the novel and whose name, in addition, brings Montesquieu to mind). It is obvious that there is no 'correct' interpretation, but that the aim is exactly to foreground the complicated and multi-layered nature of (literary/visual) representation and, implicitly, of reality. This produces what McHale calls an "ontological flicker" [1987, e.g. 32], which is among the central characteristics of postmodern (meta)fiction.[13] It is also part of the more general tendencies of problematisation and questioning, of the "incredulities towards metanarratives" in postmodernism at large.

Given the obvious importance of metafiction for both postmodernism and Gray's work, this aspect will play an important role in this study. In chapter three, I will comment on the phenomenon in relation to the science-fiction genre, while in chapter four Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction will serve as a starting point for my investigation of history in Gray's work.

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[13] In fact, Gray has said in an interview that "Charcot was indeed based on Boldini's portrait of Montesquieu." [Axelrod 1995b, 114] But this does not make the situation any clearer because why Charcot, who existed in reality, should be portrayed after Montesquieu and whether there could be a relation between the two is (meant to be) obscure. Moreover, in the same answer Gray asserts that "The portrait of McCandless was taken from Paul Currie, of Baxter from Bernard MacLaverty, of Bella from Moray McCalhine. The first two are friends, the third a friend and wife." [ibid.] While Bernard MacLaverty is indeed a writer living in Glasgow and a friend of Gray, Gray's wife—to whom the novel is also dedicated—is in fact called Morag McAlpine. It is clear that Gray extends his postmodern playfulness even to his interviews. (It may equally well be, however, that Mark Axelrod—the interviewer here—has simply misheard or misread the name, I would like to add.)

Intertextuality in Gray's work

My comments above lead directly to another postmodern category of which *Poor Things* is a prime example: rewriting or intertextuality.[14] Peter Barry includes this aspect as one of six points under the heading "What postmodernist critics do": "They foreground what might be called 'intertextual elements' in literature, such as parody, pastiche, and allusion, in all of which there is a major degree of reference between one text and another, rather than between the text and a safely external reality." [1995, 91] In studying the work of a specific writer, literary critics naturally tend to look for comparisons and parallels with other authors and works and try to find literary traditions to which his or her work might be allocated. No reader of Alasdair Gray's works can possibly miss this element in his writing. Indeed, it might be said to be among his favourite literary devices, as the cheeky "Index of Plagiarisms" in *Lanark* signals. It is no surprise, therefore, that he has received rather more than his fair share of such comparisons, among them Fielding, Sterne, Swift, Dante, Blake, Joyce, Kafka etc. The list may be especially long with Gray (I have only cited a tiny selection) precisely because his work resists such an approach by its very individuality, ambiguity and playfulness. Marshall Walker has made this point very clearly:

> Sandy-moustached, small-eyed Alasdair Gray comes from his self-portraits (words or pictures) candidly everything but long-bearded. It is not surprising, therefore, that long-bearded criticism has a hard time with him and with his works. The approach via sources and influences, for example, soon explodes so munificently beyond the manageable that only the longest, doggedest beard would persist with it. [Walker 1991, 37]

I will try to avoid the pitfall of "long-bearded criticism" by not looking for sources and influences per se, but always within a clearly stated context. Thus, in the following chapters I will look at the three

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[14] In fact, metafiction and intertextuality can be seen as partly overlapping concepts.

novels and their 'influences' mainly from the perspective of science fiction and history, discussing for example *Lanark*'s references to, among others, Orwell and Huxley, Wells, and the epic genre; *Poor Things*'s to *Frankenstein*, but also to Hogg and Victorian fiction; *A History Maker*'s to Scott, Hogg and again the (anti-)utopian tradition. Importantly, I will attempt to stay permanently aware of the ambivalence of Gray's use of these "sources and influences", never aiming at a monolithic explanation. What I would like to look at here, however, are several (perhaps) less obvious intertextual connections which, I want to argue, reveal something about Gray's use of intertextuality as more than simply parody and pastiche. Let me start with a remark about Gray's rewriting of his own texts.

What is interesting about *A History Maker*, for example, is that apart from all its references to other authors it is in fact also a rewriting of an earlier text by Gray himself, his TV play *The History Maker*.[15] This is actually no exception in Gray's creative process—on the contrary: *The Fall of Kelvin Walker*, *McGrotty and Ludmilla*, *Something Leather* as well as a great number of the stories in *Lean Tales*, *Ten Tales Tall and True* and *Mavis Belfrage* have all developed from theatre, radio or TV plays written much earlier, mostly in the 1960s and '70s.[16] This has been a cause of criticism from several sides [cf. e.g. Bernstein 1999, 19], and the critical reception of *A History*

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[15] For a discussion of both texts and some of their parallels as well as differences, cf. Whiteford 1997, 200ff.

[16] Cf. Charlton 1991b, Bernstein 1999 and Jansen 2000 for lists of these plays and their use in Gray's fiction. Gray himself is also very open about this 'recycling', as proved by the list of chapters with the date of original composition in the epilogue of *Something Leather* [SL, 251] and several statements in interviews, where Gray frankly admits that he has (re-)written many of these works out of financial necessity. A recent article in the *Scotsman* mentions Gray's plans for a new collection of novellas (to be entitled *Men in Love*) which "will (when he gets round to it) be based on television plays he wrote in the 1960s and 1970s. A lesser writer might be suspected of running out of things to say and having to recycle old material [...]" [Close 2003].

Maker was certainly much less enthusiastic than that of *Lanark* or *Poor Things* (although Bernstein, for one, singles out this novel as the exception to the rule of the inferior quality of Gray's rewritten material [ibid., 21]). In any case, I would hold that the strategy of rewriting and the intertextual relations between several of Gray's own texts[17] is indicative of a wider, generally open approach to the use of sources and an ambiguous position towards the originality of any cultural artefact, which again ties in with postmodern theories. Mere eclecticism, however, is not something Gray can be easily accused of. His rewriting and intertextuality are usually very well thought-out and elaborate, mostly guided by his personal agenda, and above all serving to express his deeply held beliefs and to help formulate his 'message'. In the following, I will select a few intertextual relationships in his work that I find striking (and which have not yet been extensively discussed in criticism of Gray's work) and attempt to point out possible motivations underlying Gray's use of these 'models'.

I will start with one of the—possibly—less obvious sources: the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges. Like most of Gray's important literary 'relations', he gets an entry in *Lanark*'s Index of Plagiarisms, even if it is rather short: "BORGES, JORGE LUIS: Chap. 43, Ozenfant's speech. Blockplag from short essay 'The Barbarian and the City.'" [L, 486][18] However, the speech mentioned here has a special importance for the interpretation of the novel,[19] so that it seems possible to attach a greater significance to the link (always keeping in mind that the

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[17] Eilidh Whiteford also points out the intertextual relationship between Gray's autobiographical writings, e.g. *Lanark* and the *Saltire Self-Portrait* (1988) [1997, 67ff.].

[18] A "Blockplag", according to the mock-scholarly explanation in the Index, is "BLOCK PLAGIARISM, where someone else's work is printed as a distinct typographical unit" [L, 485].

[19] Cf. my discussion of this passage in chapters three and four. Ozenfant is, of course, Lord Monboddo; the chapter is called "Explanation" and contains one of Gray's 'brief histories of mankind'.

Index is—partly—satirical). It is certainly not too difficult to connect Gray's work with the mixture of the real and the fantastic in Borges (as, for example in his *Ficciones*, 1944 or *El Aleph*, 1949). In addition, a stylistic relation can also be found, as Philip Hobsbaum has remarked: "[The] gift of retailing incidents in so plain a style as to make them seem surrealistic [...], [t]his quiet noting of bizarre circumstances [...] has something of the insistence of hysteria barely under control. That is what links Alasdair Gray with Daniel Defoe and also with a number of other 'realist' writers, such as William Cowper, John Clare, and Jorge Luis Borges." [Hobsbaum 1995, 148]

However, in the end it is the investigation of the deceptive nature of reality and its representation, which can be found in nearly all of Borges's fictions, that links it most closely to Gray's concerns. In fact, one of the stories from *Ficciones*, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote", could be read almost as a resumé of (Gray's) intertextuality in general and the (postmodern) treatment of history in particular. In this story, a (early) twentieth-century writer, Pierre Menard, manages to rewrite Cervantes's *Don Quixote*:

> Cervantes' text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say, but ambiguity is richness.) It is a revelation to compare Menard's *Don Quixote* with Cervantes'. The latter, for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine): "...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor." Written in the seventeenth century, written by the 'lay genius' Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes: "...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor." History, the *mother* of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened. The final phrases—*exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor*—are brazenly pragmatic. [Borges 1964, 42-3]

Despite the undoubtedly satirical undercurrent (another connection to Gray), there are several points here that illustrate quite well what

(postmodern) intertextuality can do. To put a text from the past in a new context by using it in the present (even if not necessarily rewriting it word for word, as Menard does), makes it "infinitely richer". Indeed, the statement that "ambiguity is richness" could be an accurate description of a central quality of Gray's writing. The change of meaning that the intertext undergoes in the case of the example is particularly pertinent to our discussion, since it is concerned with history. The fact that Menard "does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin" and that "Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened" sounds almost like a quotation from postmodern debates about history. History as "mother of truth" in this sense (history as fiction, in other words) is what pervades *Poor Things*, as we will see. This novel can therefore be seen to change the meaning of the Victorian "regime of truth" [cf. my quote from Crosby on p. 203] in much the same way as Menard (in Borges's story) changes Cervantes's "mother of truth" (the coincidence of the phrases is almost uncanny). In this way, Gray's rewriting of Victorianism and the Victorian novel parallels Menard's rewriting of the seventeenth-century *Quixote*.[20] After all, it is maybe in these thematic parallels, more than in the stylistic or formal ones, that Gray's connection to Borges is strongest.[21] Not surprisingly, as I

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[20] Incidentally, Cervantes is also among the authors who are sometimes mentioned by critics in connection with Gray, and his characters, such as Thaw/Lanark or Wat Dryhope can easily be described as quixotic. In fact, in his conversation with Lanark Nastler lists "the Spanish book about the Knight of the Dolorous Countenance" as part of the epic tradition in which he hopes to place his own book: "A poor old bachelor is driven mad by reading the books you want to be in, with heroes who triumph here and now. He leaves home and fights peasants and innkeepers for the beauty which is never here and now, and is mocked and wounded. On his deathbed he grows sane and warns his friends against intoxicating literature." [L, 487] Cf. also Eilidh Whiteford's discussion of Gray's narration of his travels in Spain in "A Report to the Trustees of the Bellahouston Travelling Scholarship" [LT, 185-214] in the context of "picaresque romance". [Whiteford 1997, 83ff.]

[21] There are many further parallels to be found between Gray's and Borges's works. These include the list of books at the beginning of "Pierre Menard", which form his "visible work", and the many imaginary books

have already mentioned, it is also Borges who is often seen as one of the ancestors of postmodern fiction, or even as a 'proto-postmodernist' [cf. McHale 1992, 34].[22]

Whether it is a coincidence or not, it is tempting to point out that one of the authors Borges refers to in the "Prólogo" to the original edition of *Ficciones* is Thomas Carlyle, who is incidentally also among Gray's favourite intertextual references. Robert Crawford writes: "his [i.e. Gray's] genre-busting, footnote-crammed texts have an antecedent (as he has pointed out) in the Carlyle of *Sartor Resartus*" [Crawford 1991, 7]. This is borne out (in typically ironic fashion) by the Carlyle entry in the Index of Plagiarisms in *Lanark*: "[...] The device of giving a ponderous index to a ponderous work of fiction is taken from *Sartor Resartus*." [L, 487][23] Once again, this light-hearted remark—as well as the formal connection of mixing realism and fantasy, which can lead to Carlyle as well as Borges (maybe pointing to a triangular relation)—veils a deeper thematic parallel:

> Carlyle's *Sartor* presents a world falling apart, with a centre that no longer holds, and an experience of life which is characterised by fragmentation. [...] This is the kind of man-made cosmic apocalypse which Gray echoes [...] at the end of

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in Borges's work, e.g. in "Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain" (from *Ficciones*), when seen in connection to Gray's "Index of Plagiarisms" etc.

22 Robert Crawford makes a similar point and at the same time hints at another thematic parallel when he writes of the ending of *Lanark* (Gray's typical "GOODBYE" on the last page): "Here Gray exits from, yet also inters himself within, his labyrinthine and quasi-autobiographical novel. Such an escape which is also from another perspective an act of enclosure is typical of his imagination as a whole. It is also very typical of the postmodern imagination, whether of Borges's *Labyrinths* or of *The Prison House of Language*, an imagination preoccupied with systems from which life seems unable to escape" [Crawford 1991, 7].

23 It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Gray has written the introduction to Canongate's 2002 edition of *Sartor Resartus* [cf. Gray 2002].

> *Lanark*, in Jock's imagined scenarios of social disintegration in *Janine*, or at the end of the axletree story. Gray shares with Carlyle a 'sense of an ending' and the strategy to translate this feeling into a literary work of strong visionary qualities. [Witschi 1991, 218-9]

However, the apocalyptic theme is significantly linked to an intense social and political criticism in Carlyle's work as well as Gray's. This is arguably even more important: "Carlyle [...] is behind the English political novel [...] He is the great signpainter, and when we interpret his legacy we dissolve literature into political action. *Sartor Resartus* lurks throughout *Lanark* and *1982, Janine*". [Harvie 1993, 199] Gray's criticism of contemporary society in *Lanark* certainly echoes Carlyle, even if their preferred alternatives certainly differ.[24] The way Gray describes Carlyle's views in his Introduction to *Sartor* makes this clear: He talks about "a government chosen by big landlords who saw Britain as a statistical machine profiting those who owned it by grinding down those who served it. [...] Carlyle thought it disgustingly unfair and wasteful." [Gray 2002, xvii] So does Gray, as it becomes very clear in *Lanark* and most of his other writings. Carlyle, as Gray describes him, becomes something of an *alter ego* for Gray and his own views:

> He made an impact because he addressed his readers like Micah or Isaiah addressing the Jews, declaring that states where great wealth flourishes alongside great poverty *should* be reformed peaceably and fairly by rulers or *will* be changed violently and horribly by the ruled. [...] His message was effective because told in a tone of passionate sincerity varied by grotesque irony and grim humour. He also suggested

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[24] It is important to stress that Gray has no sympathy for Carlyle's authoritarian and sometimes anti-democratic ideas, especially in his later phase: "After 1840 something went wrong with Carlyle's notion of virtue. He defended negro slavery, Prussian militarism and an unscrupulous dictator of Paraguay, Dr Francia. George Orwell was probably right to call him sadistic." [Gray 2002, xxii] On the other hand, the idiosyncracy—not to say eccentricity—of Carlyle's views finds its parallel in Gray's own frequently unconventional ideas and writings.

> democracy and justice could coincide, while doubting the value of ballot boxes. [ibid., xx][25]

It is not too difficult to draw a parallel from this to Gray's own attacks on the injustices of British society under Thatcherism, as will be amply illustrated in this study.

A similar link to Carlyle can be found in *Poor Things*, as John C. Hawley points out:

> For all the novel's pyrotechnic allusions to Gothic fiction, there are at least as many to books preoccupied with the social condition of Britain. Among the most prominent are Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* in such chapters as "Making Me" and "Making Bella Baxter." [...] And at the heart of Godwin Baxter's experiments that brought Bella to life was an essentially social concern. [...] What we have in *Poor Things* is a late-twentieth-century nineteenth-century eighteenth century: an endlessly self-referential social experiment that views society as a sick body without a soul. [Hawley 1995, 177]

The intertextual relation to Carlyle in this case is therefore also clearly motivated by his position as one of the great Victorian 'sages', which echoes the significance of Victorianism for the novel and for Gray's concerns. In *A History Maker* the social and political aspect is also very much implied, if maybe in an even more ambiguous form. It is

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[25] Cf., for example, the following quote from *Past and Present* (1843), Book 3, ch.8: "I well venture to believe that in no time, since the beginnings of Society, was the lot of [the] dumb millions of toilers so entirely unbearable as it is even in the days now passing over us. It is not to die, or even to die of hunger, that makes a man wretched; many men have died, all men must die.... But it is to live miserable we know not why; to work sore and yet gain nothing; to be heartworn, weary, yet isolated, unrelated, girt-in with a cold universal Laissez-faire: it is to die slowly all our life long, imprisoned in a deaf, dead, Infinite Injustice" [quoted in Herbert F. Tucker (ed.), *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, Blackwell 1999, 20].

mainly linked to the historical theme, but is still very similar to the views discernible in his other works:

> Gray's point about the world with which his novel begins is clear: no society is so perfect that its benefits do not rest on the sorrow or misery of some, and none is so stable that it cannot be delivered once more into the Heraclitean flux of historical change. As the novel's many references to actual historical events and finally its account of the plot gone awry also demonstrate, Gray emphatically holds that no one can foresee the consequences of determined efforts to chart the course of history. [Bernstein 1999, 150]

We will see later that Gray's views on history can also be related to Carlyle's, but Bernstein interestingly goes on to hint at an additional connection:

> The best we can apparently hope for constitutes a theoretical echo of the words of another Scottish apostle of work, Thomas Carlyle: "To reform a world, to reform a nation, no wise man will undertake; and all but foolish men know, that the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each begins and perfects on *himself*." Those alive at the end of *A History Maker* have the chance, as so many in Gray's work would like to have but so few actually do, to work as if they were in the early days of a better nation. [ibid., 150-1][26]

It is obvious that the public and the private are very closely linked in Gray's work and that the connection between the two spheres is among his central concerns (cf. e.g. Douglas Gifford's "Private Confession and Public Satire in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray" [Gifford

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[26] The quotation is from *Sartor Resartus and Selected Prose* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), p. 29. "Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation" is a slogan Gray printed on the covers of several of his novels. It was originally taken from the Canadian poet Dennis Lee [cf. Whiteford 1997, 31].

1987]). If we think of the central characters of *Lanark*, *Poor Things* or *A History Maker*, it is also evident that their individual developments and problems, the "reformation that each begins and perfects on him(or her-)self", are at least as important as the bigger power struggles—although always inextricably bound up with those.

Once again, Gray's intertextual relationship with Carlyle's work is clearly not motivated only by a desire for postmodern playfulness but by a feeling of shared ideas and similar purpose. This does not make his intertextuality less postmodern, but it does emphasise the ethical dimension beyond or inside this postmodernism. From this perspective, indeed, Carlyle (with *Sartor Resartus* as point of reference) could himself be related to postmodernism, even if this is much more controversial than in the case of Borges: "Carlyle's use of irony as well as his self-conscious narrative strategies are strongly reminiscent of the kind of postmodern techniques we found in Gray's novels." [Witschi, 219][27] What characterises this irony according to Witschi, however, is precisely its ethical dimension:

> In Gray's literary work we do not only find thematic echoes from *Sartor*. What I would like to emphasise here is Gray's understanding of Carlyle's 'postmodern' use of irony. Gray's

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[27] Witschi goes on to point out the 'postmodern' structure of *Sartor Resartus*, with its different narratives by the Editor (complicated itself in a chapter on "Editorial Difficulties"), the German professor Diogenes Teufelsdröckh in his book *Die Kleider, ihr Werden und Wirken* which follows, as well as in a review of the book, footnotes by the printer, the professor's autobiography (which "arrives at the Editor's office in the form of 'Six considerable Paper-Bags' of 'sheets', 'shreds', and 'snips', relating all sorts of (ir)relevant information about the professor; it is written in a 'most enigmatic manner' and in a 'scarce legible' handwriting." [Witschi 1991, 220]) etc. He relates these techniques to Gray's work, but his study was written before *Poor Things* was published. However, it is certainly this novel which is most clearly modelled on *Sartor*. As usual, Gray gives it away in one of his notes, where he refers to a book printed by "Stillschweigen Verlag" at "Weissnichtwo" [PT, 290]. This is incidentally also the 'publisher' and place of publication of the book of Carlyle's professor.

> re-vision of Carlylean crisis highlights an ethical use of irony. [...] Irony is thus a forward moving and intellectually challenging force which *questions* the validity and assessment of social crisis as presented in the literary visions of Carlyle and Gray while simultaneously *affirming* the need for a re-assessment of communal values. [...] Carlyle's *Sartor* is thus one of the more important examples of an echo of the past in Gray's work. [ibid., 220-1]

It is this simultaneity of questioning and affirming that we have seen to be at the centre of postmodernism 'properly understood', in contrast to an uncommitted, ludic postmodernism. Gray's intertextual use of Carlyle's work therefore reinforces not simply the postmodern quality of his own work but also the ethical quality of his postmodernism. This in turn recalls the balanced views from the postmodernism debate.

Although Carlyle was very much concerned with the 'condition of *England*' and has been adopted by the *English* tradition, he is, of course, Scottish by birth. Whether this is significant for his importance to Gray (as Bernstein's phrase "another Scottish apostle of work" above seems to suggest) is not my central interest here, but the fact that many of Gray's intertextual 'relations' come from the Scottish tradition is undeniable. Among these, two of the most important are certainly James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson. The significance of Hogg is especially obvious in *Poor Things* and above all *A History Maker* and will be investigated in later chapters. Stevenson can also be seen as one of the possible models for *Poor Things*, in reference especially to his *Master of Ballantrae* (in both novels we find an editor, an edited manuscript etc.).[28] However, his work is arguably of

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[28] In *A Short Survey of Classic Scottish Writing*, Gray says: "After *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Stevenson's best work is *The Master of Ballantrae*, a novel in which an honest, conscientious, hard-working man is exploited, maddened and corrupted by his devilishly attractive, mean-spirited brother." [Gray 2001, 118]

more fundamental importance to Gray.[29] He is another author in the tradition of writers who possess a deceptively plain style, which Philip Hobsbaum sees Gray writing in, but he is also a markedly international writer. Gray has significantly taken up the task of 'finishing' a fragment by Stevenson, in "The Story of a Recluse" [LT, 222-46], characteristically fragmenting—or rather dissecting—it even more (especially with a nice, perhaps rather un-Stevensonian twist at the end).

The influence of *The Master of Ballantrae*, however, together with Stevenson's much more famous novella *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, points to an important strand in the Scottish literary tradition which Gray also clearly inherits (and which is conspicuous in Hogg, too): the concern with duality, division and doubles—the 'Caledonian antisyzygy'.[30] Robert Crawford emphasises the connection: "Gray's writing is widely indebted to Scottish tradition. [...] [H]is love of doubling, whether in Lanark/Thaw, in 'The Spread of Ian Nichol', or in Monboddo's 'bilocation' (L, 549) surely owes something to that love of doubles [...] which is so strong in the Scottish tradition of Hogg and Stevenson." [Crawford 1991, 7] Gray himself in fact gives a

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[29] H. Gustav Klaus, in his article "1984 Glasgow: Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard, James Kelman", posits that "[t]he three writers under discussion appear unimpressed by their nation's literary past. They profess a total lack of interest in it precisely because it does not offer any literary models to which they could turn (though Gray is clearly fascinated by Robert Louis Stevenson)." [Klaus 1993, 40] This statement is certainly debatable. I have tried to show elsewhere that it does not in fact hold true for Kelman [cf. Böhnke 1999] and would also contest it in Gray's case. What is important here, however, is the last remark in brackets, stressing the importance of Stevenson for Gray.

[30] One of the reasons for this phenomenon is often seen in the religious sphere in Scotland, especially in the strict Calvinist faith. This is certainly an important aspect, above all for the work of Hogg, and has repercussions also in Gray's fiction, e.g. in *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* (which I cannot deal with here). Cf. e.g. Schwend 1996.

brief summary of Stevenson's use of this device in "The Story of a Recluse":

> Stevenson had a habit of creating characters dialectically. Perhaps every author works in this way, but Stevenson's antagonistic or linked opposites are unusually definite. In *Kidnapped* the cautious Lowland Whig, David Balfour, contains a pride and courage which only become evident when he is coupled with the touchy Highland Jacobite, Alan Breck Stewart, who displays his pride and courage in his garments. *The Master of Ballantrae* is about two brothers, one a dutiful, long-suffering toiler who hardly anyone likes, the other an adventurous, revengeful waster with charming social manners. In *Weir of Hermiston* each character is the antithesis of one or two others, with the Scottish State Prosecutor, Lord Weir, maintaining unity by being the antithesis of everybody. In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* a respected healer and detested murderer alternate inside the same skin. [LT, 226-7]

Apart from testifying to Gray's wide reading of Stevenson, this passage is especially interesting for the aside in the second sentence that "perhaps every author" "creat[es] characters dialectically". Gray himself certainly does. Most obviously, *Lanark* is a 'dialectical' novel throughout, with the most evident but by far not the only duality being the Thaw/Lanark dichotomy. In *Poor Things*, similarly, dualities abound: there is the central opposition of the two narratives (by McCandless and Victoria), the two 'lives' of Bella/Victoria,[31] the 'double life' of General Blessington and the split in Duncan Wedderburn's personality,[32] together with many more dualities and

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[31] Cf. the last sentence of the novel: "Dr. Victoria McCandless was found dead of a cerebral stroke on 3rd December 1946. Reckoning from the birth of her brain in the Humane Society mortuary on Glasgow Green, 18th February 1880, she was exactly sixty-six years, forty weeks and four days old. Reckoning from the birth of her body in a Manchester slum in 1854, she was ninety-two." [PT, 317]

[32] Both of these can be said to be graphically signalled in the actual splitting of the printed text into two columns—in the biography of Blessington on

divisions in the novel. It is no wonder, therefore, that Stevenson's *Master* and *Jekyll and Hyde* as well as Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* have been mentioned frequently as intertexts of the novel, including their mentioning by Gray in the text itself [cf. e.g. PT, xiii + 272-3].

In *A History Maker*, the 'antisyzygy' lies again in the (at least) two narratives, as well as in the main protagonist Wat's own divided self, constantly torn between the wish to be a heroic 'history maker' on the one hand (linked to his desire for Meg/Delilah, who is herself another split personality) and his yearning for a quiet peaceful old-fashioned life on the other (connected with his attachment to Kittock and Dryhope Tower). The divided self is almost a cliché in Scottish fiction, of course, but this motif—and 'Caledonian antisyzygy' in general—can also productively be related to postmodernism, as Randall Stevenson has remarked:

> Postmodernism's particular potential for Scotland relates not only to the country's position within the increasing cultural diversity of Britain, but also to aspects of its native tradition in literature and imagination. [...] In the view of McHale and others, postmodernism is characterised by ontological shifts into worlds variously, often fantastically, disjunct from any real one. Double worlds and double narratives also figure in the Scottish imagination's Jekyll-and-Hyde, antisyzygical splits, and in its almost seamless transitions from real worlds to fantastic domains beyond them. [...] [I]t is worth pointing out that however different the antisyzygy and the experimental tradition of postmodernism may be in origin, they naturally, fruitfully, fall into alignment with each other. [Stevenson 1991, 61]

Gray's postmodern intertextuality (to Stevenson and Hogg, in any case) therefore seems to be motivated at least as much by his place in a Scottish tradition as by a desire for experimentation and radical

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the one hand [PT, 206-7] and parts of Wedderburn's letter on the other [95-7].

questioning. Indeed, contrary to expectation perhaps, the Scottish tradition and context emerges here as particularly hospitable to postmodern themes and concerns. It is important, moreover, that the Caledonian antisyzygy can offer postmodernism a concept of division that is not necessarily negative or futile, thus circumventing relativistic fragmentation. Indeed, division can become something positive, enabling, even necessary—as in the theories of the Scottish psychoanalyst R.D. Laing:

> 'The divided self' was to become the title of R. D. Laing's study of schizophrenia, a study which was to have a direct influence on such 'schizophrenic' texts as Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*. [...] Laing's conception of psychiatry is precisely the conception of the psyche not as an isolated ego but as a person based on an 'I and You' relationship [...] [T]here are many ways of envisaging the inner dialectics of the self and not all of them require that the self as constituted by its capacity for 'self-negation' is either an illness or an evil. Too often in studies of Scottish culture the apparent lack of unity of the self is taken to be the symptom of a failed identity, of a self-contradictory and self-destructive identity, rather than that the healthy self is always a dialectic operating within and between 'opposing' elements of self and other. [Craig 1999, 113]

This could serve as a summary of Gray's indebtedness to the Caledonian antisyzygy as expressed in his intertextual relationships, as well as an indication of the dialectic rather than self-destructive (or relativistic) nature of (Gray's/Scottish) postmodernism.[33] I hope to be able to illustrate the intricacies and significance of Gray's intertextuality in more detail in the following chapters, in relation to the aspects of science fiction and history respectively.

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[33] There is a hint in Johanna Tiitinen's book that a study of Gray and recent Scottish literature in the context of Laingian ideas by Gavin Miller is in preparation (I could not ascertain whether it has been published yet) [cf. Tiitinen 2004, 23 (fn 10)].

Gray's Inter-Art Discourse[34]

In the context of antisyzygy, it is interesting to note that schizophrenia is a metaphor that Brian McHale also uses to describe a subtype of postmodernist texts, which he calls "schizoid texts" or "split texts" [1987, 190ff.]. He is referring to unusual (or postmodernist) typographical arrangements of texts, which stress the materiality of the book, e.g. "two or more texts arranged in parallel, to be read simultaneously—to the degree that that is possible." [191] The Epilogue in *Lanark* immediately comes to mind as an example for this postmodern device; it is in fact split into four texts at places: the main narrative, the Index of Plagiarisms running along the margins of the page, the 'scholarly' footnotes, and the captions at the top of each page which give a 'summary' of its content [cf. Appendix, fig. 2]. Due to the impossibility of reading these split texts simultaneously and also because of the often non-existent (direct) relation between glosses and glossed text (cf. the footnote "This remark is too ludicrous to require comment here." [L, 492]), "[w]e are forced to manipulate the book as a physical object, thus never losing sight of the ontological 'cut' between the projected world and the material book." [McHale 1987, 192] As I have pointed out above, however, what is equally highlighted by these discourses competing on the page is the question of narrative authority. The necessity of a multiplicity of perspectives is emphasised as much as the materiality of the book.

The most elaborate use of typography in Gray's work occurs in *1982 Janine*, when the main protagonist Jock McLeish is experiencing a complete breakdown [J, 175-90]: here many different typefaces and sizes are used, many different texts run parallel on the page, some in

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[34] I would like to point out that I use the term "inter-art discourse", which is associated with Linda Hutcheon and her theory of parody, in a slightly different sense here. While Hutcheon mainly uses it to describe the connections of postmodern literary works to earlier or other (literary) works of art (i.e. roughly in my sense of intertextuality), I am using it here for the connections between different art forms in Gray's work, i.e. his literary and his visual art.

triangular shapes etc., others upside down or running from top to bottom and vice versa [fig. 3]. In many ways, this is the prototypical split text. When asked about these typographic devices, Gray replied: "I use a variety of typefaces where this makes the story clearer. [...] In *1982 Janine*—an interior monologue novel—the speaker has a nervous breakdown conveyed by three columns of different typefaces on the same pages, each a stream of thought or feelings at war with the rest. I do not know how else I could have done it." [Axelrod 1995b, 111] So, while the 'postmodern' use of typography might indeed stress the materiality of the book, the motivation behind it is arguably at least of equal importance.

The same can be said about Gray's virtuoso use of typography in *Poor Things*, where "the letters of Bella and Wedderburn are printed in italic, a type based on handwriting rather than Roman chiseling." [ibid.] This is not the only typographic innovation in the book, however. The illusion of the book within the book is upheld by a 'reproduction' of the cover illustrations of McCandless's memoir. The front one is followed by a 'facsimile' of a dedicatory poem to Bella, handwritten by 'Archie' [PT, 1], the back one is preceded by another hand-written line: "Please remember me sometimes." [247] If this emphasises the materiality of the book, it is the 'materiality' of an imaginary one, thus drawing attention to issues of 'reality' and fictionality, of history and 'truth'. In the middle of Bella's letter, too, there are six 'facsimile' pages [145-150], showing Bella's emotional turmoil after the Alexandria incident, allegedly "printed by a photogravure process which exactly reproduces the blurring caused by tear stains, but does not show the pressure of pen strokes which often ripped right through the paper." [144; fig. 4] Taking into account the centrality of the Alexandria episode for the meaning of the book, it is therefore no coincidence that the importance of this passage (and of "Astley's Bitter Wisdom" following it immediately) is stressed by this typographic eccentricity. It will catch any reader's eye, even when only flicking through the book. Significantly, the last line that is readable (although in Bella's idiosyncratic orthography) before the 'breakdown'—in many ways similar to Jock's although represented differently—is: "Whi did yoo not teech mee politics God?" [145] Just as Jock's breakdown precedes the central chapter in which he at last confronts his past in *1982 Janine*, so Bella's breakdown in *Poor Things* precedes the important passage in which Astley teaches her

politics. In both cases they are highlighted by typographic devices, pointing to the significance of these beyond simply stressing the materiality of the book. *Poor Things* can with some justification be regarded as Gray's visually most playful book; besides the typography, there is the elaborate cover illustration, the portraits by 'William Strang', the medical drawings from (Henry) Gray's *Anatomy*, the nineteenth-century engravings and drawings in the Notes etc.

It is clearly Gray's own 'double life' as a writer and painter/visual artist that turns all of his books into *Gesamtkunstwerke*. The illustrations are therefore as integral to the works as the typographical devices. As we will see, the frontispieces in *Lanark*, the portraits and drawings in *Poor Things* and the nineteenth-century illustrations in *A History Maker* are closely integrated into the text. This is in contrast to McHale's statement that "[p]ostmodernist illustration is typically anti-illustration; [...] [it] functions to foreground ontological structure [...] In many postmodernist texts, the absence of any apparent relation between the illustration and the verbal text turns these visual materials into pure demonstrations of the *visuality*, and therefore the three-dimensionality and materiality, of the book." [1987, 189-90] However, he goes on to point out that "[o]ther postmodernist illustrations [...] are integrated into the structure of the verbal text as other modes of discourse—visual discourses. Thus they contribute to and serve to heighten the polyphonic structure of these texts; [...] they bring worlds of discourse, visual and verbal, into collision." [ibid., 190] This is much more in keeping with my analysis of Gray's work and—if we take the collision of discourses to be productive—incidentally recalls a statement by Cordelia Oliver in her investigation of Gray as a visual artist: "For Alasdair, history, fiction and graphic illustration are simply 'different ways of showing similar things'." [Oliver 1991, 30] (The inclusion of history here is particularly telling and highlights the theme of my fourth chapter).

Thus Alison Lee, in *Postmodern British Fiction*, writes about the illustrations in *Lanark*:

> The frontispiece [i.e. the title page], containing a drawing of a drawing drawing itself (both of which emanate from an open

> book which is resting on three other open books) signals the auto-referential structure of the novel. It also anticipates, in form and content, the overtly self-conscious Epilogue. The epilogue is described as a room as well as a chapter and, just inside the door of the Epilogue room are paintings which reflect the room. These signal the self-consciousness of the ensuing chapter, just as the frontispiece, just inside the "door" of Lanark, signals the self-consciousness of the novel. The title pages also point to parodic intertexts which give the novel its particular ontological status. [Lee 1990, 104-5]

The illustrations are the place where Gray's postmodern features, his metafiction and self-conscious writing as well as his intertextuality, are reflected and reinforced. Among the intertexts Lee discusses is Hobbes's *Leviathan*, which I will come back to in the next chapter in relation to Gray's political and moral convictions. This is important because it makes clear the thematic significance of the postmodern allusions, also and maybe especially in Gray's illustrations. I am not so sure, however, of Lee's assertion that "these images make abstractions concrete, and in this way encourage a Realist reading of the relationship between the visual images and the prose. They create the illusion of one-to-one correspondence, as though the images capture an external 'reality' which is then mirrored in prose." [ibid., 107-8] This is only true if one stresses the *illusion* part, as my discussion of the Charcot portrait from *Poor Things* above should prove. Lee goes on to discuss the equally complicated issue of the verbal representation of visual art in *Lanark*, referring to the description of Thaw's paintings and mural in Books 1 and 2. She rightly stresses the aspect of multiple perspectives in these: "[H]is paintings play with different ways of seeing. [...] Thaw is clearly not one who believes in the Realist reading position." [109] The culmination of this aspect comes in his mural:

> Thaw's *magnum opus*, a mural depicting the six days of creation which he is commissioned to paint on the ceiling of a local parish church, is perhaps the best example of multiple perspectives. Indeed, the process of painting is an arduous one, partly because Thaw envisions such a multitude of possibilities that he cannot limit himself to a single, finished work. He is constantly re-interpreting and re-working every image that he paints. [...] The mural cannot be conceptualized

> or categorized and thus cannot be accorded a single, authoritative meaning. [Lee 1990, 110-111]

The significance of this focus on multiple perspectives for Gray's work and for its relation to postmodernism can hardly be overestimated. First of all, it is a device which he actually uses a lot in his own paintings and drawings.[35] More importantly, it is also a central concern of his *writing*, as we have already seen at various points in this study. Ian Spring sees a direct relation here: "the crucial factor in understanding *Lanark* is Gray's use of perspective, which is innovative and various. [...] This aspect of Gray's writing clearly derives from his painting". [Spring 1993, 213] Whether this is a one-way relation or a dialectical one shall not concern us at this point. What is important is Gray's use of various perspectives on the same object, his constant re-interpreting and re-working,[36] the impossibility of conceptualising and categorising the products, and the evasion of a single, authoritative meaning. It is arguably this quality that is most 'postmodern' in Gray's work, if we take the balanced version of postmodernism as our point of reference. This already goes beyond a merely literary (and generally artistic/aesthetic) postmodernism.

My investigation of these primarily literary/artistic aspects (e.g. self-conscious metafiction, intertextuality, and inter-art discourse) in

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[35] Examples of some of his visual work—apart from the illustrations and design of his novels—can be found for instance in Crawford/Nairn 1991 (including photos of his own church mural, which is now demolished—proof of the autobiographical dimension of the Thaw story), in Moores 2002, and in *Chapman* no. 97 (2000), esp. p. 54-9. The drawing on the cover of that magazine, *Two Hills*, is incidentally a good example of Gray's unusual use of perspective and proves that this is a long-standing concern of his work (he was only 16 when this drawing was begun in 1950!).

[36] This can also be taken literally, if one thinks of the extremely long gestation periods of *Lanark* and *The Book of Prefaces*, for example, or Gray's reworking of his own material.

Gray's work above has shown how important they are in his writing, and that he can indeed be regarded as a postmodern writer on account of that. However, whether they can be clearly separated from the more comprehensive questions connected with postmodernism, its politics, philosophy and ideology, is certainly open to question. Yet, if Gray's work is seen as postmodern by critics, it is usually because of these more strictly 'literary' features, and the resistance (not least on his own side) is strongest when the more comprehensive, and possibly more controversial, aspects come into play. I will therefore approach some of these more 'theoretical' issues in the following chapters, and test whether they can be reasonably related to Gray's writing similarly to the way in which the literary aspects clearly can. I will do this in three steps (and chapters), of which the last one will pose and problematise the question of Gray's theoretical/ideological postmodernism most directly (but also more abstracted from his works), while the next two provide most of the detailed discussion of Gray's texts with reference to the themes of science fiction and history respectively, and thus concentrate on the concrete (and sometimes implied) manifestation of some of the theoretical issues in the actual literary works.

Chapter Three: Shades of Science Fiction and Apocalypse

Alasdair Gray and Science Fiction Today

One aspect that was notable in the theoretical field, which is clearly related to the broader social and cultural developments, is a certain apocalyptic tendency, a feeling of confusion and dissolution in contemporary culture. In British literature, this was conspicuous in the 1980s and can perhaps at least partly be attributed to the impact of 'Thatcherism'. It frequently went together with elements of the fantastic or grotesque, and especially with devices borrowed from the science-fiction tradition, a development that we have seen to be one of the characteristics of postmodern literature as a whole. In a British context,

> the apocalyptic note became a familiar feature of an Eighties fiction in which culture was random and 'junk,' time frequently dislocated, and oppressive hints of disaster and crisis seemed universal. The sense of recent history as a sequence of past disasters pointing to some further coming catastrophe [...] intensified, multiplied, came closer. Science fiction, which over previous decades had been moving closer toward the fictional centre, now exercised a growing influence on the literary novel. [...] For the degraded cities, ravaged fields and dying clouds that were once the world of science fiction and fantasy now filled many of the novels. [Bradbury 1994, 410]

The world of *Lanark* seems to be a good example of exactly this development, and Gray's other novels, such as *Poor Things* and *A History Maker* also vindicate the claim that "in Eighties fiction,[1]

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[1] The same is also true for the nineties (when the latter novels were published), as Bradbury points out in his "Afterword from the Nineties", especially in relation to the 'turning point' of the year 2000: "to this date [i.e. 1994] disillusion, with politicians, promises and public prospects,

apocalyptic visions, corrupted Utopias and threatened cities were everywhere. Gothic violence, the uncanny, the fantastic and the grotesque, were back" [ibid., 411].

The fantastic and grotesque are also part, of course, of one of the 'polar twins' of the Caledonian antisyzygy. Indeed, one of Bradbury's examples for the convergence of science fiction and the 'literary' novel is the Scottish writer Iain Banks, who writes science fiction as well as 'mainstream' fiction and has been influenced by Gray's work.[2] Moreover, if we take into account that it is probably under the category of science fiction that issues relating to the role of science in postmodern literature and culture (which are being so controversially discussed in the theoretical debates) can be best addressed, then the field of science fiction, dystopia and the fantastic seems to offer itself as an important site to study the intersection of theoretical and literary discourses, particularly with a view to Gray's work. This appears to be a curiously understudied area, however, especially in the Scottish context[3]—which makes it all the more valuable to investigate it here.

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seems the dominant note of the Nineties. [...] If sensations of transition and nameless uncertainty regularly afflict the ending of centuries and the great turnings of the historical clock, then our own times are no exception. [...] Enveloping processes of modernization have penetrated everywhere, but the new structures and relations have proved as often destructive as beneficial; futuristic social and scientific utopias have turned, again and again, into grim dystopias. Much of the mythic excitement that attached to the year 2000, with its visions of a new interplanetary future, has dissolved into images of decay, disaster and conflict." [Bradbury 1994, 452-3] The last remark, for example, can be easily related to Gray's *A History Maker*.

2 Banks publishes his science fiction under the 'pseudonym' of Iain M. Banks and is very successful in both genres. He has told me that he is "a big fan of [Gray's] work" [personal letter, 18 May 1998], and his novel *The Bridge* (1986) is said to be modelled on or at least inspired by *Lanark*. [cf. Nairn 1993 + Lyall 1993]

3 With the exception, perhaps, of Colin Manlove's *Scottish Fantasy Literature*, which also has a chapter on *Lanark*. In a recent article on the

The question whether Alasdair Gray's works, or at least some of them, can be described as science fiction is certainly controversial, partly because of the nature of his works and partly because of the problems involved in the science-fiction category. I will address this issue more directly below, but I would like to stress at the outset that it will not be my only or even prime concern in this chapter. Rather, I am using this 'genre approach' in order to investigate several themes in Gray's writing which relate to the larger context of recent developments in culture and society, including the question of science itself but also looking beyond it to Gray's critical engagement with (late capitalist/Western) society at large. The science-fiction theme, if it is taken as a relatively broad category that includes dystopian and apocalyptic modes, offers itself here not only because it has rarely been addressed in connection with Gray's work but because it is closely linked to the developments of the past decades and to postmodernism in particular. In the context of this study, it has additional advantages: it justifies my selection of the three novels for analysis which I will focus on throughout and to pay particular attention in this chapter to Gray's first and most important novel *Lanark*, which is useful as a starting point for the study of the other novels, which in turn will be at the centre of the following chapter. The focus on *Lanark*, with its strong social and political criticism, is also one of the reasons for the extensive references in this chapter to one secondary text, Patrick Parrinder's *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching*, because it stresses this aspect under the category of 'fable'. It was also written and published in Britain at almost exactly the same time as *Lanark*, and it takes a non-essentialist view of science fiction that pays attention to the creative use of different

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Edinburgh publisher Canongate's *Classics* series entitled "What is a classic? A way forward for Scottish literature", John Sutherland remarks that "Scottish fantasy is largely missing so far", not to mention science fiction. [Sutherland 2001]

genres and the importance of parody, making it very useful for Gray's work.[4]

Science Fiction and Postmodernism

Science fiction is a fairly recent phenomenon. Although there were precursors (of which more later), as a specific genre it essentially developed in the twentieth century. The past few decades since c. the 1960s—roughly the time of most of the 'postmodern' developments—are of particular importance. It was only with the so-called 'New Wave' science fiction and the simultaneous development of TV and cinema as media for science-fictional topics that the genre achieved the mass popularity that has made it "a major cultural phenomenon, an understanding of which is essential if one wants to comprehend the ways in which Western societies have come to terms with the rapid change and uncertainty which have characterized our century." [James 1994, ix]. Indeed, it is today sometimes seen as one of the most characteristic expressions of contemporary society: "Just count the number of ways in which we can think about the world today that have been shaped by science fiction. The symbolic purchase of SF on contemporary living is so powerful, and speaks so directly to the realities of our accelerated culture, that it provides many of the conceptual templates of the modern Western world." [Roberts 2000, 35] It is no wonder, therefore, that several critics have used science fiction to exemplify some of the developments which I have surveyed under the label of 'postmodernism' [e.g. McHale 1987 and 1992].

There is, first of all, the aspect of the mixing of genres in postmodern literature, particularly incorporating aspects of popular culture and literature. Science fiction certainly offers itself

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[4] Patrick Parrinder works at the University of Liverpool and is an expert on H.G.Wells. This background certainly conditions his approach to science fiction in a way that arguably makes it more suited to Gray's work (who also regards Wells highly, as we shall see) than many other studies of the genre, including more recent ones.

especially for such a project by virtue of its enormous popularity (cf. the—mainly American—science-fiction magazines of the 1930s-60s as well as the science-fiction films following them). Thus Brian McHale writes in *Postmodernist Fiction*: "We can think of science fiction as postmodernism's noncanonized or 'low art' double, its sister-genre". [McHale 1987, 59] More generally, postmodern works have a strong interest in the construction/representation of a variety of (often radically different, conflicting) 'worlds'. This characteristic was incorporated by McHale in his concept of postmodernist fiction as being dominated by ontological issues, as opposed to the epistemological dominant in modernist fiction.[5] He sees science fiction as the "ontological genre *par excellence*" [ibid., 16], leading him to suggest a simultaneous "science-fictionalization of postmodernism" [65ff.] and "postmodernization of science fiction" [68ff.]. This argument is certainly plausible, if we think of writers such as Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut or Don DeLillo on the one hand and J.G. Ballard or Samuel Delany on the other, in addition to the above-mentioned Iain Banks. [cf. also Puschmann-Nalenz 1992] It is therefore hardly surprising that one of McHale's prime examples for this development is—precisely—Gray's *Lanark*.

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[5] McHale 1987, e.g. preface + chapter 1. This theory is certainly controversial and has been subsequently criticised, among other things for its formalism. To be sure, a strict division between these two "dominants" is hardly possible (although, to be fair, McHale shows the shift of dominant happening within the work of one and the same writer, e.g. Nabokov or Beckett), and I am not convinced that postmodernist fiction as a whole is less concerned with epistemological questions than with ontological ones (maybe the problem is again one of terminology). However, his concept is useful in shedding light on the relation of science fiction to postmodernist fiction.

More frequently, however, the connection between science fiction and postmodern fiction is made via the sub-genre of cyberpunk.[6] Most famously, Fredric Jameson called cyberpunk "the supreme *literary* expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" [Jameson 1991, 419]. The reason for this is above all the treatment of virtual reality or the "virtual subject", i.e. androids, cyborgs etc., in these texts. I am very far from claiming Alasdair Gray as a cyberpunk writer, of course—nothing could be more ridiculous.[7] However, McHale himself provides the link when he writes that "cyberspace is the machine-mediated version of the World to Come, and in this function bears a certain resemblance to some of the postmodernist variations on the World-to-Come topos (e.g. Christine Brooke-Rose's *Such*, 1966; Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, 1981; and especially the double-agents' Hell of *Gravity's Rainbow*)." [McHale 1992, 266] From this perspective, Gray's work (*A History Maker* would of course also qualify as a variation on the World-to-Come topos) is connected to the postmodernist field via its 'science fiction' status.

More generally, the characteristically postmodern concern with the issues of relativism and constructivism (which can also be connected to developments in science, especially physics) is reflected in contemporary SF. For some modern SF writers, as with so many postmodern theorists, "the sense of reality itself appears increasingly delusive and threatening." [Parrinder 1980, 119] Contemporary SF,

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6 "A branch of science fiction particularly associated with the 1980s [...]. Following on from novels like William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) or films such as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), a great many 'cyberpunk' works were produced. They tend to be focused on crime storylines, to portray the future as a dirty, grim and exhausting urban jungle; and to be populated with hard-boiled, streetwise characters." [Roberts 2000, 186-7] For the relation cyberpunk—postmodernism cf. e.g. Featherstone/Burrows 1995, McHale 1992, McCaffery 1991, Connor 1997.

7 Nevertheless, one could say that such elements as the 'brain transplantation' in *Poor Things* or the "neo-sapiences" in *A History Maker* do come close to cyberpunk themes.

therefore, clearly represents "a response to the changing nature of scientific thought and of our notions of 'reality' itself." [ibid., 121] There is a notable development to be observed which leads away from the propagation of scientific materialism which used to be so characteristic of the genre in earlier times. This can be linked to the more general feeling of disillusionment with scientific progress in society: "In the 1960s [...] the generation of science fiction writers loosely known as the New Wave began to exploit post-nuclear nightmares as a way of questioning the scientific enterprise as a whole. The most influential writer in this mode was J. G. Ballard. Ballard is the poet of the Scientific Enlightenment in decline." [Parrinder 1995, 145] These last words clearly relate to the more comprehensive questioning of the Enlightenment legacy in contemporary theory, a connection that is also echoed in the following words from the conclusion of Adam Roberts's *Science Fiction*: "SF is able vigorously to popularise relativisms that challenge the monolithic and oppressive ideologies of much human culture." [2000, 182] This is something we should certainly bear in mind for our analysis of Gray's works.

What must be stressed, however, is the frequent connection of this ideological criticism with a political and social one, since one of the results of the new developments in science fiction since the 1960s was "a more profound awareness of the political and moral complexities of the world" [James 1994, 175], which has often been expressed by a critical stance towards contemporary Western society. This is not particularly new, though, since there has always been an important dystopian current in SF which is critical of scientific and technological developments and combines this with social criticism. This includes some of the greatest and best-known works of 'science fiction' by, among others, Wells, Huxley and Orwell. In view of the frequent criticisms against postmodern literature as irresponsible game-playing [e.g. by Fredric Jameson], this characteristic trait should nevertheless be emphasised, as Jenny Wolmark insists in her *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism*. With a view to feminist science fiction, she criticises Jameson's opinion that "potentially oppositional responses have been all but excluded in postmodernism" and the consequent negative view of science fiction, which "fails to recognise the potential of science fiction to offer alternative and critical ways of imagining social and cultural reality"

[Wolmark 1994, 10]. Instead, she insists, "[t]he erosion of the boundary between high art and popular culture results in the production of texts that are undoubtedly contradictory, but this does not negate their utopian and radical possibilities" [11]. This is again a 'balanced postmodernism' view and will be important for my discussion of Gray's science fiction in the following.

The Problem of Genre Definition

So far, I have evaded the question of what science fiction actually is, and of how Gray's writing fits the genre. This basic question as to what 'kind of science fiction' it is that Gray is writing, or whether he is writing science fiction at all must be posed here, and the answer is by no means easy or straightforward. I hope that my analysis in this chapter can contribute to a more complex view of this issue, one which does not deny Gray's involvement with the genre but also pays heed to the complications that go with it. To say that Alasdair Gray does not write straightforward science fiction is almost a truism. It is exactly the complexity and category-defying quality of his work which is often seen as the hallmark of his writing. A general idea of science fiction usually involves themes, props or subjects such as spaceships, aliens, robots, time travel etc. [cf. the list in Roberts 2000, 15], few of which ever appear in Gray's novels. However, in view of the variety of science-fiction writing past and present, this appears to be a very limited perspective, and the list must at least be extended to include aspects such as genetic engineering, alternative history and futuristic utopias and dystopias [cf. ibid.]. From this point of view, there are indications for a possible inclusion at least of some of his works in the genre: Books 3 and 4 of *Lanark* are set in a dystopian version of Glasgow called Unthank and in the science-fictional Institute; *Poor Things* is a 'medical romance' set in *fin-de-siècle* Glasgow with more than just one parallel to *Frankenstein*. *A History Maker* (described in the blurb in typical Gray fashion as "a kilted sci-fi yarn full of poetry and porridge, courage and sex") is set in the Scotland of the 23rd century and describes a matriarchal society organised in clan-like communities where fighting wars has become a

sport with fixed rules for the distraction of the male population. In addition, some of his short stories from *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* and *Ten Tales Tall and True* must surely be considered as science fiction.[8] Accordingly, Gray also appears in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* [Clute/Nicholls 1993, 518].

On the other hand he is certainly no writer of typical SF, and many people would probably be opposed to the idea of including his work in the SF category at all. One of the alternative possibilities would be to classify his writing as fantastic literature. Accordingly, Colin Manlove includes *Lanark* in his critical survey of *Scottish Fantasy Literature* [Manlove 1994, 197-213] and so does David Pringle in his *Modern Fantasy: The Hundred Best Novels* [London: Grafton Books, 1988, 214-5]. Neil Cornwell names Gray—alongside Stapledon, Vonnegut, Lem and the Strugatskys—as a possible example of his genre of "the literary fantastic" [Cornwell 1990, xiii]. To make matters more complicated, even the term 'science fantasy' has been applied to *Lanark* [Smith 1995, 116]. Gray himself does not make things easier when he answers a question about the mixture of autobiography and fantasy in *Lanark* and the literary tradition behind it as follows: "Every writer makes their fantasies on the basis of their experience. Most science fiction universes are part of our world blown up into insane proportions." And he goes on to exemplify this by referring to Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. [O'Brien/Plaice 1994, 22] At this point, we have not even touched upon the question of utopia and dystopia.

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[8] Many reviews of these works in fact mention the science-fiction category, sometimes relating them to other works from that tradition [cf. e.g. Boyd 1981, Gifford 1981, Schoene 1996]. Examples for science-fiction stories are "The Cause of Some Recent Changes", "The Crank That Made the Revolution" (both included in the science-fiction anthology *Starfield* [cf. Lunan 1989]), and the "Axletree" stories from *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*; as well as "A New World", "Time Travel" and "Near the Driver" from *Ten Tales Tall and True*. The latter collection incidentally also has the label Science Fiction—alongside Social Realism, Sexual Comedy and Satire—on one of the title pages. In this study, I will only comment on the Axletree stories in any detail.

What seems to be necessary, then, is to have a closer look at the meaning of the term science fiction to be able to accurately assess the character of Gray's writing in connection to this genre. A look at some general overviews of science fiction confirms the impression of confusion or at least ambivalence of categories and genres [e.g. James 1994, Parrinder 1980, Roberts 2000, Ruddick 1993].[9] Not only do they hardly ever supply a concise definition of the term, they also differ significantly in what regards the time span and the works to be included.[10] This is especially true for the period from c. the mid-seventies onward, i.e. our 'postmodern' era. Here, boundaries of genre and category get blurred; 'mainstream' or 'serious' literature becomes more surreal and fantastic, while SF becomes more 'literary'. This points not so much to a decadence or even end of science fiction as rather to the inherent precariousness of (strict) genre distinctions. As Edward James remarks: "We might agree on a definition of genre sf (though no one has, so far); but there have always been problems on the fringes, and there always will be, as long as there are some writers who refuse to write work which can be readily labelled." [James 1994, 7] It is exactly in this context that we have to view the work of Alasdair Gray. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* describes *Lanark* as "a vast tale whose burly narrative voice shoulders aside questions

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[9] Adam Roberts, for example, writes at the beginning of *Science Fiction*: "The term 'science fiction' resists easy definition. This is curious, because most people have a sense of what science fiction is. [...] But when it comes down to specifying in what way SF is distinctive, and in what ways it is different from other imaginative and fantastic literatures, there is disagreement. All of the many definitions offered by critics have been contradicted or modified by other critics, and it is always possible to point to texts consensually called SF that fall outside the usual definitions." [Roberts 2000, 1-2]

[10] A kind of lowest common denominator is probably what has been called the 'genre SF' of the 1930s-1960s, exemplified above all by American SF magazines. Also usually included are H.G. Wells as one of the founding fathers of the genre and the group of writers of the 1960s and '70s commonly known as the 'New Wave' (e.g. J.G. Ballard, Michael Moorcock, Samuel R. Delany, Brian Aldiss etc.).

of genre as impertinences." [Clute/Nicholls 1993, 518] It should be interesting to see whether Gray himself also 'shoulders aside questions of genre as impertinences'. His answer to the question of whether he regards himself as a science-fiction writer reads as follows: "If Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the work of a science fiction writer then so is *Poor Things*. If Wells's *Time Machine* and Huxley's *Brave New World* are science fiction so is my *A History Maker* and some chapters of *Lanark*. But I have worked in other genres." [personal letter, 31 December 1997; cf. also Epilogue] As we see, while stressing the diversity of his work in the last sentence, he does not brush off the idea. Instead, he situates himself in a tradition of works that are usually seen as (precursors of) science fiction. I will return to the specific implications of this tradition later, but in any case it seems justified—and even promises to be fruitful—to approach the works mentioned by Gray from the background of science fiction.

Since we have seen how difficult generic definition is, I shall use categories that have been suggested by Patrick Parrinder in order to analyse the science-fiction aspects of Gray's writing and their relation to the wider context of this study. In *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching* Parrinder identifies three basic generic lines along which science-fiction works should be critically judged: romance, fable and epic. In addition, he mentions parody as an important ingredient of recent SF. However, SF does not usually fall easily in any single one of these categories. It often bears traces of several or all of them. According to his argument, a book can be called "a science-fictional classic [if] it exemplifies the creative fusion of romance, fable, epic, and parody." [Parrinder 1980, 123][11] For the reasons outlined above, a

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[11] It is obvious that this is a simplified rendition of Parrinder's more complex argument, and that these categories are not necessarily present in all science-fiction works; nor are they sufficient in themselves for calling a literary work science fiction. However, the idea of the creative fusion of these different aspects in science fiction appears convincing, especially if seen in relation to Gray's work. In the following, while referring to other works of science-fiction criticism from time to time, I will mainly use

claim for any of Gray's works to be a "science-fictional classic" is surely wide of the mark, but an investigation of his works along these lines seems a good way of identifying the science-fictional aspects that do form part of his artistic achievement, as well as making some connections to the general position of (Gray's) science-fiction writing in the context of the broader theoretical debates in literature and culture today. While the romance aspect is perhaps not too important here (as well as being the least convincing for the science-fiction genre as a whole, in my opinion), the category of 'fable' will occupy a central place in this analysis.

Science fiction is a popular genre that appeals to a wide range of people, which is one of the reasons why it is often looked down upon as 'merely' popular literature. One implication of this is that readers expect to find certain elements in it that are attractive to a wider readership, such as a strong plot, strange and exciting settings and events, and a nostalgic or romance element. Alasdair Gray has certainly never been a 'popular' writer in this sense. Indeed, his literary techniques demand a lot of the reader, with his early works such as *Lanark* and *1982 Janine* being notoriously difficult to 'consume'. However, even in these works, and much more clearly in *Poor Things* or *A History Maker*, Gray is also very much concerned with entertaining the reader.[12] So even if the category of romance is probably the one that least fits the works that I am concerned with, he does make use of conventions of the genre, though often in self-conscious and mocking fashion. The novel *Poor Things* has been called a 'medical romance' by Gray himself and in its central narrative

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Parrinder's book, without necessarily following his classification too strictly at all times.

[12] *Poor Things*, in particular, is a very funny and readable book despite—or because of—its apparatus of introduction, notes and typographical eccentricities (as well as its deeper implications which we will try to trace in this study). Gray has remarked repeatedly how much he enjoyed writing it, and it is no surprise that it has become his most commercially and critically successful novel. In *Lanark*, too, the most 'postmodern' part, the Epilogue, is also arguably the most enjoyable one for the reader.

shows all signs of a traditional, fairy-tale-like 'tale of wonder' where indeed "the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended".[13] If stripped of its complexities, rival narratives and 'postmodern' playfulness, this novel consists of the autobiographical story of Archibald McCandless, Scottish Health Officer, set mainly in Glasgow at the end of the nineteenth century and supposedly written down in 1909. The book cover describes this particular story as follows (which is very much tongue-in-cheek if one looks at the novel as a whole):

> What strange secret made rich, beautiful, tempestuous Bella Baxter irresistible to the poor Scottish medical student Archie McCandless? Was it her mysterious origin in the home of his monstrous friend Godwin Baxter, the genius whose voice could perforate eardrums? This story of true love and scientific daring whirls the reader from the private operating-theatres of late-Victorian Glasgow through aristocratic casinos, low-life Alexandria and a Parisian bordello, reaching an interrupted climax in a Scottish church. Unlike Alasdair Gray's last novel *Something Leather*, the good people thrive, while the villainous Duncan Wedderburn and General Sir Aubrey de la Pole Blessington get what they deserve. [14]

This could pass as the synopsis of a prototypical romance, and despite the irony, everything described in it is indeed contained in the book. This part of the novel may be said to exemplify what Parrinder remarks about romance and SF: "The underlying motive for all romance-writing [...] is that of satisfying our hunger for a pleasing story. SF written as deliberate romance is always likely to end up giving the reader's satisfaction priority over the creation of a rigorously plausible world." [Parrinder 1980, 67] The self-conscious

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[13] From Northrop Frye's definition of romance in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, quoted in Parrinder 1980, 49.

[14] This is, incidentally, also a good example for Gray's self-consciousness about genre divisions and his contempt of them, because he calls this synopsis "Blurb for a Popular Paperback", while at the same time offering another "Blurb for a High Class Hardback" that reads quite differently.

character of Gray's use of these elements is made clear by what lies outside this central story. The autobiographical narrative is followed in the novel by "A Letter to Posterity" by the main protagonist of the account by McCandless, the 'tempestuous' Bella Baxter who became his wife and calls herself Victoria. In this she gives 'plausible' and rational explanations for the extraordinary events of the former narrative, which she calls a "morbid Victorian fantasy":

> You, dear reader, have now two accounts to choose between and there can be no doubt which is most probable. My second husband's story positively stinks of all that was morbid in that most morbid of centuries, the nineteenth. He has made a sufficiently strange story stranger still by stirring into it episodes and phrases to be found in Hogg's Suicide's Grave with additional ghouleries from the works of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. What morbid Victorian fantasy has he not filched from? I find traces of The Coming Race, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dracula, Trilby, Rider Haggard's She, The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes and, alas, Alice Through the Looking-Glass; a gloomier book than the sunlit Alice in Wonderland. He has even plagiarized work by two very dear friends: G.B. Shaw's Pygmalion and the scientific romances of Herbert George Wells. [PT, 272-3]

Apart from containing almost all 'classics' or precursors of the science-fiction genre, this list stresses above all the fairy-tale or romance quality of McCandless's narrative.

Another element of science fiction often mentioned in this connection is the aspect of nostalgia or 'domestication', making the strange elements in the story seem more familiar to the reader—an aspect, in fact, that can be found more generally in 'fantastic' literature. According to Parrinder, 'domestication' is a romance element in science fiction and can be explained as follows:

> SF works to 'estrange' the reader by showing him or her a world transformed by some new element. At the same time, this new world is made familiar and thus comprehensible. [...] At the very moment of representing the strangeness of the universe—and the possibilities of change in our own way of existence in the universe—he makes it, in John Huntington's words, 'habitable and ... basically familiar'. In some SF

> novels, this leads to a delicately rendered balance between the strange and the familiar; in many others, a superficial exoticism is combined with almost total reassurance that the essentials of life have remained constant. [Parrinder 1980, 58-9]

It can be argued that this "delicately rendered balance between the strange and the familiar" is also characteristic of Gray's science fiction. One prime example is the dystopian world of Unthank in *Lanark*. It is a strange world indeed, where it is always dark, time is distorted, and people suffer from scaring diseases such as "dragonhide", "mouths", "twittering rigor" or "softs" and sometimes disappear without trace. Yet it is also a familiar world, for Unthank is recognisably a distorted version of Glasgow. There is the Cathedral and the Necropolis, there are the Victorian buildings of the city centre, and even the Elite Cafe described at the beginning of the novel resembles a cafe that existed in the fifties off Sauchiehall Street.[15]

In *A History Maker*, the world presented to us is even more remote from our own than the one in *Lanark*. We are transported to the 23rd century; small matriarchal communities have replaced cities and even states, men are only needed for insemination, because everything that is necessary can be instantly produced by "powerplants". So they fill their time by fighting wars that resemble sports events, strictly regulated by the Geneva Convention and closely watched and televised by the "public eye", a kind of giant camera always hovering

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[15] Cf. Morgan 1991, 72. The diseases themselves can also be interpreted in more realistic fashion as an expression of psychological deficiencies which the people suffer from: "dragonhide" is a symptom of the inability to form emotional attachments to other people, leading to the 'patients' literally becoming encrusted and keeping all their heat/love inside until they explode (or "go salamander", as it is called in the novel). This, however, is really the opposite of 'domestication', it is the familiar literary technique of estrangement or defamiliarisation, which Gray uses masterfully. Cf. the remarks below on 'cognitive estrangement'.

above the scene. Also, far-away planets have been settled on[16] and immortality is an option for some of the people who choose life in space (although apparently not too popular among the people on earth). However, even here the world is also familiar, in that the setting is the Ettrick Forest in the Border area of Scotland, recalling the past rather than the present: with its tribal communities, warfare between "clans" (battles are fought with swords) and the small settlements scattered around St Mary's Loch. This impression is further strengthened by early nineteenth-century illustrations of the scenery inserted at the beginning and the end of the book [cf. fig. 5]. This seems to echo Roberts's statement that "the chief mode of science fiction is not prophecy, but *nostalgia*" [2000, 33] and that "SF actually enacts a fascination with the past for which 'nostalgia' is the best description." [ibid., 34] I will come back to Gray's interest in the past in the following chapter, so all that can be said here is if this kind of 'domestication' of a strange world is a romance element in science fiction, then it is certainly present in Gray's work. However, it is hardly among the central features of his 'science fiction', in contrast to the category of fable.

Gray's SF as (Social) Fable

Parrinder's second category for the description of science fiction works is that of fable. This is certainly, maybe together with the category of parody, the generic element of greatest importance to Gray's work and probably also the most interesting one in the general context of this study. The propensity for social criticism implied in

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[16] This is one of the few examples in Gray's work of science-fictional stereotypes. Parrinder sees such formulaic elements as at least to some extent indicative of the romance genre: "The fundamental mode of domestication in the space adventure is that of minimizing the emptiness of space and the chilling remoteness of other star systems. [...] Moreover, there must be 'green worlds', or planets with a biosphere that is not irreducibly hostile to human settlement ..." [Parrinder 1980, 59-60]

this category can indeed be seen as one of the most important aspects linking science fiction as a genre to questions of society and politics. It is also of paramount importance in the work of Alasdair Gray. This critical quality can be seen as one of the social functions that literature is able to fulfill, possibly more effectively than literary or cultural theory. It seems that science fiction in particular has this didactic quality built into its generic foundations: "[M]ost science-fiction writers have managed to combine the qualities of the poet and the propagandist. [...] Critics who see science fiction as an essentially didactic genre [...] may be closer to the truth than those who see it as irresponsible popular entertainment." [Parrinder 1980, 68] In the introduction to the Scottish science-fiction anthology *Starfield* Angus MacVicar states: "The best of science fiction [...] is not afraid to offer 'messages,' some overt, some subliminal, as encouragement—and perhaps also warning—to the human race. This anthology demonstrates how boldly Scottish writers have entered the lists." [MacVicar 1989, 12] The inclusion of Alasdair Gray in this anthology is surely no coincidence because the quality of fable pervades a large part of his work. The fact that "the genre is essentially oriented towards social criticism," [Parrinder 1980, 72] of which there is widespread recognition today, is also to some extent due to the underlying technique of 'cognitive estrangement'.[17] Parrinder sees this as being basically "an intentional [...] distortion of various aspects of contemporary society," exemplifying it by reference to George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [ibid., 75]. This can

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[17] This term originates with the science fiction critic Darko Suvin and is explained by Adam Roberts as follows: "Darko Suvin's definition of science fiction sees the genre as combining 'cognition'—rational or scientific elements—with 'estrangement'—a literary term sometimes translated as 'alienation', which refers to those aspects of a literary work that 'estrange' from the familiar and everyday." [2000, 186; cf. also 7]

be said with equal justification referring to Alasdair Gray's work, as shall be shown by a look at his similarly dystopian novel *Lanark*.[18]

Apocalyptic Allegory: Social Criticism in Lanark

As I have already indicated above, the city of Unthank as portrayed in the apparently science-fictional and dystopian part of *Lanark* is strange and familiar at the same time.[19] The reason for this is exactly that it is 'an intentional distortion of contemporary society', i.e. the late-twentieth-century society of Glasgow, and by implication of Scotland, Britain, the Western world. Gray himself has conceded that Unthank "is nothing more than Glasgow after many years of ruinous modern transformations." [Brown 1995] Many aspects of the dystopian city thus have their correlative in the real one. One case in point is the sudden disappearance of people in Unthank, usually when they are in an advanced state of one of the diseases described earlier. This can be read as a reference to the 'Glasgow disease,' that is the growing number of unemployed people, having been made 'redundant' after the closing-down of so many industries that once were the pride of the city. There is a concrete relation here to the political and social developments in Britain and Scotland at the time, which were to become even more pronounced in the period of Thatcherism and which Gray attacks in most of his writings.[20] The

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[18] *Lanark* has been repeatedly compared to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by critics, and there are indeed quite a few more or less significant parallels—cf. also the comments below about parody in Gray's SF.

[19] In this chapter I will limit my discussion to Books 3 and 4. These two Books are also, it seems, the more complex and maybe more rewarding part—for analysis or interpretation—of the novel. Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, concentrating mainly on these two Books in their essay on *Lanark*, contrast "the intricacies packed into those Books" with "the more straightforward [...] content and concerns of Books One and Two." [Murray/Tait 1984, 222]

[20] For a brief discussion of the aspect of working-class culture in Gray's work with reference to *1982 Janine* cf. Klaus 1993.

first time Lanark hears about the disappearances is when he learns from his landlady that a neighbour has vanished, a single mother who left three little children behind her. Showing Lanark the kids the landlady says:

> "Their bloody mother's disappeared."—"Disappeared? Where to?"—"How do I know where folk disappear to? One minute she was there, the next she had gone. [...]"—"But surely she'll come back?"—"Her? She won't come back. Nobody comes back who disappears when the lights go out."—"What do you mean?"—"I was standing at the sink washing dishes when the lights went out. I knew it wasn't a power cut because I could see the street lights through the window, and right away I thought, 'Somebody's disappearing,' and then I thought, 'Oh, what if it's me?' My heart was thumping like a drum, though I don't know why I should be scared. I get so tired and my back is so sore that I often feel I'd be glad to disappear. [...]" [L, 12-3]

The fact that it is a single mother of three—the kind of person that is usually hit hardest by unemployment—who 'disappears' as well as the remarks of the landlady at the end, which suggest that a disappearance would free her of work, hint to a possible interpretation of the disappearances in this way.[21] Moreover, we later learn that people who disappear go to the Institute, where some of them—actually very few, among them Lanark himself—are cured and retrained as doctors. They find their way back into working life, while the vast majority are literally 'eaten up' by the members of the Institute, just as the few rich and powerful people in society 'feed on' the poverty and unemployment of the bottom layer of society.

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[21] It is no exaggeration to say that 'the lights went out' in Scotland in the 1970s and '80s, when most of the heavy industry that had been its lifeline since at least the nineteenth century was closed down, resulting in huge unemployment especially in Glasgow. Cf. the relevant chapters in Christopher Harvie's history of twentieth-century Scotland (1998). One of his chapters is in fact called "When the lamps went out", but that refers to the period between 1911 and 1922.

Gray's social criticism is therefore not restricted to depicting the effects of unemployment, it goes much further in criticising the very structure and organisation of (Western) society. His main concern is clearly with power structures and the abuse of power. The Institute is a clear example of this. Douglas Gifford, in a seminal article on *Lanark*, describes Lanark's discovery of the Institute:

> After a poignant but unsatisfactory affair with the enigmatic Rima (but what affair could be happy in Unthank?) Lanark discovers, in a midnight cemetery, the way through the baffling surface appearance of this "civilisation" to the organising Power behind it and other "civilisations," the Institute, Academy, University, Hospital Board, it is a huge, amorphous, familiar body of professional people, their meetings, theories, places of work, which in essence is the privileged heart of our society. Gray's portrayal of Lanark's discovery of the Institute, and the horrific impression he succeeds in giving of its vast but rather demented rights and powers, is amongst the astonishing achievements of the book—made all the more effective for being realised in down-to-earth harsh concrete detail, where reality and fantastic nightmare merge. [Gifford 1981, 10-11]

Here we have acute social criticism expressed precisely through 'cognitive estrangement,' that technique so essential to science-fiction writing. Gray's concern with power is arguably at the centre of his social criticism. The Institute is certainly one of the central metaphors for the power structures in society, with some possible interpretations given by Gifford above, but it is not the only one in *Lanark*. Indeed, there are hints that the Institute itself is being used by even mightier powers. One of the 'doctors' at the Institute, the sad but caring Monsignor Noakes remarks at one point at the end of Book 3, responding to Lanark's allegation that the Institute is a "murder machine":

> Ah, it could be easily destroyed if it was a simple murder machine. But it is like all machines, it profits those who own it, and nowadays many sections are owned by gentle, powerless people who don't know they are cannibals and wouldn't believe if you told them. It is also amazingly tolerant of anyone it considers human, and cures more people than you realize. Even the societies who denounce it would (most of

> them) collapse if it vanished, for it is an important source of knowledge and energy. That is why the director of the institute is also president of the council, though two thirds of the council detest him. [L, 101-2]

Apart from shedding some more light on the meaning of the metaphor of the Institute,[22] this passage introduces the apparently even more powerful Council and its president, who is also director of the Institute. It is only when Lanark manages to escape from the Institute—together with Rima, whom he saved from death and cured, and who has become his lover—back to an Unthank that is even darker and more hopeless than the one he left that he realises the importance of these hidden powers (including the sinister "creature"). They have always governed Unthank and also, by implication, the world of Duncan Thaw. Now Unthank is being threatened with immanent destruction because of their workings. It is here, in Book 4, the last and longest part of the novel, that we are presented with the ultimate picture of the power structures and their disastrous effects in the world of Unthank. We are free to infer that this is also a reflection of Western industrial society of the late twentieth century.

The allegorical meaning of this part, which arguably makes it the most important part of the novel, is already implied in Gray's frontispiece.[23] This literally gives us a 'picture' of society/the state (intentionally reminiscent of the title page of Hobbes's *Leviathan*) in

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[22] "There are shades here, indeed, of property-owning democracies with their pension funds distantly invested in wars and pollution: Gray's idea of a Scottish petit-bourgeois model of the universe." [Murray/Tait 1984, 235] The quoted passage could also be related to the theoretical background sketched in chapter one, because its description of society is reminiscent of ideas often found in postmodernism, i.e. about the relation between discourses and power (Foucault) or the concept of 'hegemonic' systems, where the suppressed play a part in their own suppression, which is often used in (neo-)Marxist theories (as for example by Louis Althusser).

[23] The frontispiece of Book 4 was accordingly also used as the image on the cover of the paperback edition of the novel. Cf. fig. 6.

the form of a huge crowned figure made up of tiny persons representing different sections of society (e.g. army, church, business, the law, 'common' people etc.), who holds a sword with "force" inscribed on it in the right and a crosier with "persuasion" in the left hand. This figure dominates a landscape which can easily be seen to represent Scotland, with Glasgow and the Firth of Clyde in the foreground and Edinburgh with the Firth of Forth in the background. At the top of the picture run the words "Foremost of the beasts of the earth for pride," allegedly a biblical quotation,[24] and below it there are two columns with four little pictures each, corresponding to the two sides of 'force' and 'persuasion' respectively.[25] Between them, in the bottom centre, we read in bold print "Book Four," together with the significant subtitle "or the matter, form and power of a commonwealth" (again referring to *Leviathan*, of course). All of this very clearly points to Gray's concerns in this Book: they are with (Scottish) society, the structure of the state and the (ab)use of power. This is accordingly 'illustrated,' as it were, in the contents of the Book, in what happens to Lanark and what he learns about the world of Unthank and Provan, the world of the Institute, the Council and the Creature.

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[24] The source is given in the frontispiece as "Job c41, v34," however, these exact words cannot be found there. Yet the reference is clearly to the 'Leviathan'-figure representing the state/society. Interestingly, there exists another version of the frontispiece which leaves out the indication of the source and tellingly expands the words to "By arts is formed that great mechanical man called a state, foremost of the beasts of the earth for pride." (This version served the National Library of Scotland as a poster announcing its 1998 exhibition "Alasdair Gray: Maker of imagined objects.") In the original lithographs for the frontispieces, held by Glasgow University Library, the line reads: "By Arts is manufactured that great mechanical man called a State".

[25] Thus we find on the left-hand side pictures of the army and war, and on the right-hand side pictures of the law, education and working life. This indeed reminiscent of Althusser's ideas concerning the "state-ideological apparatus".

The workings of these hidden powers are initially unclear to both Lanark and the reader and remain so for a considerable amount of time. Lanark is a sort of Everyman or Holy Fool figure, suffering in a dystopian world (his repeated cries of "This is hell!" bear witness to his feelings). While trying to fight the unpalpable powers that rule this world without much success, he is being used for their purposes in the process. Yet he does gain some insight into the structures of that 'great mechanical man called a state' in the course of his struggle, and he does seem to find a place for himself in life that lets him await death calmly at the end of the novel, "a slightly worried, ordinary old man but glad to see the light in the sky." [L, 560] So what does he—and with him the reader—learn about this world? In the second chapter of Book Four, called "Council Corridors", Lanark shortly meets the leader of the Council and director of the Institute, Lord Monboddo. Before this meeting he asks Munro, a doctor and friend from the Institute who is to help him leave the place:

> "But what is the institute? What is the council?"—"The council is a political structure to lift men nearer Heaven. The institute is a conspiracy of thinkers to bring the light of Heaven down to mankind. They've sometimes been distinct organizations and have even quarrelled, though never for long. The last great reconciliation happened during the Age of Reason, and two world wars have only united us more firmly."—"But what is this heavenly light? If you mean the sun, why doesn't it shine here?"—"Oh, in recent years the heavenly light has never been confused with an actual *sun*. It is a metaphor, a symbol we no longer need. Since the collapse of feudalism we've left long-term goals to our enemies. They're misleading. Society develops faster without them. If you look closely into the dome, you'll see that though the artist painted a sun in the centre it's almost hidden by the first Monboddo's crown." [L, 367][26]

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[26] The reference in the last sentence is to a painting covering the ceiling, which has been described before this scene as depicting, among others, "Nimrod, Imhotep, Tsin-Shi Hwang and Augustus, early presidents of the council" as well as "former directors of the institute: Prometheus, Pythagoras, Aquinas and Descartes." [p.366] The link to the broader

Though certainly open to various possible interpretations, this passage offers first glimpses of an explanation regarding the nature of the Institute and the Council. The Council is "a political structure to lift men nearer Heaven," that is the sphere of politics within the state, which offers the possibility to climb ever higher on the ladders of power hierarchy towards that "heavenly light" of supreme power focusing in "Monboddo's crown," the highest position in the political hierarchy. It works in close connection with the Institute, that "conspiracy of thinkers to bring the light of Heaven down to mankind." This seems to suggest the realm of science and technology, together perhaps with the interpretations as university/academia (and also philosophy, given the names of the "former directors of the institute"). Especially the statement that "two world wars have only united [council and institute] more firmly" points in this direction. There is obvious social criticism of (late) capitalist society, when Munro says that "since the collapse of feudalism" long-term goals for society have been seen as "misleading," because "[s]ociety develops faster without them." This criticism is consistently pursued and strengthened the more knowledge and insight Lanark gains in this dystopian world.

A considerable part of this knowledge is imparted to Lanark and the reader in Chapter 36, called "Chapterhouse." Here Lanark, having at last reached Unthank from the Institute after a long and horrible journey through the "Intercalendrical Zone", and starting to realise that it is in many ways an even more 'hellish' place than the one he left, is talking to a character called Grant and nicknamed Polyphemus. He seems to be one of the few persons of integrity in Unthank and appears to have a deeper insight into the workings of power and

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criticism of Enlightenment rationalism (and its relation to the two world wars!) that we have also seen in contemporary theory is hardly to be missed here.

society in the place.[27] Lanark asks him about that other sinister power he has been hearing of—the Creature:

> Lanark said thoughtfully, "These groups—Volstat, Algolagnics and so on—are they what people call the creature?"—"Some of us call it that. The council is financed by it. So is the institute. So it likes to call itself the foundation."—"I'm sick of these big vague names that power keeps hiding behind," said Lanark impatiently. [...] "Would you tell me exactly what the creature is?"—"A conspiracy which owns and manipulates everything for profit." [...] "They pretend culture and government are supremely independent powers when they are nothing but gloves on the hands of Volstat and Quantum, Cortexin and Algolagnics. And they really think they are the foundation. They believe their greed holds up the continents. They don't call it greed, of course, they call it profit, or (among themselves, where they don't need to fool anyone) *killings*. They're sure that only their profit allows people to make and eat things." [...] "As the creature couldn't stay rich by selling necessary things to the folk who made them it sold destructive things to the council. Then the war started and the destructive things were used to wreck the necessary things. The creature profited by replacing both."—"Who did the council fight?"—"It split in two and fought itself."—"That's suicide!"—"No, ordinary behaviour. The efficient half eats the less efficient half and grows stronger. War is just a violent way of doing what half the people do calmly in peacetime: using the other half for food, heat, machinery and sexual pleasure. Man is the pie that bakes and eats himself, and the recipe is separation." [...] "The war ended with the creature and its organs more dominant than ever." [...] "The creature still puts time and energy into vast weapons and sells them to the council, but recent wars have been fought with smaller weapons and kept to the less

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[27] The nickname of Polyphemus can be related to Gray himself, when taking into account that "[a]t Wetherby primary school he wrote and directed a six minute play from an episode in the *Odyssey*, acting the part of Polyphemus" [Charlton 1991a, 12], thus adding weight to the views of this character.

> industrial continents. Meanwhile the creature has invented peaceful ways of taking our time and energy. It employs us to make essential things badly, so they decay fast and have to be replaced. It bribes the council to destroy cheap things which don't bring it a profit and replaces them with new expensive things which do. It pays us to make useless things and employs scientists, doctors and artists to persuade us that these are essential." [L, 409ff.]

This passage—quoted here in length because of its importance for my reading of Book 4 and the novel as a whole—first of all supplies information about the possible meaning and function of the enigmatic "creature." It is clearly designed as a metaphor for 'big business', for the ruthless philosophy of capitalist economics, which believes that "greed holds up the continents" and which profits from wars and exploiting people. It is the most powerful institution in the world of Unthank because both Institute and Council are financed by it. This passage paints a grim picture of the whole of society in that dystopian world, which translates into a not inaccurate if slightly cynical commentary on late twentieth-century (post-)industrial society. The key sentence here and one of the most significant and disturbing statements of the novel is arguably: "Man is the pie that bakes and eats himself, and the recipe is separation." This takes up images encountered earlier in the novel, from Thaw's fantasy of a "Flealouse" infecting and eating all the life on earth[28] to the 'processing' of people by the Institute, and becomes a kind of underlying social criticism that

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[28] In chapter 21 ("The Tree"), the first of Book 2, Thaw invents a maggot called the Flealouse and imagines in disgusting detail how it infects people and slowly eats them up from inside: "In less than a century the Flealouse infected and ate every other sort of life on the globe. The earth became nothing but rock under a heaving coat of lice of every size, from a few inches up to five hundred feet. Then they began to eat each other. In the end only one was left, a titan curled round the equator like a grub round a pebble. The body of the last Flealouse contained the flesh of everything that had ever lived. It was content." [L, 233] The frontispiece of Book 2 also bears exactly the "Man is a pie ..." phrase as an epigraph, only in Latin: "Homo a se coctum esumque crustum est hoc fecit separatio".

runs through the novel. This critique is exemplified again and again by events and actions in the plot.

This is particularly evident in the developments in Book 4, following the passage quoted above. Lanark learns that Sludden, a charismatic but rather unpleasant figure he first met at the Elite Cafe at the beginning of Book 3, is now Provost of Unthank, and he attends a committee meeting of the city, where he meets other 'politicians' who do not exactly inspire confidence either. There he reports what he has heard about the danger of imminent destruction threatening the city and stresses the urgent necessity of taking measures against it. However, despite the presence of some sensible people like Grant, the demagogues prevail and nothing is decided. At the same time Lanark's girlfriend Rima, after giving birth to his son Alexander, leaves him to live with Sludden. Before he gets to know this, he tries to find work to be able to support his family. In the course of this attempt he learns that society in Unthank works precisely according to the principles explained to him by Grant; making a few people rich and wealthy by keeping most people poor, while at the same time preventing riots by supplying the latter with hope, drugs and colour television.[29] These are certainly science-fiction elements very much in the tradition of Huxley, Orwell and other dystopian texts. In the meantime the threat to Unthank becomes unexpectedly acute, as a not precisely specified poisonous substance, released at an accident with an Algolagnics transporter, has entered the sewage system of the city

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[29] Thus Lanark is told at the "job centre" that "it is a dangerous thing to suddenly deprive a man of hope—he can turn violent. It is important to kill hope *slowly*, so that the loser has time to adjust unconsciously to the loss. We try to keep hope alive till it has burned out the vitality feeding it." [L, 439] He also learns that half the population is hooked on a cigarette-drug called "Poison", which has the Council warning "Don't smoke this!" printed on it but from the selling of which the Council profits enormously; and he gets the opportunity to visit one of the "mohomes" that most people live in, which are nothing more than tiny kinds of campers parked on huge parking sites and having a huge television screen built into them that allows people visions (and the scents) of blooming gardens in sunlight and the like.

and threatens to poison its inhabitants. Although the problem is 'solved' by cutting whole parts of the city off from the sewage system altogether, the danger becomes even greater because the pollution now threatens to cause "tremors and subsidences in the earth's crust" by "filtering down through the Permian layer." [L, 460] At last Sludden and the committee decide to send Lanark to the meeting of Council states in Provan to speak for Unthank. Lanark does not suspect that this is just another of Sludden's ploys, who will strike a private deal with the Creature, selling Unthank while he is away, which is a long time because he has to cross another intercalendrical zone and ages rapidly.

At Provan, apart from making an utter fool of himself (he gets drunk and arrested and misses most of the meeting), Lanark gains some more insight into the workings of Council politics. This is summarised in a description of the conference by a disillusioned journalist: "this has been the smoothest, politest, most docile assembly in history. The delegates have handled each other as gently as unexploded bombs. All the dirty deals and greedy devices have been worked out in secret committees with nobody watching, nobody complaining, nobody reporting." [L, 531] Lanark does manage to speak up in the final assembly of the meeting, interrupting a long speech by Lord Monboddo. This speech is quite significant in itself, taking up as it does most of chapter 43, called "Explanation." Here, towards the end of the novel, Monboddo paints a picture of history from the beginnings to the present which can be linked back to Grant's picture of present society at the beginning of Book 4. Monboddo himself calls his picture "a perhaps too cynical view of history" while a delegate remarks that "[i]t's too Marxian for the Corporate Wealth gang and too approving for the Marxists." [544] Reaching the present, Monboddo says:

> I have described [history] as a growing and spreading of wealth. Two styles of government command the modern world. One works to reconcile the different companies which employ their people, the other employs the people themselves. Defenders of the first style think great wealth the reward and necessary tool of those who serve mankind best; to the rest it is a method by which strong people bully weak ones. [ibid.]

These "two styles of government" can easily be interpreted as the two big political systems and ideologies of the twentieth century (and especially of the late seventies, Gray's time of writing): the capitalist system with its free market economy and the (pseudo-) socialist/communist regimes with their state economy. Monboddo argues for a common cause for both systems: "What we must unite to prevent are half-baked revolts which might give desperadoes access to those doomsday machines and bottled plagues which stable governments are creating, not to use, but to prevent themselves from being bullied by equals." [545] This is the great goal of governments everywhere in this world: to perpetuate the power of the powerful against the mass of the people, against "desperadoes" and "irresponsible intellectuals, the enemies of strong government everywhere" because, as Monboddo explains,

> [b]oth types seem anxious to break the world down into tiny republics of the prehistoric kind, where the voice of the dull and cranky would sound as loud as the wise and skilful. But a reversion to barbarism cannot help us. The world can only be saved by a great enterprise in which stable governments use the skills of institutional knowledge with the full backing of corporate wealth. Council, institute and creature everywhere must work together. [545-6]

Powerful of the world, unite! This is Monboddo's credo, and hardly anybody seems to disagree at the assembly, so he goes on to paint a picture of the future for mankind under the leadership of this unholy alliance, where the problems of the present will be forgotten:

> The fuel supply of the present planet is almost exhausted. The food supply is already insufficient. Our deserts have grown too vast, our seas are overfished. We need a new supply of energy, for energy is food as well as fuel. [...] Where can this energy be found? Ladies and gentlemen, it is all around us, it streams from the sun, gleams from the stars and sings harmoniously in every sphere. [...] It is time for me to admit that sending ships into space is not just an adventure but a necessity. That greater outer space is not, we now know, a horrid vacuum but a treasure house which can be endlessly, infinitely plundered—if we combine to do it. Once again the secretaries of the sky will be our leaders. We must build them a high new platform, a city floating in space where the clever

> and adventurous of every land, working in a clean, nearly weightless atmosphere, will reflect heat and sunlight down to the powerhouses of the world. [546]

If nothing else, the word "plundered" gives away the imperialist designs behind this rosy picture painted by Monboddo.[30] It is at this point, in the middle of this vision of the extension into the future of the fatal and unjust structure of present society, that Lanark at last interrupts Monboddo, having been hypnotised at first by his speech but having then come to realise the terrible implications of his statements and the politics he stands for, and now seeing that "[t]he man's a lunatic." [547] He accuses Monboddo of lying

> "when he said all the delegates agreed to manage things through open, honest debates! [...] Unthank is being destroyed with no open agreement at all, jobs and homes are being destroyed, we've begun hating each other, the Merovicnic Discontinuity is threatened -" He was deafened by a babel of laughter and talk. [ibid.]

As the reaction of the assembly indicates, nothing much comes of his intervention. At least he is granted a short personal interview with Monboddo. This, at the beginning of the last chapter of the novel, serves to reinforce and clarify the picture of society which Lanark and the reader have successively been given throughout the Unthank/Lanark-part of the novel and especially in the course of Book 4:

> [Monboddo] said, "At last the Common Man confronts the Powerful Lord of this World. Except that you are not very common and I am not very powerful. We can change nothing, you and I. But talk to me. Talk to me."—"I am here to speak for the people of Unthank."—"Yes. You wish to tell me they have too few jobs and homes and social services so stupidity,

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[30] Although this was written about 25 years ago, it sounds rather topical today. Incidentally, Gray took part in the protests against the Iraq War of US President Bush and Tony Blair in 2003 and has written about that in his latest short story collection [cf. Gray 2003, 146-60].

> cruelty, disease and crime are increasing among them. I know that. There are many such places in the world, and soon there will be more. Governments cannot help them much."—"Yet governments can fire great structures into space!"—"Yes. It is profitable."—"For whom? Why can't wealth be used to help people here and now?"—"It is, but we can only help people by giving them less than we take away from them. We enlarge the oasis by increasing the desert. That is the science of time and housekeeping. Some call it economics."—"Are you telling me that men lack the decency and skill to be good to each other?"—"Not at all! Men have always possessed that decency and skill. In small, isolated societies they have even practised it. But it is a sad fact of human nature that in large numbers we can only organize against each other."—"You are a liar!" cried Lanark. "We have no nature. Our nations are not built instinctively by our bodies, like beehives; they are works of art, like ships, carpets and gardens. The possible shapes of them are endless. It is bad habits, not bad nature, which makes us repeat the dull old shapes of poverty and war. Only greedy people who profit by these things believe they are *natural*."—"Your flood of language is delicious," said Ozenfant, yawning slightly, "and can have no possible effect upon human behaviour. [...] You suffer from the oldest delusion in politics. You think you can change the world by talking to a leader. Leaders are the effects, not the causes of changes. I *cannot* give prosperity to people whom my rich supporters cannot exploit." [...]—"But if your *reason* shows that civilization can only continue by damaging the brains and hearts of most children, then ... your reason and civilization are false and will destroy themselves."—"Perhaps," said Monboddo, yawning, "but I think we can make them last our time." [L, 549-51]

This is the dissatisfying end of the conversation and the end of Lanark's hope that this society can be changed for the better. The result seems to be a very bleak and cynical view, but it combines with Monboddo's earlier speech and with Grant's views before as well as with Unthank/Provan's reality (and even to a certain extent the reality of Duncan Thaw's Glasgow). It suggests that this is indeed Gray's comment on late-twentieth-century industrial (capitalist) society and his criticism of a world where the profit of a few people is more

important than the well-being of the mass of the people, and even more important than the future of the planet.[31] Thus *Lanark*, and especially Book 4 as the last and longest part of it, can be read as social criticism, as a fable, being an 'intentional distortion of various aspects of contemporary society', and as such it gives an idea of Gray's own views that can be linked to the general postmodern critique of monolithic Western capitalist ideology. This is in stark contrast to Jameson's claims for postmodern literature (and particularly science fiction) as the "cultural logic of late capitalism".

This brings us back to the starting point of our discussion of the novel: namely the importance of the quality of fable and therefore of social criticism for the genre of science fiction. Garnett and Ellis, for example, write in their introduction to *Science Fiction Roots and Branches: Contemporary Critical Approaches*:

> Common to all these essays, to a greater or lesser extent, [...] is a concern with the nature and disposition of power in modern societies—whether in its overtly political distribution, its ideological reinforcement, its subversion, its scientific and technological deployment, or its expression within gender relations. This common concern flows from the generically pivotal interaction between on the one hand science fiction's exploration of alternative/oppositional models of social organisation (with all its implied loading of social criticism), and on the other the very diversity of its origins and evolving identity as a genre which characteristically draws on elements of the fantastic. [Garnett/Ellis 1990, 1]

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[31] In this interview we also find again the notion of the state as a work of art (i.e. man-made), which was implied by Gray's frontispiece. Lanark's remarks that "only people who profit by these things believe they are natural" and that "your reason and civilization are false" also recall the general postmodern debates about traditional (Enlightenment) standards and certainties and their challenging.

It should have emerged from the aforesaid that Books 3 and 4 of *Lanark* are typical of this socially critical strain in science fiction.[32] This is one more indication not only of the possibility of approaching this novel as a work of science fiction, but of the interesting and fruitful perspective such an approach allows. Although the same can surely not be said of all of Gray's works, the ones I identified as 'science-fictional' do certainly justify a closer look from that angle, too. However, at this point I can only briefly hint at the possible reading of some of the other works as (social) fables—my more detailed analysis of *Lanark* will have to stand as the model.

Parables of Power: The Quality of Fable in Gray's Other 'SF' Works

The function of social parable or fable is most obviously fulfilled by some of Gray's short stories, the prime example perhaps being the two connected stories (which is actually one longer story) "The Start of the Axletree" and "The End of the Axletree" from *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*. This is the story of "the last and greatest world empire," [US, 68] the Empire of the Great Wheel, and its attempt to join "the wheel of the civilized world [...] to the wheel of heaven" [ibid.] by building an enormous tower called the "axletree" at the capital city situated at the hub of the empire. This attempt ends in disaster when the axletree actually reaches the "ceiling which held up the moon" [ibid.] and pierces it for reasons of scientific investigation, triggering the catastrophe that destroys the capital city and most of the empire. This story is an ambitious allegory of mankind's unquenchable and fatal thirst for 'knowledge' and the driving political, economic, military and scientific forces behind it.[33] The second part—"The End of the

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[32] Therefore, the novel "might be taken to typify the modern fable" [Parrinder 1980, 75] just as much as the work of George Orwell, to which this quote refers.

[33] This allegorical character, which we already found in *Lanark*, is not only one of Gray's great strengths (cf. e.g. the chapter "Allegory in Lanark" in Charlton [1988, 16-18] as well as Witschi's remarks on Gray's use of

Axletree"—in particular describes these forces at work in the organization of the great enterprise of building the axletree, which takes many generations. The structure of the edifice as well as of the society represented by it, unified at the foundation, successively breaks up into competing companies with a whole cluster of political, economic and military structures behind them, which each build their own summit at the very top of the axletree, trying to outdo the others. As the universal catastrophe that is the outcome of this competition clearly shows, there is here, as there was in *Lanark*, a strong criticism of these structures and the underlying organisation of society. This emerges plainly from the last exchange between the president of the company which has 'reached heaven' first on the one hand, who wants to stop the military-scientific group from piercing the sky, and this group on the other, represented by the "control" and determined to continue with the experiment:

> President to control: Rapidly convened heavenly parliament orders you to stop. Foreman of work declares God wants you to stop. Everyone on earth begs you to stop. Please stop. Nobody supports you except shareholders, a corrupted trade union, the army, and mad experimenters without respect for human life.
>
> Control to president: Support sufficient. The spirit of man is too great to be confined by a physical boundary. [US, 263]

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postmodern allegory in "Babylonian Towers: The 'Axletree' story" [Witschi 1991, 100-23]), it is also one of the basic features of the (science-fictional) fable: thus Parrinder starts his discussion of "Science Fiction as Fable" with a look at its precursors, which he finds exactly in the tradition of allegory: "[A]llegory is often used to counter or undermine received doctrines [...] [T]here is a long tradition of 'underground' texts expressing discomforting and heretical views in opposition to the established outlook of literature, philosophy, and theology. Most of the narratives acknowledged as precursors of modern science fiction [...] belong in this tradition." [Parrinder 1980, 69]

Shortly after this, disaster ensues. This tragic end of the great enterprise of the axletree is foreshadowed as inevitable at the very beginning of the story, exactly because of the way this society is organised. The emperor who starts the project is told in a message from another emperor: "You and I are mere emperors. We both know that a strong class of merchants and generals cannot be commanded against their will. Wealthy nations and men will embrace disaster rather than lose riches." [US, 72]

Social criticism like this is also found in Gray's other science-fiction stories, such as "Near the Driver" from *Ten Tales Tall and True*, where a speed train is heading for collision with another train and the passengers are powerless to do anything. As Bruce Charlton writes,

> this is a political allegory with the railway system as the world, the train as a country, the driver as prime minister and the passengers as the powerless masses. When the train is about to crash and kill everyone including the driver, he is more concerned to keep order even at the price of his life than allow damage to government property. Gray is satirising a rigidity of thought that verges on insanity where a government is so convinced of the primacy of profit that it will not interfere in "the market" even when the country is on the verge of annihilation. In a note in *Chapman* magazine, Gray specifically links this play with the government attitude to nuclear power stations, in the wake of the Three Mile Island accident. [Charlton 1988, 51][34]

In other words, there is another 'intentional distortion of contemporary society' by the technique of 'cognitive estrangement.' Similar elements of political allegory are also to be found, for example, in the

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[34] Charlton is referring here to Gray's 1976 radio play "Near the Driver," which was later reworked and published as a short story in 1993. In this later form, it can of course also be read as a comment on Margaret Thatcher's policies in the 1980s which arguably had such catastrophic results not only but especially in Scotland.

stories "A New World" or "The Trendelenburg Position" from the same collection of short stories.

Aspects of social criticism of contemporary society are maybe less clearly discernible at first sight in Gray's novel *Poor Things*. This might be because it is such a playful and, at least superficially, funny book, and also perhaps because it is set at the end of the nineteenth century, which might lead the reader to see criticism of *fin-de-siècle* society (which is certainly there) rather than criticism of Gray's own 'end of century.' Yet the novel is full of references to the contemporary society of Glasgow, Scotland, even the world. So much so, in fact, that one reviewer called it a "timeless comment on Western society and its warped nature." [Gifford 1992, 14][35] Without going into detail I will briefly mention some of those references (I will come back to some of them later, in any case). Already in the Introduction to the novel by the "editor" Alasdair Gray, which tells the reader of the circumstances under which the alleged "document" that makes up the central part of the book was discovered, there is criticism of the 'improvements' thrust upon Glasgow by those who govern it: "Life in Glasgow was very exciting during the nineteen seventies. The old industries which had made the place were being closed and moved south, while the elected governors (for reasons any political economist can explain) were buying multistorey housing blocks and a continually expanding motorway system." [PT, IX] The whole book can indeed be read as Gray's reaction against the official glossy image of modern Glasgow, as exemplified in the European City of Culture festivities in 1990, which is all shining facades and has no place for anything like actual working people, or even the unemployed and homeless (this is also why Gray was active in the counter-campaign Workers' City). The class issue keeps coming up throughout the book,

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[35] Gifford goes on to specify this claim by saying: "Gray is deeply serious here. The 'poor things' of the title are thus Baxter's dependants, and then the rest of the sick, poor, deprived classes Victorian affluence didn't reach, and then humanity, and its impoverished spiritual condition." [ibid.] This links up with Gray's concern with the powerless in the works discussed above.

and so does the issue of an unfair society. This is probably most clearly the case in chapter 16, called "Astley's Bitter Wisdom," in which Harry Astley, a rather cynical character whom Bella meets on her 'grand tour' through Europe, paints a picture of Victorian society for her. Most of the points that make up his survey, which are noted down under separate headings by Bella because they are "all the things [she] must change" [PT, 154], have an oddly (or not so oddly) contemporary ring to them. This includes above all the points "History," "Unemployment," "Freedom" and "World Improvers."[36] Also, the discussion between Astley and an American missionary called Doctor Hooker in the preceding chapter "The Missionaries" is conspicuously reminiscent of the contemporary Fukuyama—Huntington debate about 'the end of history' or 'the clash of civilisations' (cf. the next chapter). There can be no doubt, then, that there is considerable contemporary social criticism in this novel, too.

Gray's latest novel *A History Maker* seems to be, at first sight, a classic case of 'extrapolation',[37] envisaging as it does twenty-third-

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[36] Relevant passages would be, for example, "Big nations are created by successful plundering raids, and since most history is written by friends of the conquerors history usually suggests that the plundered were improved by their loss and should be grateful for it. Plundering happens inside countries too." [from "History," p. 156-7], "Poverty, hunger and disease may drive some people to steal loaves from bakeries and dream of revolutions, but makes revolutions less likely by weakening the bodies of the desperately poor and keeping down their number through infant mortalities." [from "Unemployment," p. 157-8]; or—very up-to-date indeed—"parliament is an alliance of monarchs, lords, bishops, lawyers, merchants, bankers, brokers, industrialists, military men, landlords and civil servants who run it to protect their wealth AND FOR NO OTHER REASON. Socialists elected into it will therefore be outwitted by these, or bribed, or compromised into nonentity." [from "World Improvers," p. 161-2]

[37] Extrapolation is a term often used in science-fiction criticism to describe the projection of contemporary trends and developments into the future. It was also the title of the first scholarly magazine devoted to science fiction, first published in 1959.

century society. This should make it easy for us to regard it as criticising contemporary society and thus as a fable of some kind. But (of course, one is tempted to add, this being a work of Gray the master of ambiguity) all is not so straightforward here. However, we do get a clue that links the novel to the issues discussed above, in the shape of a 'quote' from some future kind of dictionary, printed as a sort of motto on the very first page of the text:

> "*Economics*: Old Greek word for the art of keeping a home weatherproof and supplied with what the householders need. For at least three centuries this word was used by British rulers and their advisers to mean *political* housekeeping—the art of keeping their bankers, brokers and rich supporters well supplied with money, often by impoverishing other householders. They used the Greek instead of the English word because it mystified folk who had not been taught at wealthy schools. The rhetoric of plutocratic bosses needed *economics* as the sermons of religious ones needed The Will of God."—from *The Intelligence Archive of Historical Jargon*. [HM, n.p.]

Here we find the same concerns with class, power and oppression as in Gray's other works. However, the meaning of this motto in relation to the whole novel is not as readily decipherable. First of all, the passage pretends this is "historical jargon," which together with the past tense of the text suggests that these capitalist phenomena have long been overcome by twenty-third-century society. Indeed, the society described in the novel is not far from being a socialist-communist utopia: people live in small matriarchal communities, they do not lack anything, the "powerplants" can produce everything that is or might be needed, there is no money, no profit, no oppression, no states. There are still wars, but they are not fought over territorial claims or for economic reasons, but as sports events between clans (such as Ettrick and Northumberland). In the course of the novel, a conspiracy to destroy the powerplants and thus bring back the times of real wars, fierce competition and power hierarchies is fended off.[38] So

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[38] The novel opens with a battle between the Ettrick clan and the Northumbrians, in which Wat Dryhope, son of the Ettrick chief, manages

how are we to interpret the initial 'quotation' in relation to the content of the book? Is it really only a reminder of the ills of our contemporary world while presenting us with a perfect alternative one? Our response to this depends to some extent on the interpretation of how 'utopian' Gray's outlook really is, which is why I will now turn directly to the issue of (anti-)utopia.

Ambiguous (Anti-)Utopias

It is not surprising that we should arrive at the issue of utopia and dystopia (or anti-utopia) in Gray's writing at this point, for "the clearest examples of the social fable involving cognitive estrangement are to be found in the utopian tradition." [Parrinder 1980, 76] I cannot investigate in detail here the more general relations between utopia and science fiction, but it should be obvious that there is a considerable overlap between the two genres. So much so that it is by no means easy to even separate them clearly, as Darko Suvin writes in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, when he points out that science fiction is

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to snatch a draw on a technicality against the vastly superior Northumbrian army, which makes him a media hero and spearhead of a great new movement restoring manly courage to its ancient prestige. This role, which he takes up hesitantly and uneasily, makes him the target of Delilah Puddock, who wants to seduce him into joining the conspiracy to bring back the 'good old times' of the past. This conspiracy can be read as an allegory of Tory/capitalist policies, with Margaret Thatcher as Delilah Puddock (especially when one remembers Thatcher's demand to bring back the good old Victorian values): "[O]ur hero, 'superbly muscled' Wat Dryhope, encounters 'fearfully seductive' Delilah Puddock and her manifesto of monogamy and capitalism. By way of mind-bending drugs and torrid sex, Puddock tries to convert Dryhope to her cause. Puddock, it quickly becomes clear, puts the 'Tory' in the 'story'. [...] For Puddock, read Thatcher." [McLean 1994, 12]

> at the same time wider than and at least collaterally descended from utopia; it is, if not a daughter yet a niece of utopia—a niece usually ashamed of the family inheritance but unable to escape her genetic destiny. For all its adventure, romance, popularization, and wondrousness, SF can finally be written only between the utopian and the anti-utopian horizons. [quoted ibid., 77]

Utopia vs. Dystopia in Gray's 'SF'

The last statement is certainly true for Gray's science fiction, and not only in the sense that one work (e.g. *Lanark*) is closer to the anti-utopian horizon and another (e.g. *A History Maker*) to the utopian, but especially in the sense that most of the works in themselves already hover somewhere in space between the two horizons. It seems to be precisely in *A History Maker* that Gray specifically focuses on the theme of this 'struggle' between utopia and anti-utopia. It is instructive here to pay attention to the particular way in which this novel (which in length is actually closer to an elaborate novella) evolved. The text was first written by Gray as a (television) play in the sixties. What is interesting about that version is that while it contains most of the themes and action of the novel, the matriarchal world there actually does revert to a militaristic one, and it ends in catastrophe, where wars are for real and "history has resumed once again."[39] For the novel Gray has changed the earlier negative ending (which would have been in keeping with many of his other works) into a more positive one. Concerning the motivation for this change, Gray himself has pointed to the fact that "[a] writer has to be 'reactionary,' has to be critical of the main current of his society," [Anon. 1994] and that therefore his pessimism of the sixties was a

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[39] This play was mainly written in 1965 (according to Charlton 1991b) but never performed or broadcast. Manuscripts and typescripts of it are kept in the National Library of Scotland [cf. ibid.] As I have not seen those, information about the content and ending of the play came from reviews of the novel [e.g. McLean 1994] and from a personal interview with Gray on February 12, 1998 [quote].

reaction against the optimistic mood of the time: "At the time I planned it, it was in the beatnik or flower-power period of feeling—everything's going to get better because technology is going to make everybody richer and nobody will need to do nasty work". Whereas "in writing the modern version I thought, aw naw, things are too bad to be pessimistic! I wasn't wanting the baddies to have it their way." [McLean 1994] As another review put it, "Now, living in a 'completely militarised, patriarchal society' [Gray] has opted for a more upbeat ending." [Anon. 1994] So we can glimpse a possible relation between the quote at the beginning of the novel and the novel itself: it can be seen as a kind of 'inverted' social criticism of contemporary society by writing a utopia that so obviously clashes with the realities and contradicts any realistic projection of the future.

However, one should always be cautious in taking Gray's statements at face value (the ironic undertones are hard to miss), and the same holds for his works. The optimism of *A History Maker* is again qualified, as Gray cheekily remarks at the end of the interview quoted above: "But, of course, anything like a happy ending is kept to Notes on the Text." [McLean 1994]—which is an important qualification because the main story's ending is actually left open.[40] So once again we have the ambiguity built right into the text. Apart from that, even the 'utopian' world itself is strangely unpromising despite the many improvements when compared with the contemporary world. Douglas Gifford writes:

> Gray creates a semi-Utopia that contains and limits what he has consistently presented in his work as male immaturity and gender violence. Women and tradition rule; better that males should channel their aggression in bloody team games than repress and poison their society, the fable argues. Gray is,

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[40] *A History Maker*, rather like *Poor Things*, consists of various parts: a "Prologue by a hero's mother," (that is the mother of Wat Dryhope, the main protagonist of the book), then the main body of the text, followed by Gray's typical "Notes & Glossary explaining obscurities" and a "Postscript by a student of folklore." The fending off of the attempted 'revolution' is related only in the Notes.

> however, aware that Utopia is unlikely; this crude control of the male is deplorable. [Gifford 1995, 9]

Not everybody is happy in this brave new world, and what seems to be missed in particular is some kind of 'history'. There is a longing in this posthistoric age for the times when man (and especially men) could still achieve great deeds by courage and personal commitment alone:

> Gray's plot derives its narrative impulse from the festering dynamics of posthistoric boredom, and male posthistoric boredom in particular. [...] Wat Dryhope, Gray's hero, is the epitome of male boredom and discontent. His craving for history, 'a period of excitement when folk thought they were making a better world', alerts us to the fact that life within a perfect idyllic still outside the contingent turbulence of historical flux, is essentially inimical to the ambitious human spirit on its quest for self-fulfilment. His resentment of the matriarchal power structures that inform the world in which he lives, and his longing for a world in which 'men and women earn their living room by working together as equals' are not so much indicative of Wat's latent misogyny as of the extremely sexist nature of 23rd-century society. [Schoene 1996, 152]

Once again Gray is criticising power structures and hierarchies, and we realise that this world may be just as "inimical to the human spirit" as was the world of *Lanark* or the Axletree stories. There are other elements in the novel which hint at the theme of control and power, for instance the institution of the "public eye", which is linked to a global communications network where "[j]ournalistic integrity and critical detachment have been replaced by the expedient imperative to pander to a gluttonous public voyeurism". [ibid.] Moreover, the structure of the novel itself implies this concern with control by wrapping its main story, where the focus is on the actions and thoughts of Wat Dryhope, once again in layers of Prologue, Glossary and Notes, and Postscript. These in turn glorify and ridicule the main protagonist (and, significantly, tell the reader of his 'disappearance'), as well as providing—in the case of the Notes—a meta-commentary on the story, history and literary techniques. The ultimate power to manipulate clearly lies in the hands of the author, and he has indeed manipulated this story into a deeply ambiguous utopia, which leaves

the reader strangely ambivalent and undecided in his response to the novel.[41] Although this can be seen as a weakness of the book,[42] it may, on the other hand, be exactly what Gray intended, as some of his remarks seem to suggest. If this is so, it can be read as a meta-statement on the complicated nature of the concept of utopia at the end of the twentieth century. As such, while stressing the difficulties of constructing a utopia which is not at the same time also a dystopia, the novel contests a strictly and generally negative position towards utopian concepts, which is often seen as characteristic of (late) twentieth-century science fiction.[43] Gray, while seemingly 'debunking' utopia in *Lanark* and many of his science-fiction short stories, takes on the challenge of engaging more deeply with the concept in *A History Maker*.[44] The result may be of necessity deeply

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[41] The very end of the novel is particularly confusing, if at the same time very funny: the Postscript relates the discovery of a folksong which is (possibly) about the fate of Wat Dryhope and Meg Mountbenger, alias Delilah Puddock, after their disappearance. They are described as a continually quarrelling "couple of travellers who had lived in dens and sea caves round the northern shores of Scotland and Ireland" [HM, 221-2], and one version has them both dying, unheroically and ridiculously, from the consequences of one of their quarrels. This is commented on in the two last sentences of the novel: "such an ending for Kittock's son and daughter seems as likely as murder and suicide, and more in keeping with modern notions. We prefer the comic to the tragic mode." [ibid., 223]

[42] Many critics have therefore regarded the book as a failure or have at least voiced their reservations about it. Gifford, for example, is "uneasy" in his response to "the paradoxical tone and attitude" of the novel and concedes that it is "not [Gray's] most controlled and shaped work". [Gifford 1995, 9] Marshall Walker goes further in thinking that in this novel "Gray has become too enamoured of his own whimsies." [Walker 1996, 341]

[43] Parrinder writes that "The debunking of utopia [...] remains the representative expression of twentieth-century anxieties." [Parrinder 1980, 78]

[44] Compare, for example, the following footnote from the Epilogue in *Lanark*: "Modern afterworlds are always infernos, never paradisos, presumably because the modern secular imagination is more capable of

ambiguous, but it is certainly not all dark or entirely without hope. There seems to be some kind of personal utopia for Gray that almost stubbornly refuses to be defeated in spite of all the 'debunking' of utopia going on all around us (which certainly has its justification, considering the circumstances).

With hindsight, this is even discernible in *Lanark* and many of the short stories. The end of *Lanark*, for example, does have an element of optimism, despite the bleak picture painted by the book as a whole. When Lanark comes back to Unthank after his experiences in Provan, an old man, ill and disillusioned, he does find the city on the brink of apocalypse, parts of it already in flames, buildings falling down, the earth trembling. On the other hand, he also meets his son Alexander, who is a grown man now, and who helps him flee towards the Necropolis, supporting him with his arm. This gives Lanark "such a strong feeling of happiness and safety that he started chuckling." [L, 555] When they reach the top of the cemetery Lanark prepares to watch the great flood which he has been told will destroy everything in the end:

> A blast of cold wind freshened the air. The rushing grew to surges and gurglings and up the low road between Necropolis and cathedral sped a white foam followed by ripples and plunging waves with gulls swooping and crying over them. He laughed aloud, following the flood with his mind's eye back to the river it flowed from, a full river widening to the ocean. His cheek was touched by something moving in the wind, a black twig with pointed little pink and grey-green buds. The colours of things seemed to be brightening although the fiery light over the roofs had paled to a silver streaked with delicate rose. A long silver line marked the horizon. Dim rooftops against it grew solid in the increasing light. The broken buildings were fewer than he had thought. Beyond them a long faint bank of cloud became clear hills, not walling the city in but receding, edge behind pearl-grey edge of farmland and woodland gently rising to a faraway ridge of moor. The darkness overhead

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debasement than exaltation." [489] with the end of *A History Maker* quoted above: "We prefer the comic to the tragic mode."

> shifted and broke in the wind becoming clouds with blue air between. He looked sideways and saw the sun coming up golden behind a laurel bush, light blinking, space dancing among the shifting leaves. Drunk with spaciousness he turned every way, gazing with wide-open mouth and eyes as light created colours, clouds, distances and solid, graspable things close at hand. Among all this light the flaming buildings seemed small blazes which would soon burn out. With only mild disappointment he saw the flood ebbing back down the slope of the road. [L, 557-8]

Without attempting a biblical interpretation, the imagery (particularly of light and colours) here is clearly more one of salvation or rebirth than of apocalypse, reminding one of Noah's vision after the biblical Deluge. The whole passage is suffused with a feeling of optimism, even joy. And, of course, Unthank is *not* (or at least not yet) destroyed. After this experience, Lanark can calmly await his imminent death, saying "I'm prepared to take death as it comes." [559] Despite everything, there is still hope, and for Lanark this seems focused in his son, who has just told him that "[t]he world is only improved by people who do ordinary jobs and refuse to be bullied." [554] Alexander apparently is one of them, and so there is still hope for the world to be improved: utopia is not entirely discredited.[45]

Similarly, Bella/Victoria in *Poor Things* tries to improve the world by becoming a socialist and Fabian and setting up a clinic for the poor, despite Astley's cynical teachings about the uselessness of "World Improvers". At the end of the story "The End of the Axletree", too, there is a glimmer of hope. The narrator of the story has survived the catastrophe and is now able to write it down for the use of generations to come. He hides the account in a cave inside a granite rock,

> so unless there is a shattering earthquake my history will not be found till the next world empire is established. Many

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[45] Cf. also Gray's remarks on the happy utopian ending indicated in the Index of Plagiarism's reference to non-existent chapters (see the Epilogue to this study).

> centuries will pass before that happens. [...] [W]hen unity is achieved the accumulation of capital which created the first great tower will lead to another, or to something very similar. But men are not completely sheeplike. Their vanity ensures that they never exactly repeat the past, if they know what it is. So if you have understood this story you had better tell it to others. [US, 266-7]

This may not be much by way of consolation but, undeniably, the hope that men can and will learn from the past (if only out of vanity) is still there.

These examples should suffice to suggest that Gray's science-fiction writing, though often deeply critical of contemporary society, is never entirely dystopian.[46] As long as man can hope, he will be hoping and in the meantime "do ordinary jobs and refuse to be bullied". Gray's idea of utopia seems to be a mixture of socialist views and the conviction of the virtue of personal decency and integrity. He is well aware of the fact that this might seem old-fashioned and naive in the face of the increasing powers of global capitalism and the ecological and militaristic threat to the planet, which is why his 'utopia' is always ambiguous and his works usually allow multiple interpretations. However, an indication of his beliefs is to be glimpsed in the mention of Robert Owen's New Lanark project in his political pamphlet *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland*:

> Robert Owen, owner and manager of New Lanark, a small Scottish industrial town he had partly created [...], advised the government to make all British industries do what he had done: use profits above five per cent to improve living conditions and education of their workers, and to keep them employed at a basic rate when trade was slack [...], but political economists explained the scheme was Utopian because the more prosperity you give the poor the more they will breed. [...] The prosperous should therefore keep their

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[46] An exception are perhaps the science-fiction stories in *Ten Tales Tall and True* ("Near the Driver" in particular), the message of which has been summarised as "we are heading for collision". [Gifford 1993, 7]

> wealth and let unemployment, hunger and homelessness reduce the numbers of poor who can do very little damage to a strong nation where at least three quarters of the people are comfortable. Meanwhile a reservoir of unemployed strengthens industry by keeping down wages. [WS, 68-9]

One need not necessarily read *Lanark* or *Poor Things* (some passages out of which seem to repeat almost word by word the same argument), to realise that Gray's feeling is certainly not with the political economists. For him, Owen's project is indeed 'Utopian', but in the sense of something that it is desirable to strive for. It is interesting to note, in this context, that in the 1970s Gray himself was involved in a project to set up a 'New Lanark Craft Community' precisely in Owen's buildings, which was to realise a kind of small socialist utopia, where people 'do ordinary jobs and refuse to be bullied' by working and living together as a community, mutually supporting each other and being independent of the 'official' world with all its power structures and oppression. Although this project did not work out (a couple of people, including Gray, actually went to New Lanark to live there for a while, but they soon had to give up), the underlying 'utopia' seems to inform Gray's work to this day, some aspects of the future society in *A History Maker* being perhaps not unlike the intended form of the community in New Lanark.[47]

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[47] A connection between this 'utopian undercurrent' and the title of *Lanark* seems to suggest itself here. This would imply an interpretation of Lanark as a Utopian or utopian socialist in a hostile world, just as Robert Owen was in his time. This is certainly not entirely mistaken, at least concerning one of the various facets of the Lanark figure. In the novel itself, however, the reason for Lanark to give himself this name is his remembrance of a picture of the town he saw when he awoke in the railway compartment at the beginning of Book 3 (narrated in Chapter 3). But then, why should it have been Lanark, of all places?

(Anti)Utopia, Science and Ideology

Utopianism in the twentieth century always had to define itself in relation—and mostly in opposition—to the scientific worldview and its materialism. The former seems to have declined in the same measure in which the latter has gained prominence throughout the century because "[f]rom a scientific standpoint, the utopian idea seemed to embody an essentially short-sighted quest for communal happiness." [Parrinder 1980, 80] It is only recently that an effective critique of scientific philosophy has begun to emerge, as I have mentioned in chapter one. To pursue the argument further and to link it to these more general developments in society, I will therefore now investigate how this is reflected in Gray's science-fiction writing. If it is considered as social fable, as I have done above, a secondary function as science criticism is to a certain extent already implied, because: "Modern science's aim of mastery over nature is not only radically unsettling in its social effects, it is also an inherently political aim." [ibid., 81] This political aspect of science, its involvement in the power structures of society, is what Gray criticises most strongly. This was already obvious in the representation of the Institute in *Lanark* as (partly) the scientific elite which is closely linked to the political power of the Council (remember that Ozenfant from the Institute becomes Lord Monboddo) as well as to the economic power of the Creature. It was equally apparent in "The End of the Axletree", where the scientific exploratory urge, backed by the armed forces and the 'shareholders', finally brings about catastrophe. The association of science with the military in particular is a frequent point of criticism not only in Gray, but in modern science fiction in general which can at least in part be read as a response to the militarization of science during and after the Second World War. In this, (Gray's) science fiction is clearly part of the broader developments in society outlined in chapter one. *Lanark*, *Poor Things* and even *A History Maker* illustrate very well the points made by Parrinder about modern science fiction and its place within broader developments in society:

> Since the 1960s there has been a dramatic revival of interest in utopian ideas in the West. At the same time, the ideals of mastery over nature and of the perfection of the social organization have given way, to a large extent, to that of liberation from oppression. [...] [T]he result is a perspective of ongoing (and perhaps never-ending) dialectical struggle

> against new forms of 'oppression'—a vision in sharp contrast both with the static perfection of the traditional utopias and the hypostatization of man's ultimate destiny in post-Darwinian science. The changing outlook of contemporary utopianism is paralleled to some extent by new developments in the philosophy of science. Scientific 'truths'—above all, in their reliance on general concepts such as those of man, space, time, and nature—are now seen to be inherently anthropomorphic and subject to revision. The supposed objectivity of laws and theories has been challenged by the realization that they invariably reflect, at some level, the structures of thought and social relationships in the societies which produce them. [...] In the most recent science fiction, the fables of power have become tentative and ambiguous, and often [...] have turned into fables of impotence. The hero struggling [...] to hold together some fragments in a disintegrating universe is now a commonplace figure. [Parrinder 1980, 85-6]

This sums up succinctly the role of science and its critique within the larger developments of the postmodern 'paradigm shift' which we are concerned with in this study and shows how this is reflected in modern science fiction. It also justifies the placement of Gray's writing in this context because, as I hope to have shown, it certainly illustrates the struggle against new forms of oppression as well as portraying heroes struggling to hold together some fragments in a disintegrating universe. Concerning the relation of his science fiction to the above-mentioned new developments in the philosophy of science, let me point to an essay in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, in which Anne Varty investigates Gray's short stories (mainly from *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*: in the following quote the reference is to "The Problem" from that volume). She highlights this aspect by a reference to Nietzsche (whom I have mentioned as one of the 'forefathers' of postmodernism, which again shows that those developments are not so new after all):

> [T]he reader is alerted to the duplicitous use of science. Gray's imagination toys repeatedly with the apparent fixtures of our understanding of the natural world and we may remember Nietzsche's warning: "Physics too is only an interpretation and arrangement of the world (according to our own requirements, if I may say so!) and *not* an explanation of the world ..." Gray has a fine sense of our capacity to confuse description with explanation and his imagination luxuriates in

> the creation of possible worlds which expose assumptions we make about our own. The speaker in 'The Problem' is motivated to offer a scientific solution to the Sun simply because he wants to see her again in serene circumstances. She wants to believe the explanation because she wants to be rid of her spots. The reader, like the Sun, is pleased by the solution, but pleased not because of its explanatory value or truthfulness. Instead we enjoy the shape this gives to the fable. Our pleasure is aesthetic. We realise that the satisfaction we take in explanations from other domains may be motivated by a similar aestheticism and therefore by factors other than their truthfulness. Explanations are seen as more strictly relative to our already existing horizons. [Varty 1991, 126-7; the Nietzsche quote is from *Beyond Good and Evil*]

Gray addresses here the same underlying assumptions of science that have been criticised and investigated in recent years by philosophers of science, cultural theorists and literary critics. Like many of them, he does not primarily criticise science as such, but the political, economic and ideological (ab)use of it:

> While a Nietzschean view of science liberates Gray's formal imagination, the world he presents is often one where scientific explanation is put to politically corrupt service and inhibits freedom. In this way Gray illustrates the destructive nature of monolithic explanation and demonstrates the political implications of imaginative atrophy. [ibid., 130]

It is important to stress that Gray's criticism of science—similar to his related social criticism—is in fact a criticism of ideology (i.e. "the destructive nature of monolithic explanation"), of political and social structures and their underlying (or missing) morality and ethics.[48] So

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[48] In a personal letter to the author [31 Dec. 1997], Alasdair Gray wrote: "I believe scientists are as responsible for the harm they do others as are politicians, stockbrokers, civil servants, industrialists and advertizing agencies. They are not *more* responsible for the state of the world than those I have just listed. [...] I define science as knowledge gained through imaginative guesses confirmed by practical experiment, an activity no

in the end, what remains irreducible is once more the sense of the virtue of decent, humane values. This seems to be inseparably linked in Gray's (science) fiction to a sense of the importance of complexity, of variability and of ambiguity, sometimes maybe also of confusion, in short, anything opposed to "monolithic explanation".

This "strategy of ambiguity"[49] in Gray's writing and its relevance in the context of the broader developments in culture and society might be the most important result (in terms of the more general concerns of this study) that my investigation of his science fiction as fable has yielded, but it has also proved the applicability of this category to many of his works, which we can therefore more legitimately consider as science fiction. Even more, it has emphasised the centrality in Gray's work of his interest in issues of (political) power and oppression in society and has shown the basic values (or shall we call it the personal philosophy) underlying his writing.

Epic Parodies: Gray's 'SF' as Epic and the Condition of Parody

Epic Elements in Gray's 'SF'

Having emphasised the importance of the category of social fable in Gray's work, let us move on to the third element which Parrinder proposes as constitutive of science fiction: the epic quality. This is certainly a complex field and also rather difficult to define in a few words. Instead of going back to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, it must suffice for our purposes to take Parrinder's investigation of the

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human being can live without, so I cannot deplore it. Only human greed and ignorance make me worried about the future" [cf. also the Epilogue].

[49] This phrase is taken from Marie Odile Pittin's essay "Alasdair Gray: A Strategy of Ambiguity" [cf. Pittin 1996].

influence of the concept in science fiction as the frame of reference for the examination of Gray's writing. Parrinder himself concedes that there is a basic problem in talking about modern writing as epic, pointing at a certain "tentativeness that afflicts all modern epic writing (whether or not it is science-fictional), since there is always a level at which the hero's deeds seem gratuitously inflated and the narrative is 'only a story'. The fact is that no artist's vision today can mould his society as inescapably as Homer did his." [Parrinder 1980, 97] It is probably more appropriate to speak of epic elements in a given literary work, which presupposes that the work satisfies some or all of the "epic requirements of realism, universality, heroic enterprise, and confrontation with forces beyond man's control." [ibid., 103] Furthermore, the epic strain is affiliated to the theme of (future) history:

> The tale of the future is the main representative of the epic mode in science fiction—epic being defined in modern terms by Ezra Pound as a 'poem including history'. The inclusion of history marks the contrast between the epic and the romance. [...] [E]pic writing postulates a historical or eschatological continuity between the events it narrates and the reader's situation. [...] The epic is thus a secular or historical narrative of events and deeds which constitute the heritage, or provide the key to the destiny, of the people for whom it is written. [...] [T]he principal grounds for calling some science fiction epic as opposed to romantic are that it deals with future or alternative history. [ibid., 89-90]

The two works of Gray that first come to mind here are *Poor Things* and *A History Maker*—concerned with the 'heritage' and the 'destiny' of people in Glasgow/Scotland respectively.

In many respects history is the central theme of the novel *Poor Things*. Since I will be returning to this question in the next chapter, it may suffice here to put forth the argument that while on the surface level there is certainly no direct continuity between the events it narrates and the reader's situation, there are many such continuities when we look for deeper or less obvious levels of meaning in the book. Some of them have already been touched upon in our consideration of the novel as social fable. Foremost among the others is arguably the 'heritage' of Victorianism and the continuities that

exist between the politics and culture of that age and our own. Gray writes in the Introduction about McCandless's 'book': "McCandless makes his narrative a host to letters by others who show his subject from a different angle, and ends by revealing a whole society." [PT, XIII] Among others, the novel contains the themes of the state of the medical system in *fin-de-siècle* Britain, the position of women and poor people in society, imperialism, the rise of socialism, Fabianism, Malthusianism etc. This comprehensive 'period feeling' is further emphasised by the insertion of illustrations from Henry Gray's *Anatomy* into McCandless's narrative and of nineteenth-century engravings into Gray's "Notes Critical and Historical". Thus, *Poor Things* can be said to meet the condition that "[t]he events portrayed in epic fiction must be of a certain magnitude. [...] [T]hey must involve the fate not of individuals but of whole societies". [Parrinder 1980, 90] While this speaks for the epic quality of the novel, it apparently contradicts its inclusion in the science-fiction genre, since "it must be remembered that future histories differ profoundly from the historical novels of the nineteenth century in that their basis is not history but speculation or prophecy. The science fiction that may be called 'prophetic' invokes the authority of the modern cognitive sciences for its speculations about the far future." [ibid., 93] However, I have pointed out earlier that the science-fiction genre also includes *alternative* history, which shows that the future setting is no precondition.[50] In any case, the quoted statement shifts the focus to Gray's other 'science fiction' novel, *A History Maker*, as we shall see.

For *A History Maker*, Gray did invoke the authority of modern science, as he has himself stated:

> When writing *A History Maker* in 1993 [...] I felt a need to know how the kind of future I imagined might be achieved through current thoughts about the future of engineering and human colonies in space. I consulted Chris Boyce, a writer of

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[50] Moreover, the medical experiments and operations undertaken in the novel—especially the 'brain transplantation'—can be read as a speculation about the future development of medical science—as well as a warning about its (unwarranted) possible effects.

> science fiction who (unlike most such writers) is a student of contemporary science. He lent me some useful books [...] [personal letter, 31 Dec 1997]

Therefore, this novel could more legitimately be called 'prophetic' in Parrinder's sense. For example, the idea of the organic "powerplants" developed from scientific knowledge regarding geothermal heat and predictions about the future production of machines. When Gray was asked once whether he considered himself as a bit of a (moral) prophet, his answer was: "I don't think there's anything in my books which isn't absolutely contemporary, therefore I'm not." [Renton 1988, 4] Although this was before he had written *A History Maker* (or *Poor Things*, for that matter), the response stresses once again the importance of the continuity between the events of the novel and the reader's situation. This only reinforces what Parrinder says about prophecy in science fiction (in reference to Wells's *The Time Machine*):

> Wells does not disappoint us of his promise to give a comprehensive and prophetic account of the future. [...] There are two major prophecies in *The Time Machine*: that of the degeneration of human civilization as represented by the Eloi and the Morlocks, and that of the gradual regression of all life on Earth to the point reached in the final scenes on the beach. The episode of the Eloi and Morlocks, although a demonstration of evolutionary decline, seems to embody a warning of the possible consequences of the greed, complacency, and rigid class divisions of present society. Wells here is satirizing both the society in which he grew up [...], and the peacefully prosperous societies which utopians such as William Morris foresaw in the near future. The effect is to make sense of man's possible future, since this future appears as the outcome of social choices made in the present. [Parrinder 1980, 94-95][51]

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[51] It is interesting to note that in the interview cited above the question whether Gray was a prophet developed from a comment by Gray about—precisely—H.G. Wells as a prophet, which sounds very similar to Parrinder's argument: "In *The Time Machine*, *The Sleeper Awakes*, *The*

This reminds us again of the fable quality in science fiction. Accordingly, *The Time Machine* is for Parrinder a major example of what he calls the "epic fable" or the "truncated epic", which he sees as the characteristic expression of the epic mode in modern science fiction:

> [F]uture history [...] is very difficult to keep [...] convincing in detail. [...] For this reason, science-fiction writers have good reason for sheering away from traditional epic construction in their narratives of the future. The characteristic relationship of many SF stories to the older epics is, it would seem, one of truncation or frustration. If the events that they portray are of epic magnitude, the manner of their portrayal is brief and allegorical, reminiscent not of the poem in twelve books but of the fables discussed in the previous chapter. [ibid., 93]

In this sense, *A History Maker* can surely be called an 'epic fable'. However, this label seems even more appropriate for our prime example of the social fable in Gray's work, the novel *Lanark*.

In fact, *Lanark* lends itself perfectly for a reading as epic fable similar to Parrinder's reading of *The Time Machine*. As we have seen earlier, it also embodies a warning of the possible consequences of the greed, complacency, and rigid class divisions of present society. It also illustrates very well another observation: "The epic quality of the story results not only from its projection of future history but from the Time Traveller's courage in facing the evidence of mankind's futility and bringing it back to his hearers. [...] [There is an implied]

War of the Worlds, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, and *First Men on the Moon* [sic] which is my favourite, he is both a critic of the society of his own time, and also a perceiver of its temporary nature. He has an immense interest in what it's turning into and can turn into. His best works were prophetic in the Old Testament sense. The prophet isn't somebody who says **THIS** IS GOING TO HAPPEN, the moral prophet says, IF THINGS GO ON ON THESE LINES **WITHOUT MODIFICATION**, THIS WILL HAPPEN. Of course, there are always modifications which can't be foreseen" [Renton 1988, 4].

ambivalence with which a more ordinary humanity must regard such heroism and such prophecy". [Parrinder 1980, 96] In *Lanark*, it is the eponymous 'hero' that faces the evidence of mankind's futility in Unthank and Provan (let us remember his remark to Monboddo that "your reason and civilization are false and will destroy themselves"), only that in this case it is also he himself who shows the ambivalent response of a more ordinary humanity in his stubborn refusal to let himself be deprived of hope at the end of the novel. This, then (just as the Epilogue of *The Time Machine*, which is Parrinder's example), is a reflection of "the tentativeness that afflicts all modern epic writing, since there is always a level at which the hero's deeds seem gratuitously inflated and the narrative is 'only a story'".[52]

Apart from this there is another, more comprehensive epic aspect to be detected in *Lanark*. In writing the novel, Gray was actually deliberately planning to write an epic. This idea existed already at the very beginning of the conception of the novel in Gray's teens and developed successively until its completion, as Bruce Charlton demonstrates:

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[52] Parrinder 1980, quoted above. This is arguably even more true for *Lanark* than for *The Time Machine*, since Gray's 'postmodern' tricks make the fact that this is "only a story" very obvious indeed. When Lanark meets his 'author' in the Epilogue, he is told by him: "As for my ending's being banal, wait till you're inside it. I warn you, my whole imagination has a carefully reined-back catastrophic tendency; you have no conception of the damage my descriptive powers will wreak when I loose them on a theme like **THE END**." [L, 498] There are peculiar parallels indeed to Wells's Epilogue, where the narrator says of the Time Traveller: "He, I know [...] thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end. If that is so, it remains for us to live as though it were not so." [Wells 1958, 83] This is exactly what Lanark does after this 'interview'. And significantly, the novel does *not* end as Nastler—'the author'—envisages it: "your eyes finally close upon the sight of John Knox's statue [...] toppling with its column into the waves, which then roll on as they have rolled for ... a very great period." [L, 497]

> On the eve of his eighteenth birthday, while a first-year student at the Glasgow School of Art, Gray wrote: "Tomorrow is my 18th birthday ... there are so many useful ideas to be caught before memory loses them ... just now I have pictures, and good ones, and a novel which may thrive, and a few small poems, and an epic (in intention)—these seem at last to be coming off." *Lanark* was descended from a combination of the above-mentioned novel and the epic. [...] Gray worked at a series of books which combined or juxtaposed a realist semi-autobiography with an epic allegorical fantasy in ways which culminated in the solution achieved by *Lanark*. [...] After reading E.M.W. Tillyard's *The English Epic and its Background*, Gray had the idea of blending genres normally kept apart, in this case the story of an artist growing up in Glasgow (i.e., Books 1 and 2 of *Lanark*, which were already well advanced in conception by 1953) with a 'Kafkaesque adventurebook of politics in an underworld' which was the other sort of book he was plotting to write. [Charlton 1991a, 12-3; the first quote is from a notebook kept in the National Library of Scotland, the second from a letter to Bruce Charlton]

This should be sufficient evidence for the argument that *Lanark* is not only a prime example of a social fable but also of an *epic* fable.

With 560 pages, *Lanark* is also of almost epic length (if not exactly the "poem in twelve books", it is "A Life in Four Books", as the subtitle puts it). This seems to contradict to some extent the statement that "the one aspect of the traditional epic that science fiction does not inherit is its amplitude". [Parrinder 1980, 103] However, it might just be an exception to the rule that the epic element in science fiction is best exemplified by the shorter form, as Parrinder argues, pointing to "the excellence of some of SF's short stories. The epic strain in science fiction may be present to most advantage where a single future crisis is portrayed with precision and economy." [ibid., 102] This is precisely borne out, on the other hand, by the "Axletree" story, which arguably makes this story the prototypical epic fable in Parrinder's sense. The epic requirements of realism, universality, heroic enterprise, and confrontation with forces beyond man's control are all met at least to some extent. In addition, it exemplifies other epic elements common in modern science fiction. Foremost among them is "the projection of a cyclical history, which

has become commonplace in more recent science fiction." [ibid., 100] This becomes especially apparent at the end of the story, where the building of another tower similar to the Axletree is projected as probable in the future. This confirms that "a closure of the cyclical history at a moment of destruction and possible new beginning is one way of ending such a story" [ibid., 101] and is in keeping with the statement that "cyclical theories of history serve to familiarize the future, since they entail the repetition of patterns found in the past. The theme of the rise and fall of civilizations has a powerful appeal to historically-minded writers". [ibid., 100]

Having shown the importance of the category of the epic for Gray's science fiction, I will not conclude this section without —once again—pointing to the ambiguity of this concept in Gray's writing. As we have seen, the epic quality is often balanced in his novels and stories—above all in *Poor Things* and *A History Maker*, but certainly in *Lanark* too—by a strong comic element, which frequently puts them closer to the category of mock-epic.[53] As it turns out, however,

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[53] Murray/Tait, for example, refer to Gray's parody of the epic regarding the beginning of *Lanark*: "We come to realise that we are being presented with a remarkable ironic parody of the venerable epic technique of plunging the reader into the middle of the action, *in medias res*. The most obvious aspect of this is that at the end of Book Two young Duncan Thaw is swallowed up by the sea and at the beginning of Book Three we have a young man of about twenty-four who has no idea who he is or what's what. Gray solemnly refers us to Homer, Vergil, Milton and Scott Fitzgerald as respectable antecedents in the use of the technique of throwing the reader into the thick of the action. His own version of the practise has some originality. None of those others chose to open a *magnum opus* with one of their key characters in quite such a state of vacuous inertia bordering on paralysis" [Murray/Tait 1984, 225]. The reference to this epic device is made by the 'author'/'conjuror' in the Epilogue [L, 483]. He proceeds to give peculiar summaries of a couple of great epics (without naming them, but it is easy to recognise, among others, the Bible, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Faust* etc.), suggesting they are antecedents of his own book. This is in turn commented on in a footnote: "[O]ne is compelled to ask why the 'conjuror' introduces an apology for his work with a tedious and brief history of world literature, as though summarizing

this is far from being exceptional in modern science fiction. On the contrary, it is almost becoming mainstream, as Parrinder observes:

> When the old epics lost their primary authority over their readers, they gave rise to the various modes of mock-epic, comic epic, satire, and burlesque. Lucian's *True History*, the earliest surviving narrative of interplanetary travel, begins as a parody of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In recent years, comic fantasy has become a prominent science-fictional mode [...] While the spread of comic science fiction and the parallel-world story may reflect an increasingly sceptical attitude towards the scientific anticipations that fired an earlier generation of writers, the chief factor in their emergence is a growing self-consciousness about the conventions and language of SF. [Parrinder 1980, 104-5]

It seems fitting, then, to turn next precisely to this question of self-consciousness with regard to the conventions and language of SF in the 'science fiction' writing of Alasdair Gray.

Echoes and Parodies of the Science-Fiction Tradition in Gray's Work

We have seen before that one of the most conspicuous 'postmodern' traits in Gray's work is its intertextuality, which can also be referred to as (in the most general sense) parody. The importance of parody for science fiction is summed up in the following statement: "What is peculiar to science fiction and its use of (fictive) cognitive logic as its validating principle is its equal and opposite attraction towards the two poles of prophecy and parody." [Parrinder 1995, 12-3] Parody is, once again, an ambivalent term. In the broadest terms, it could be defined as 'repetition with difference',[54] which signals an ironic distance to an

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a great tradition which culminates in himself! Of the eleven great epics mentioned, only one has influenced *Lanark*." [L, 489-90]

[54] Cf. e.g. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985).

earlier text. In modern science fiction, therefore, the implied distance is between the earlier 'collective myth' of SF and the more recent works of the genre, as Parrinder had already pointed out in his earlier study: "More recently, SF novelists have tended to approach the 'collective myth' of the genre—such as it is—in a spirit of self-conscious imitation and parody." [Parrinder 1980, 115] If anything, this kind of parody and self-consciousness has become even more 'mainstream' in science fiction since that time. So much so, in fact, that many critics are not sure whether this is a good sign for the state of the genre. Edward James, for example, talks about "the type of sf which was to become more and more common in the 1980s and into the 1990s: the sf work whose theme and area of exploration is not so much the physical or historical universe as the texture and meaning of sf itself. This is the sign of the maturity of a genre, perhaps, or of its decadence." [James 1994, 201][55] Whereas James seems to be rather optimistic[56], Nicholas Ruddick sees science fiction (British SF, that is) at the end of its tether:

> To generalize about British science fiction during the current *fin de siècle* is difficult. I would venture to suggest, however, that as a genre capable of generating worthwhile literature, contemporary British science fiction is all but defunct. [...]

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[55] Almost fifteen years earlier, Parrinder had made the same observation, referring to works by Kurt Vonnegut and Philip K. Dick: "The elements of parody and satire in these novels testify to their genetic descent from earlier science fiction. The fiction of Vonnegut and Dick is a sign either of the dissolution or the renovation of SF". [Parrinder 1980, 121]

[56] He closes his study by saying: "The ideal reader for [...] so much modern sf is the reader steeped in the sf of the past; the uninitiated will revel in the surface texture, but may never penetrate beneath it. Sf has become part of the modern idiom, infusing our language, our media culture, and our children's world of play with its images and its concepts. But sf as a literary medium is also still engaged with developments in modern science and technology; it still offers serious speculation about the future; it is still a place for satire. It now acknowledges and interacts with a century-long tradition of sf writing, enriching and broadening it and preparing it for whatever awaits it in the next millennium" [ibid., 208].

> The end of British science fiction, in a welter of empty gesture and Douglas Adams-style parody, perhaps confirms Ballard's insight, now practically a cliche, that the space age has been over for a long time. [Ruddick 1993, 180]

These are certainly different conclusions—which might, by the way, stem simply from a different understanding of the term science fiction[57]—but they are drawn from the observation of essentially the same phenomenon: the growing self-consciousness and parody (or intertextuality) in modern science fiction. After my findings in the previous chapter, it is to be expected that Gray's work is no exception to that tendency.

The parallels Gray himself has drawn between his work and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Wells's *Time Machine* and Huxley's *Brave New World* are a first indication of where to look for 'influences'. Wells's writing, in particular, seems to be important for him, as he once stressed in an interview, talking about his reading background: "[R]eading science fiction, I got on to H.G. Wells. His science fiction romances are about 95% of the science fiction worth reading even today. Most science fiction works take bits of his plots and develop them with a few twiddles of their own." [Renton 1988, 4] This is in keeping with the importance for the genre that is almost universally accorded to Wells's writing in science-fiction criticism: "For example, one may consider the literary diaspora belonging to Wells's *War of the Worlds* (1898)—a diaspora which extends, at its outer edges, to every twentieth-century narrative of invasion from outer space." [Parrinder 1980, 115][58] Interestingly, Wells's own description of his

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[57] It is not clear, for instance, why "Douglas Adams-style parody" should be less science-fictional than 'real' science fiction. Furthermore, Ruddick concedes that there still exists "what we might term, after the end of a science fiction worthy of serious attention, British fantastic literature." [ibid., 181] I have already pointed at the impossibility to clearly separate science fiction from 'fantastic literature'.

[58] Cf. also Parrinder 1980, 10-12; James 1994, 12ff. (esp.27ff.); Ruddick 1993, 3+62ff., and the whole of Parrinder 1995. Patrick Parrinder's

writing as a combination of fantasy and realism, which has become important for the definition of science fiction, also closely resembles Gray's narrative technique.[59] Wells, therefore, obviously plays a part as a point of reference (to put it cautiously) for Gray's writing.

The stature of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in the context of science fiction is more controversial than that of Wells's writing. For one, the genre is often thought to start only with Wells (both James 1994 and Ruddick 1993 give 1895—the publication date of *The Time Machine*—as the starting point). However, the novel is almost without exception included in critical surveys as an important, if not the most important, ancestor of the genre. Parrinder is no exception here and claims a special significance for the novel's preface:

> In many ways *Frankenstein* [...] is written in the mode of 'scientific romance'. [...] Yet the original preface to Frankenstein (reportedly written by Mary's husband Percy Shelley) [...] emphasiz[es] that this is no supernatural tale of uncontrolled horrors. [...] Whatever we make of *Frankenstein* itself, the preface unmistakably claims for it the status of science fiction. [Parrinder 1980, 5-6]

Brian Aldiss, in his history of science fiction *Billion Year Spree*, goes much further in claiming the status of the science-fictional urtext for Shelley's novel. For him, "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is the first great—or the first—sf novel" and "Victor Frankenstein [...] stands at

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interest in Wells's work might indeed be one reason why his ideas on science fiction seem to fit the work of Gray so well in many cases. For an essayistic approach to Wells's life and work (going far beyond his 'science fiction' writing) cf. Elmar Schenkel's *H.G. Wells: Der Prophet im Labyrinth* (2001).

[59] Parrinder quotes Wells's statement and comments on it: "The significance of Wells's contribution to the definition of SF lies in this combination of fantasy and realism." [Parrinder 1980, 12] Gray's writing has often been described in almost exactly the same terms as 'a blend of fantasy and realism' (especially in reference to *Lanark*).

the threshold of sf itself."[60] Be this as it may, the importance of the novel for the development of the genre of science fiction is clearly undeniable.[61] In particular, the theme of man (or the scientist) assuming a godlike position and interfering with nature has proved irresistible to SF writers. Neil Cornwell stresses the enduring 'appeal' of the topic when he concludes his study of the 'literary fantastic' (which for him includes science fiction) by stating that

> in the age of Aids and at a moment when the planet appears poised for ecological disaster—for as long, indeed, as the 'Frankenstein syndrome' of man-induced doomsday remains high on the agenda of probability—the continued need for monstrous revelations from the literary fantastic is disturbingly guaranteed. [Cornwell 1990, 218]

As we have already seen, "monstrous revelations" are also guaranteed from the science fiction of Alasdair Gray, maybe nowhere more obviously than in his own 'Frankenstein' novel, *Poor Things*.[62]

Concerning the more recent developments in science fiction, the greatest 'influence' on Gray can apparently be ascribed to the dystopian tradition, as his mentioning of Huxley indicates. When talking of Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984* is never far away, so that my earlier mention of Orwell in connection with Gray is not especially surprising. The tradition exemplified by these two novels is again very influential within the genre of science fiction,

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[60] These are references to Aldiss' book from James 1994, 103 and 105 respectively.

[61] One of the more recent manifestations of this influence in science fiction can be observed, for example, in the sub-genre of cyberpunk [cf. Featherstone/Burrows 1995, 10]

[62] There is a perceptive reading of the novel in the context of the grotesque by Ian McCormick [McCormick 1994]. This topic also links Gray's work to the wider developments in contemporary British literature that I have mentioned (where the fantastic and grotesque are very much en vogue).

especially for SF works of the latter half of the twentieth century.[63] Orwell's work can be taken to typify the modern (science-fictional) fable and, together with Huxley's novel, to exemplify the debunking of utopia as the representative expression of twentieth-century anxieties. The importance of this strain in SF writing is proved by countless examples of anti-utopian tales within the genre to date. Once again, the shadow of H.G. Wells and *The Time Machine* looms large in the background, for this tradition is both indebted to his work and—at least in part, it should be added—a reaction against his vision, as Nicholas Ruddick writes:

> Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, like E. M. Forster's "The Machine Stops," or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, or C. S. Lewis's Perelandra Trilogy, or Golding's *The Inheritors*, emerges at least partly from the desire to show how mistaken or blinkered Wells's vision of a humanity perfectible through science and rational social engineering could be. These are all important works that, despite their quite different visions, constitute [...] an anti-Wellsian tradition. These works can certainly be included within the field of British science fiction for the same reason that Wells himself finds a place within that field. [Ruddick 1993, 175]

The question whether Wells's vision can really be described in these terms is certainly controversial (*The Time Machine*, at least, does not seem to suggest a "humanity perfectible through science and rational social engineering"), but the fact of the importance of an anti-utopian tradition in (British) science fiction, including the work of Huxley and Orwell, is emphasised once more. One of the 'heirs' of these writers, at the same time constituting a link to the present, is the American writer Kurt Vonnegut.[64] Fittingly, it is also the work of Vonnegut that

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[63] This is not to say that these two novels started the tradition, as the example of H.G. Wells and his *Time Machine* makes clear.

[64] Ruddick explicitly links them when he writes: "In 1949 Huxley and Orwell produced the first major postwar myths of the destroyed society in *Ape and Essence* and the despotic society in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. And the Americans followed in 1952 with Kurt Vonnegut's ironic version of a computer-controlled United States in *Player Piano*." [Ruddick 1993, 44]

for Parrinder exemplifies the self-consciousness and parody of modern science fiction. For example, he regards his *The Sirens of Titan* as "a novel which is not so much a parody of Wells, or of any individual SF author, as of the genre as a whole" and goes on to suggest that "Vonnegut's novel as a whole gains its coherence and artistic validity from its pervasive debunking of earlier SF and the world-view which sustained it." [Parrinder 1980, 116 and 118] It is not surprising that Vonnegut, too (or the kind of science fiction he stands for), is an 'influence' on Gray: Cairns Craig, in an important article on *Lanark*, writes: "The influences which have gone into the creation of this extraordinary amalgam are clear [...] [T]here is Kurt Vonnegut, whose *Slaughterhouse 5* is evidently the inspiration for the mixture of fantasy and history". [Craig 1981, 20] This mixture is equally present in Gray's other works, notably *Poor Things* and *A History Maker*.

This short overview of 'sources and influences' for Gray's science fiction shall serve us as an introduction to a more detailed look at these three novels, attempting to isolate concrete textual instances of these influences. As I have pointed out above, the survey could easily have been much longer, but it seemed reasonable for our purposes to restrict the list to the more strictly science-fictional tradition.[65] Perhaps the most obvious absence is therefore that of works belonging more naturally in the tradition of fantasy and fantastic literature (however transparent the boundaries), which is surely equally important for Gray's work. Especially the works of Charles Kingsley and Lewis Carroll as well as the Scottish ancestry of Robert Louis Stevenson, David Lindsay, James Barrie and George MacDonald come to mind. But as Walker put it so succinctly, my approach then would "soon explode munificently beyond the manageable", and I would even more obviously run the risk of being accused of "long-bearded criticism" [Walker 1991, 37].

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[65] It should have become clear, however, that this tradition does not include what many SF aficionados would probably see as the only 'real' science fiction, that is SF stories and novels in the manner of *Star Trek*, which are usually set on board a starship or in the exotic world of alien planets and contain a wealth of scientific and technological detail.

Again, the obvious point to turn to in the search for 'influences' on *Lanark* is certainly the Epilogue—always bearing in mind that this is above all a savage satire precisely regarding the notion of literary influences entertained by critics and a hilarious parody at their (our, that is) expense. Nevertheless, if nothing else it shows that Gray is aware of the authors and traditions he names as well as of the possibility of drawing parallels with his work. One example is when Nastler, the 'author' or 'conjuror', confronts Lanark with his plans to end the novel in universal disaster:

> "[...] How's that for an ending?"—"Bloody rotten," said Lanark, "I haven't read as much as you have, I never had the time, but when I visited public libraries in my twenties *half* the science-fiction stories had scenes like that in them, usually at the end. These banal world destructions prove nothing but the impoverished minds of those who can think of nothing better."—The conjuror's mouth and eyes opened wide and his face grew red. He began speaking in a shrill whisper which swelled to a bellow: "*I am not writing* science fiction! Science-fiction stories have no real people in them, and all my characters are real, real, real people! I may astound my public by a dazzling deployment of dramatic metaphors designed to compress and accelerate the action, but that is not science, it is magic! Magic! [...]" [L, 497-8]

This extract is rather typical of Gray's strategy: he manages to suggest an influence of science fiction on his writing while at the same time disclaiming it and thereby stressing the very individuality of his 'contribution' to the genre. Of course, neither of the characters is really reliable in their statements (if anything, Lanark is the more likeable of the two). Gray surely knows that it is not (only) science which characterises science fiction, but on the contrary often precisely the 'magic' of metaphors. Thus, a third (and fourth?) perspective is added through the 'critical' material accompanying the Epilogue, namely the "Index of Plagiarisms" which runs along the sides of the text in alphabetically ordered marginal notes and the 'scholarly' footnotes. Just next to the passage quoted, we find in the Index the note on "WELLS, HERBERT GEORGE" (surely no coincidence?), which reads:

> The institute described in Books 3 and 4 is a combination of any large hospital and any large university with the London

> Underground and the BBC Television Centre, but the overall scheme is stolen from 21st-century London in *The Sleeper Awakes* and from the Selenite sublunar kingdom in *The First Men on the Moon* [sic]. In the light of this fact, the "conjuror's" remark about H. G. Wells in the Epilogue seems a squid-like discharge of vile ink for the purpose of obscuring the critical vision. See footnote 5. [L, 498]

In turn, footnote 5 tells us, referring to a remark by the 'author' on Goethe: "The author's amazing virulence against Goethe is perhaps a smokescreen to distract attention from what he owes him. See GOETHE and WELLS in the Index of Plagiarisms." [L, 488] Another footnote is inserted, by the way, when Lanark refers to the apocalyptic scenarios in science-fiction stories, and this goes: "Had Lanark's cultural equipment been wider, he would have seen that this conclusion owed more to *Moby Dick* than to science fiction, and more to Lawrence's essay on *Moby Dick* than to either." [497] This is simply hilarious, and any attempt to find out which of these contrasting perspectives is the 'correct' one would definitely need a "long and dogged beard".

In contrast, what it really tells us is that there is no single, monolithic perspective on this tricky problem of literary influences, that Gray *has* read his science fiction, and this reading *does* influence his writing; but also that there is *no* one-to-one relationship between these earlier works and *Lanark*, and the Institute is certainly *not* 'stolen' from *The Sleeper Awakes* and *The First Men in the Moon*. This is certainly a major comment by Gray on his creative 'processing' of (science-fictional) sources, which we will have to bear in mind when looking for themes and passages in his texts that reflect the tradition sketched above.[66] Having said this, let us point out that

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[66] Other entries from the Index of Plagiarisms, which only reinforce this, include: "ORWELL, GEORGE: Chap. 38. The poster slogans and the social stability centre are Difplags of the Ingsoc posters and Ministry of Love in 1984." (p. 495) [a Difplag, according to the Index, is a "DIFFUSE PLAGIARISM, where scenery, characters, actions or novel ideas have been stolen without the original words describing them." (p. 485)] and "VONNEGUT, KURT: Chap. 43, Monboddo's speech. The description of

the Institute *is* reminiscent of a Wellsian theme, but it reminds one of the subterranean world of the Morlocks, who feed on the Eloi just as the Institute feeds on people from Unthank and elsewhere, as much as of the works mentioned in the Index. Similarly, the chapter "A Zone", in which Lanark and Rima pass through the "Intercalendrical Timezone" and experience strange distortions of time and space has some of the feel of the Time Traveller's description of his passage through time.

Many critics have pointed out the continuities between the dystopias of, among others, Huxley and Orwell and Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*.[67] Much more than simply the poster slogans and the social stability centre (which Gray acknowledges in the Index as being 'influenced' by *1984*), the whole Unthank part of the novel with Lanark as the reluctant 'hero' in a hostile world controlled by unpalpable powers is reminiscent of the situation and struggle of a Winston Smith, or the 'Savage' in *Brave New World*. Furthermore, it is above all the "intentional distortions of contemporary society" that link *Lanark* to these earlier works, in particular to *1984*. Many details

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the earth as a 'moist blue-green ball' is from the novel Breakfast of Champions." (p. 497), as well as notes on Borges, Carroll, Kingsley, MacDonald, and Poe. Furthermore, footnote 6 contains the passage, "In almost every chapter of the book there is a dialogue between the hero (Thaw or Lanark) and a social superior (parent, more experienced friend or prospective employer) about morality, society or art. [...] [T]he glum flavour of these episodes recalls three books by disappointed socialists which appeared after the second world war and centred upon what I will call dialogue under threat: *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler, *1984* by George Orwell, and *Barbary Shore* by Norman Mailer." (p. 489) Having said this, I can only end this overlong footnote by pointing to Gray's footnote just quoted, which almost takes up a whole page and ends by stating that *Lanark* inherits "from T. S. Eliot, Nabokov and Flann O'Brien, a parade of irrelevant erudition through grotesquely inflated footnotes." (p. 490)

[67] Cf. e.g. Boyd 1981, Gifford 1981 etc. There are also Scottish 'ancestors' in this tradition, such as—to some extent—Neil Gunn's *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*.

in Gray's description of Unthank's society are not too far removed from Orwell's depiction of his totalitarian world, among them the 'mohomes' in which ordinary people live in Unthank, the indoctrination to which those people are subjected (not only through the help of poster slogans), as well as the (dis)information policy of the authorities. Most of these aspects are described, for example, in Chapter 38, "Greater Unthank", such as the following:

> "I need a lot of money," said Lanark. "If I can't get work I'll have to beg from the security people."—"The name's changed," said Jack. "They're called social stability now. And they don't give money, they give three-in-one."—"What's that?"—"A special kind of bread. It nourishes and tranquillizes and stops your feeling cold, which is useful if you're homeless. But I don't think you should eat any."—"Why?"—"A little does no harm, but after a while it damages the intelligence. Of course the unemployment problem would be a catastrophe without it. [...]" [L, 432]

This is just one instance of many such dystopian details in *Lanark*. Although they can certainly not be regarded as taken directly (or being 'stolen') from any previous work, they add up to an overall impression which places the novel securely in a tradition of dystopian science fiction. As we have seen, *Lanark* is part of that tradition while at the same time being self-consciously aware of it and using it for parody.[68]

If anything, the same is even more obvious in the case of *Poor Things*. Above all, this novel constantly alludes to, plays with, parodies and re-writes Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Not unexpectedly, Gray gives it away right at (or rather before) the start, when he writes in the acknowledgements—after having listed several influences and people

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[68] *Lanark* can even be seen to represent a new model within that tradition, having obviously influenced several 'followers'. Thus Douglas Gifford speaks of a whole tradition of dystopian city-nightmares following *Lanark* that constitute a major movement within contemporary Scottish fiction. [cf. Gifford 1996, 39ff.]

he thanks: "Other ideas were got from *Ariel Like a Harpy*, Christopher Small's study of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and from Liz Lochhead's *Blood and Ice*, a play on the same subject." [PT, n.p.] Even before that, on the dust jacket we read in the "Blurb for a High-Class Hardback" that "Nothing here would surprise Mary Shelley, Lewis Carroll and Arthur Conan Doyle, or bring a blush to the cheek of the most innocent child." In the same manner, time and again throughout the book, Shelley's novel is explicitly referred to. The authority of these references, however, is once again often doubtful. A case in point are the remarks in the "Letter to Posterity" by 'Victoria' McCandless, in which she hints to "ghouleries from the works of Mary Shelley" that are to be found in her husband's book. Even more hilarious (especially for German readers) is an allusion in one of Gray's "Notes Critical and Historical" (the counterpart to *Lanark*'s Index and footnotes), in which he refers to an episode in McCandless's book about the reanimation of a corpse with the help of electric currents in Glasgow in the 1820s:

> This story has been told and retold in so many nineteenth-century anecdotal histories of Glasgow that the original sources have themselves become the subject of an exhaustive monograph by Professor Heinrich Heuschrecke: *War Frankenstein Schotte?*, Stillschweigen Verlag, Weissnichtwo, 1929. [PT, 289-90][69]

These direct references are just one of the ways in which *Frankenstein* is reflected in *Poor Things*. Another one is the form of the novel. If the device of the frame narrative, in which the 'discovery' of a manuscript or unknown book is related by the 'editor', is generally reminiscent of nineteenth-century narrative conventions from Scott and Hogg to Stevenson, the epistolary form of huge parts of the

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[69] A literal translation of the name of the author and his monograph would read, 'Professor Henry Grasshopper, *Was Frankenstein Scottish?*, Silence Publishing, Knownotwhere, 1929'. But, of course, it loses much of its charm if 'translated' like this. As we have seen, Gray has even 'stolen' this bit from somewhere else, namely Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*.

central section[70] is especially indicative of the link with Shelley's novel. Furthermore, the very names of Gray's protagonists make the connection apparent: there is, first of all, Godwin "God" Baxter, the surgeon who 'creates' Bella from the body of the woman who had drowned herself in an advanced state of pregnancy and the brain of her unborn child. His name can be read as an allusion to Mary Shelley's father William Godwin (and, as Marie Odile Pittin has pointed out, also to one of his friends, the Scottish merchant William Baxter [cf. Pittin 1996, 212]) as well as—since his full name is given as Godwin *Bysshe* Baxter—to her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley. Bella/Victoria herself, on the other hand, constitutes the link to Mary Shelley's mother Mary Wollstonecraft, if not in name but in her development in the course of the novel into a socialist and feminist doctor.

More important than those 'mock'-influences (though they are the most obvious token of the self-consciousness of Gray's use of *Frankenstein*) may be the thematic parallels between the two books. The daring medical operation carried out by Baxter at once recalls Victor Frankenstein and his creature. Ironically, the character seems to embody both of these at the same time. He is a surgeon with extraordinary abilities, far ahead of any other member of the profession even as a student, not imparting his superior knowledge to anybody but quietly working on his own private experiments, which are truly astonishing (such as 'exchanging' the hindquarters of two rabbits by way of operation). Yet he also has a very odd appearance and strange manners, which puts him close to the category of 'monster' (certainly so in the eyes of his fellow students). In addition, the circumstances of his own 'creation' by his father, the famous

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[70] As Gray puts it in the Introduction, "McCandless makes his narrative a host to letters by others who show his subject from a different angle, and ends by revealing a whole society." [PT, XIII] Thus Chapter Twelve is a letter by Duncan Wedderburn, and most of Chapters Fourteen to Eighteen are 'transcriptions' of letters Bella wrote from her tour through Europe with Wedderburn. After McCandless's narrative there is Victoria's letter, as well as more letters of hers quoted in the Notes.

surgeon Sir Colin Baxter (who taught him most of the 'techniques' he is practising and perfecting), are somewhat dubious. His 'creature' on the other hand—"beautiful, tempestuous Bella"—seems hardly qualified for the part of the monster. Duncan Wedderburn, however, with whom Bella elopes and who is driven crazy by her sexual voraciousness, describes her as a kind of monster in his letter to Baxter. Let us also remember that Frankenstein's creature—in the beginning, at any rate—was only seen as 'monstrous' by others. Also, Bella's 'grand tour' through Europe is a kind of *éducation sentimentale* that is in some ways reminiscent of the wanderings of the creature in *Frankenstein*.

Apart from all of these more or less obvious parallels there is, of course, the more general question of the virtues of scientific progress and the responsibilities of the scientist raised by Shelley and Gray alike. In *Poor Things*, these issues have a decidedly contemporary ring to them, concerning the problems of transplantation and the special status of the human brain/mind and, by implication, the dangers of genetic manipulation. Such problems involving the role of morality in science are explicitly mentioned several times in the novel, the following extract being one example. Here Baxter feels guilty about what he has done (this is from the first-person-narration of McCandless):

> He sighed and said, "I deserve death as much as any other murderer." [...] I said, "Sorry Baxter, I haven't the faintest idea why you call yourself a murderer."—"That little nearly nine-month-old foetus I took living from the drowned woman's body should have been coddled as my foster child. By recasting its brain in the mother's body I shortened her life as deliberately as if I stabbed her to death at the age of forty or fifty, but I took the years off the start, not the ending of her life—a much more vicious thing to do. And I did it for the reason that elderly lechers purchase children from bawds. Selfish greed and impatience drove me and THAT!" he shouted, smiting the table so hard with his fist that the heaviest things on it leapt at least an inch in the air, "THAT is why our arts and sciences cannot improve the world, despite what liberal philanthropists say. Our vast new scientific skills are first used by the damnably greedy selfish impatient parts of our nature and nation, the careful kindly social part always comes second." [PT, 67-8]

The issues raised here are very much relevant today and exemplify once more the fable quality of Gray's writing and his views on science. By the very context of the fantastic revival of the young woman, similar concerns addressed by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* are likewise recalled. Therefore, Gray's parody of that earlier novel is far from being simply a playful postmodern pastiche—he uses the allusions and intertextualities to make an absolutely serious comment on morality and ethics in science and society.[71] It is interesting to note in passing here the 'feminist' aspect in the novel, which clearly is a more general feature of postmodern rewritings not only but perhaps especially of *Frankenstein*, as witnessed by Liz Lochhead's play *Blood and Ice* [cf. also Böhnke 2004].

Besides the pre-eminent 'influence' of *Frankenstein*, there are other reflections of the science-fiction tradition in *Poor Things* too. It should be enough to name only a few of them here. Most of the works mentioned by Victoria in her letter are certainly among the 'influences', once again including "the scientific romances of Herbert George Wells", whom Victoria calls her "very dear friend".[72] The experiments of Dr Moreau in his *The Island of Dr Moreau* come to mind here, for example. Also, the many rewritings of the story in Gray's novel could be seen to address similar underlying issues of the reliability or the manipulation of 'historical' discourse (as we shall see in the next chapter) to the ones raised by Orwell's description of the continuous rewriting of history by the authorities in his *1984*. Before the beard grows any longer, let me finish my consideration of *Poor Things* as a science-fictional parody by once again quoting Marie

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[71] I would therefore take issue with Edwin Morgan's statement that "we are far more strongly moved by Dr Frankenstein's creation in Mary Shelley's novel: the 'monster', like Bella, is a fabrication, but rouses intense sympathy as well as awe and terror in the reader, and forces thought into areas of deeper import, speculation and questioning than the sociopolitical concerns of *Poor Things*." [Morgan 1993]

[72] Indeed, there is a hint in one of the many letters quoted in the Notes—this one by Beatrice Webb to George Bernard Shaw (!)—that she had an "embarrassing affair with Wells".

Odile Pittin and thereby stressing Gray's "strategy of ambiguity" also in his use of literary 'models':

> The characters as well as the rhetoric and plot in *Poor Things* achieve their effect only by comparison and contrast with their models. The point is therefore not to tell the "truth" from the "fantasy" but to enjoy the weird, totally phantasmagoric result of their being pitted against each other in a story that clamours in various ways for the supremely elusive, ironical notion of "reality", a problem which indeed is *not* to be solved. [Pittin 1996, 213]

This "elusive notion of reality" is an important point in Gray's writing as well as in the more general 'postmodern' context.

The self-consciousness and science-fictional parody of *A History Maker* was already signalled in Gray's description of the novel as a "kilted sci-fi yarn full of poetry and porridge, courage and sex." I have also pointed out earlier that it is above all a parody of the category of utopia or future history (and in a way also of that of dystopia). In this novel, then, Gray is again using the science-fiction tradition—and in this case it is the tradition as a whole rather than any individual work—for his own ends. He is showing the impossibility or ridiculousness of a full-blown utopia and, characteristically, at the same time the destructiveness of an unmitigated dystopia. The presence of 'influences' from the tradition of science fiction in the book is therefore almost self-evident. A brief hint to one or two textual examples should thus be sufficient evidence for the SF parody in the novel.

The institution of the "public eye" that exists in the future world depicted in *A History Maker*, for example, can on the one hand be seen as a 'classic' science-fictional extrapolation of current trends in the media and in communications technology and thus as a critical comment on these developments, as Berthold Schoene has pointed out:

> In Gray's brave new world, the media are omnipresent as saucer-shaped 'public eyes', hovering above the battlefield like huge carrion flies to take in 'a picture to be replayed in

> slow motion for centuries to come' or spinning up unexpectedly from behind blue-berry bushes to interview a startled VIP. A battle is considered a great success when it is likely to 'be disked by millions', with the slaughter of soldiers being 'viewed and viewed again to the last days of mankind and television and time'. Journalistic integrity and critical detachment have been replaced by the expedient imperative to pander to a gluttonous public voyeurism, a feature which Gray's dystopia shares with many postmodern cinematic creations like, for example, Quentin Tarantino's experiments or *Natural Born Killers* by Oliver Stone. [Schoene 1996, 152]

On the other hand, apart from the general allusion to Huxley which Schoene implicitly hints at, it can also be read as a warning of the potentially intrusive character of modern communications technology and the inherent danger of its abuse, comparable to Orwell's two-way telescreen in *1984*.

Despite other possible intertextualities with individual works from the SF tradition (David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* is mentioned in the text, for example), the fact remains that *A History Maker* is above all concerned with the ambivalent concept of utopia. While on the surface being the most obviously science-fictional of Gray's work, this "kilted sci-fi yarn" can hardly be seen as a 'proper' contribution to the genre. It is primarily a parody, of utopia as well as of science fiction.

Summarising the findings of this section, we can legitimately regard the writing of Alasdair Gray—*Lanark*, *Poor Things* and *A History Maker* in particular—as a prime example of the self-conscious and parodic reflection of works from the science-fiction tradition in modern SF. In a way he is even self-conscious about that self-consciousness, because he constantly acknowledges the 'sources and influences' while at the same time ridiculing the very notion. We have also seen that his use of 'models' is usually a vehicle for his more important comments on literature, culture, politics, science and society. In this context it is interesting to take another look at the comments of Parrinder on this tendency of self-consciousness and parody in modern SF and its implications.

In reference to Vonnegut's novel *The Sirens of Titan*, Parrinder writes, "Countless aspects of the novel, from the verbal wit of the chapter headings to the eighteen imaginary books and articles quoted by the narrator, reflect Vonnegut's own self-consciousness about language and the uncertain relationship of sign to meaning." [Parrinder 1980, 117] As we have seen, this is equally true for Gray's novels, which are therefore also concerned with the more general questions of the uncertain relationship of sign to meaning. This is a clear link to contemporary theories commonly referred to as 'postmodern'. Vonnegut's vision, however, "falls short of that of other contemporary novelists, for whom the sense of reality itself appears increasingly delusive and threatening." [Parrinder 1980, 118-9] One could argue that Gray's does not (I am not so sure whether Vonnegut's does either), remembering that for him the problem of the elusive notion of reality is not to be solved. If this is granted, he belongs to those "contemporary novelists [... who present] a 'post-scientific' view of reality which threatens to undermine the whole basis and value-system on which scientific observation is built." [ibid, 119] Parrinder goes on to expand on that, linking the phenomena found in modern SF novels to contemporary developments in science (his second example is the work of Philip K. Dick, especially his novel *Martian Time-Slip*):

> In Dick's novel, then, the disintegration of the scientific vision is reflected in the partial disintegration of the imagined world. [...] The elements of parody and satire in these novels testify to their genetic descent from earlier science fiction. The fiction of Vonnegut and Dick is a sign either of the dissolution or the renovation of SF; at all events, it is a response to the changing nature of scientific thought and of our notions of 'reality' itself. [...] In [...] many [...] contemporary examples, the entropy and disintegration which threaten to undermine the scientific world-view are expressed in fiction which itself tends toward the condition of parody. [Parrinder 1980, 121-2]

I hope to have shown in this section that Alasdair Gray's novels analysed here can be placed alongside the fiction of Vonnegut and Dick in this context, for there clearly is a disintegration of the imagined world (esp. in the competing narratives of *Poor Things*) as well as a tendency toward the condition of parody which testifies to their descent from earlier science fiction. Here, then, is a clear

connection of the science-fiction writing of Alasdair Gray to those comprehensive developments in science, culture and society outlined in chapter one, since it is a response to the changing nature of scientific thought and of our notions of 'reality' itself.

Conclusion: Gray's Ambiguous 'SF'

Let me come back, at the end of this chapter, to the question which was one of my starting points: whether we can regard Alasdair Gray as a science-fiction writer in any meaningful sense of the term. The answer that suggests itself from the foregoing is a 'clear' "yes, but ..." The 'but' has at least as much to do with the (non-)existence of a meaningful sense of the term 'science-fiction writer' as with Gray's works. According to the categories that Patrick Parrinder has established for the criticism of science fiction, there can be little doubt that Alasdair Gray can be called a science-fiction writer. My investigation of his novels *Lanark* (esp. Books 3+4), *Poor Things* and *A History Maker* as well as of some of his short stories (notably the "Axletree" story) has shown that these works (not all of his works!) do exemplify the "creative fusion of romance, fable, epic, and parody" that Parrinder sees as the touchstone for science fiction.

However, it was also obvious that a wholesale characterisation of these works as 'simply' science fiction is at least problematic. This chapter has shown that Gray's 'SF' can be spelled out as "social fable" or even "socialist fiction" (and, of course, "Scottish fiction") as well as "science fiction". There is a very peculiar sense in which Gray's writing does and at the same time does not fit the categories, existing in a kind of 'Gray area' of its own. It could be argued that Gray makes use of the popular genre of science fiction exactly in order to undermine it. But we have also seen how difficult it is to speak of 'science fiction' as a clearly defined genre anyway. The definitions given by other SF critics are not necessarily in tune with Parrinder's categories (who, by the way, maintains that the inclusion of 'science' is not necessarily a prerequisite for science fiction), and most of them are reluctant to even give a definition in the first place.

All of this clearly suggests an inherent weakness in the striving for a generally valid classification.

It is at this point that one of my findings concerning Gray's work may be helpful. Throughout this chapter we have seen that ambiguity, ambivalence, the simultaneous affirmation of opposites or contraries, the resistance to monolithic explanation, are among the central features of Gray's writing. This is a reason for his peculiar position within—or on the margin of—the SF genre. Significantly, it could also be applied to the concept of science fiction itself, arguing for a more flexible understanding of the term which is inclusive rather than exclusive. This understanding does not concern itself with whether science-fictional parody is a sign of the maturity or the decadence of the genre, and prefers questions like 'what are the science-fictional elements in this work?' to ones such as 'is this work science fiction?' This kind of approach was basically the one adopted in this chapter, and has—as I hope, despite or because of its flexibility—made some important insights possible, especially concerning the place of Gray's writing within the context sketched in chapter one.

In reading his works as fables we have shown that there is a permanent undercurrent of social criticism in his fiction, concerned with the powerless in society and opposed to the 'monolithic explanations' of ideology and the lack of morality and ethics in (capitalist) politics and society. Behind this clearly lies Gray's deep belief in the essential importance (and potency) of decent, humane values. Together with his democratic socialist convictions, this is a constant presence in his works, so that even the blackest or bleakest picture (such as *Lanark*) is always tinged with hope. This is not so much in contrast with his permanent foregrounding of ambiguity, but rather inseparably linked to it, as an expression of the importance of complexity and diversity, of carefully paying attention to different perspectives and viewpoints, whilst resisting 'monolithic explanation'. It is also in this context that we have to view his criticism of science, for his concern is above all with the entanglement of science with precisely political, military and economic forces and ideologies. Therefore, his concerns are not far removed from those of philosophers and sociologists of science, and those of cultural and literary theorists who in recent years have been occupied with the

study of the social, political and rhetorical foundations of science and of 'discourses of power' in general.

It is this type of 'postmodernism', then, that Gray's SF connects with. Therefore, I would endorse Jenny Wolmark's criticism of a totalising and, on the whole, negative view of postmodernism, as it is found in writings by Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard[73], adopting instead a more open approach to the concept, where it is nevertheless possible to make use of "the new non-essentialist, post-Enlightenment visions, practises, projects and energies" [Wolmark 1994, 16]. This balanced position, which she propagates from a feminist point of view, is also obviously suited for the study of Alasdair Gray's (science) fiction. It also connects well with the (precarious) 'new consensus' that I have detected in my discussion of the postmodernism debate in chapter one, as the following statement underlines:

> The difficulty of finding an appropriately distanced and critical position from which to analyse the historical and cultural specificity of postmodernism does not, however, preclude the possibility that critical spaces can be negotiated and developed within the unresolved territory left by disintegrating critical and cultural boundaries and categories [...]. While this approach does not obviate the difficulty of theorising the conditions of postmodernism and postmodern cultural production, it seeks to avoid the fixity of totalising theory by employing a decentred critical strategy in which boundaries are assumed to be flexible and subject to dissolution. [ibid., 8]

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[73] Wolmark refers mainly to Jameson's *Postmodernism* and to Baudrillard's 1991 essay "Simulacra and Science Fiction". As I have pointed out, Jameson is ambiguous towards postmodernism, but his Marxist perspective clearly biases him against the "cultural logic of late capitalism". Baudrillard is also a controversial figure in the postmodernism debate, if we think of his denial of 'reality' (as e.g. in his essay on the Gulf War). As Wolmark rightly notes, however, his "analysis of postmodernism has become increasingly ironic and metaphorical." [1994, 14]

I would like to see myself as attempting a similar approach, and I hope that my discussion of Gray's science fiction has shown the necessity of such a flexible position. The foregoing therefore enables us to draw the conclusion that while it is possible and fruitful to read Gray's science fiction as 'postmodern', it also feeds back into the debate by demanding a balanced concept of postmodernism that is not relativist or nihilist but retains the antifoundational and self-critical impulse. Thus, my analysis should suggest—as does Wolmark's investigation of feminist science fiction—that attention paid to literary/aesthetic practice can indeed help to frame theoretical positions. In the following, I will try to continue along these lines, focusing next on the question of history in the works I have here identified as 'science fiction', while always paying attention to the broader debates in literary and cultural theory.

Chapter Four: Shades of HiStories

History in Literary and Cultural Theory

At the turn of the twentieth to the twenty-first century, history has become one of the most extensively debated issues in a variety of contexts and with differing results. There is talk both of a "turn to history" and of the "end of history"; the historicity of various disciplines, including scientific ones, comes under scrutiny while at the same time the literary or narrative character of historiography itself is stressed. History is alternately seen as belonging to an outmoded 'Realist' or humanist world-view or as the defining condition of the postmodern world. Reasons for this current interest in history are manifold but not always easy to detect. Political developments such as the proliferation of new nations after the end of the Cold War or the problematic situation in the Balkans are certainly as much part of the background as 'postmodern' movements in the realm of philosophy and the social sciences which stress the ultimate historicity and thus relativity of all human knowledge. In the sciences, too, a keen interest in 'historical' research, into such areas as evolutionary processes of various phenomena or the question of the starting point and development of the universe, can be observed. Other reasons may include the new millennium and the attempt of a reappraisal of the Second World War and the Holocaust, now that only a few eyewitnesses are still alive.

History and Postmodernism

There has been a growing awareness in recent times of the historicity of history itself, of the importance of specific historical, cultural and ideological systems for its construction and practice—a development that is frequently connected to postmodernism. In fact, history and its problematisation are seen by many as one of the central sites of the discussion on postmodernism. Even the first use of the term

'postmodern' is often traced to an historian, Arnold Toynbee, in a volume of his massive *A Study of History* in 1939. [cf. e.g. Docherty 1993, 1][1] Two names which are connected to this development and which should interest us here mainly because of the influence of their writings on literary criticism are Michel Foucault and Hayden White. Both Foucault's emphasis on the "discursive" determination of knowledge[2] and White's investigations of the narrative structure of history[3] have contributed to the 'turn to history' in literary studies and have been used as theoretical background for the study of literary works. This is not too surprising if one takes into account the central role played by language or "texts" in these and other 'postmodern' theories. It has to be stressed, however, that on the other hand the

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[1] Interestingly, it is also to Toynbee's theories of history that several science-fiction works are said to be indebted [cf. Clute/Nicholls 1993, 566]. Incidentally, Beat Witschi has pointed out that "the captions printed in some of Gray's works echo Toynbee's three mottoes in his *A Study of History*." [Witschi 1991, 212]

[2] His most important work in this context certainly is *The Order of Things*, first published in 1966. For a brief discussion of Foucault's concept of history, see Hamilton 1996, 133-44, and Hawthorn 1996, 29-35.

[3] White's concept of the narrative element in historiography has been particularly influential, focusing as it does on the way in which historical facts are actually arranged and presented by the historian, what he calls "emplotment": "[I]t can be argued that interpretation in history consists of the provisions of a plot structure for a sequence of events so that their nature as a comprehensible process is revealed by their figuration as a *story of a particular kind*. What one historian may emplot as a tragedy, another may emplot as a comedy or romance. As thus envisaged, the 'story' which the historian purports to 'find' in the historical record is proleptic to the 'plot' by which the events are finally revealed to figure a recognizable structure of relationships of a specifically mythic sort. In historical narrative, story is to plot as the exposition of 'what happened' in the past is to the synoptic characterization of what the whole sequence of events contained in the narrative might 'mean' or 'signify'" ["Interpretation in History", White 1978, 51-80; 58]. Cf. also Hawthorn 1996, 36-47.

emphasis on historical context sets them apart from more strictly textualist approaches (this difference being exemplified in the arguments between Foucault and Derrida[4]). At the centre of these 'new historical' approaches is the emphasis on the provisional and ultimately dependent character of any attempt to explain the past, and therefore on the importance of politics, power and ideology for the issue of history. It will be noted at this point already that we have returned to issues which I found to be of major importance in Gray's work in the preceding chapter.

One recent 'movement' which has brought this new historical emphasis into literary studies is what has been called New Historicism, a term referring to a far from homogeneous group of mainly American scholars, but sometimes also including (mainly British) cultural materialists [cf. e.g. Hawthorn 1996]. Problematic as the term itself may be, its practitioners are united by a lack of faith in objectivity, permanence and 'History', instead emphasising the role of 'histories' in the construction and representation of the past, which is seen as ineluctably influenced by present social, cultural and political positions.[5] This problematisation of objective knowledge and the suspicion of 'facts' which we have already seen to be one of the

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[4] For an account of the different viewpoints of these two theoreticians, in particular concerning the question of history, see Ann Wordsworth "Derrida and Foucault: Writing the History of Historicity" [Attridge et al. 1987, 116-25]

[5] As Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh write in the section on "History and Discourse" in their Reader *Modern Literary Theory*: "For New Historicists, [...] there can be no [...] seamless, overarching unity, but only the shifting and contradictory representations of numerous 'histories'. History can only be a narrative construction involving a dialectical relationship of past and present concerns. [...] The New Historicist is [...] concerned to focus attention on the multiple and contradictory material practices which embed each historical event or expressive act as contexts of production and reception." [Rice/Waugh 1996, 228] For a brief introduction to the New Historicism, see Hamilton 1996, 150-63, and for a more detailed treatment as well as specimens of New Historicist writing, cf. Veeser 1989 and 1994.

central 'postmodern' tenets in different fields is the cause of fierce attacks on these theories, in general as well as particularly in the field of history. Steven Earnshaw, in a chapter of his book *The Direction of Literary Theory* entitled "Postmodernism and History", accuses postmodernism (which he uses as a very general term without specifying exactly what he thinks it denotes) of having

> a vested interest in declaring [...] 'the end of history' [... and] positing itself as *the* master narrative, able to see itself as the fated closure of culture, society, and, of course, history. [...] My distrust with this line of discourse of postmodernism, which I would suggest is fairly mainstream, is that it sets up the concept 'history' in a specific discursive field which it believes it can exempt itself from. The paradox is that postmodernism can claim to be outside history, because historically speaking, it is at the end of history. [Earnshaw 1996, 61]

He goes on to accuse the New Historicism, which he sees as a prime example of this postmodern notion of history, of "elid[ing] the dialectic between the past and the present" [63], of abolishing the base from which to judge between different versions of history and therefore being "part of the larger postmodern philosophical picture, which, in a nutshell, poses the following riddle: What happens if there is no objective truth? Are we consigned to a crippling, enervating relativism?"[65] With this, we are back to the questions of legitimation, ideology and ultimately ethics, which have informed most of the postmodern debates sketched in chapter one. It is the familiar view of postmodernism as relativistic and irresponsible, which Earnshaw here suggests "is fairly mainstream", that has to be addressed. To be sure, the danger of relativism, of the impossibility of judging between opposed versions of history, is a real problem. Most notoriously, this becomes evident when people or theories try to deny the Holocaust—a tendency of which David Irving is only the most recent example.[6] But there is a more general tendency in postmodern

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[6] The case of the self-acclaimed 'historian' and Holocaust denier David Irving came to larger public notice in April 2000 through a well-publicised but unsuccessful libel action brought by himself against

thought, and in writings on history and literature in particular, to blur the boundaries and even conflate differences into an all-embracing notion of "texts".[7]

However, quite apart from the question of the role of New Historicism within postmodernism,[8] it is difficult to uphold this view

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Penguin Books and the author Deborah Lipstadt because of her book *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (1993). In "The Downfall of David Irving", a commentary on the issue in the *TLS*, April 21, 2000, Dan Jacobson writes: "Almost anything, it seemed at times, could be pressed into service by either side: speeches at mass meetings and exchanges of memoranda; the presence, absence and provenance of documents; chains of command within the Nazi party and the Nazi war machine; dates of mass shootings behind the German lines [...]; and a whole cataract of other items." [13]. For a more detailed look on the issue of Holocaust denial see Lipstadt's book as well as the recently published *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* by Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman (2000).

7 For example, Elizabeth Ermarth writes, in an essay ambitiously entitled "A Brief History of History": "One result of the cultural ferment of the twentieth century has been a slow, still-dawning recognition that history is a cultural invention, not a natural condition, and a fairly recent invention at that, having been disseminated and bequeathed to us in its fullest sense largely by nineteenth-century writers. In short, history is in the interesting position of confronting its own historicity. [...] A narrative is historical only when it operates according to a particular grammar of perspective in which every 'now' is also a 'then'—every present also already past and part of a structure of significance. Establishing the grounds for that commanding structure constitutes the main business of historical narratives. They are constructs; they are cultural fictions." [Borgmeier et al. 1998, 327-36; 327] And she concludes the essay: "In postmodernity, language is the benchmark issue. Language is where history hatches." [ibid., 335] The views of Baudrillard, too, are often seen to deny reality as such, including historical reality, and Francis Fukuyama with his thesis of the "end of history" is also often related to postmodernism (despite his neo-liberal and conservative approach) [cf. e.g. McGuigan 1999, 92ff.; Whiteford 1997, 30; Webster 1996, 126].

of ahistorical postmodernism, since what is challenged in most versions of postmodernism is a totalising and universal ("Enlightenment") view of history and not history as such. Emphatically, 'serious' postmodernism does *not* "set up the concept 'history' in a specific discursive field which it believes it can exempt itself from", and does *not* "claim to be outside history, because historically speaking, it is at the end of history." Although the traditional ("Whig"/progressivist) view of history is clearly among the metanarratives that Lyotard believes postmodernism is challenging or deconstructing, it is important to stress that to deconstruct does not mean to abolish, but rather to challenge from within. Therefore, it is another of the frequent simplifications in the debate to accuse postmodernism of simply denying history or declaring the "end of history". This is particularly obvious from the writings of Michel Foucault, who is doubtless one of the major influences in postmodernism while at the same time emphasising the importance of the historical perspective. Hans Bertens thus stresses the influence of postmodernism in a

> revaluation of culture [that] has led to an interest in the origins and history of specific representations and has thus stimulated historical projects that to the deconstructionist, self-reflexive, postmodernism of the late 1970s and early 1980s seemed pointless exercises in reigning in the play of textuality. In the wake of Foucault, postmodernism has with increasing

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[8] This equation of New Historicism with postmodern history is certainly controversial, and Earnshaw's strong criticism only partly justified. It is not, after all, a really unified theory, and I also cannot see how the 'turn to history' can be reconciled with an alleged proclamation of the 'end of history'. Moreover, Earnshaw's idea of postmodernism seems to be close to the familiar straw-targeting of the 'vulgar' type. In fact, Earnshaw's own plea "to become dialectically historicist, [to] focus upon the interaction between our own historically situated selves and the art of the past" [1996, 84] is in reality, I believe, rather close to the balanced postmodern position I have sketched. It is particularly ironic that Jeremy Hawthorn, in *Cunning Passages*, sees New Historicism as *opposed* to the postmodern approach to history by people such as Hayden White.

> frequency visited the past in order to illuminate the present. [Bertens 1995, 11]

This recalls the balanced position in the postmodernism debate and reminds us that a refusal to negate history is indeed essential to one of the 'types' of postmodernism described in chapter one: the claim that modernity is at an end or undergoing a deep transformation, with postmodernism (or postmodernity) as the next stage of development or the new (cultural/socio-historical) epoch. It simply makes no sense to postulate the end of history in order to proclaim the beginning of a new (ineluctably historical) period. Moreover, the prefix 'post-' itself makes an historical claim of posterity while at the same time reinstating that which went before (modernity, modernism, "Enlightenment", humanism etc.).

Poststructuralism as a whole is also unjustly accused of being ahistorical, as Geoff Bennington and Robert Young write in their introduction to *Post-structuralism and the Question of History* (in reference to critics such as Frank Lentricchia, Terry Eagleton or Perry Anderson): "Post-structuralism and the question of history [...], far from being a matter of the absence of history, involves nothing less than what Fredric Jameson has called 'the crisis of historicity itself'." [Bennington/Young 1987, 7][9] As they point out, it is "resistance to totalisation and synthesis [that] is perhaps the major difficulty posed by post-structuralism [...] to both traditional and dialectical accounts of history." [ibid., 9] In other words, poststructuralism (which is often somewhat simplistically equated with postmodernism) also problematises or 'deconstructs' (accounts of) history rather than being ahistorical or declaring the end of history. Similarly, the 'postmodern' movement of New Historicism, which is sometimes accused—paradoxically—of being ahistoric, is in fact committed to an equally complex view of the past and its relation to the present. This view stresses the importance and fruitfulness of investigating the interconnections, as Jeremy Hawthorn writes:

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[9] The reference is to Jameson's "Reflections in Conclusion", in E. Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, London: NLB, 1977, 198.

> I believe that we misuse and undervalue literary works when we approach them with one eye closed—trying either to deny their pastness and assuming that they speak a universal language that knows no single time and place, or trying to deny that there is any continuity of human experience across time and cultural difference which allows a work of literature from the past to *live* in the present. Indeed, I think that we may have to confront the paradox that we can sometimes feel closest to the life of the past at just the point at which we sense its difference and alien nature most strongly [...]. [Hawthorn 1996, 6]

There is an acute sense here of the simultaneous strangeness/distance—or fragmentary nature—of (our perception of) history on the one hand and its relevance to the present on the other, which seems to be characteristic of postmodernism.[10]

Most theoreticians—the more serious ones, at any rate—thus also seem careful to distinguish between history and fiction. Hayden White, for instance, writes in a footnote in the introduction to his *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*:

> Unlike literary fictions, such as the novel, historical works are made up of events that exist outside the consciousness of the writer. The events reported in a novel can be invented in a way that they cannot be (or are not supposed to be) in a history. [...] Unlike the novelist, the historian confronts a veritable chaos of events *already constituted*, out of which he must choose the

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[10] Hawthorn, however, is strongly critical of postmodernism in his book, drawing attention, among others, to Foucault's failure to name any determining factors within his 'discursive formations' or to the missing statements on truth-value in Hayden White's writings [p. 29ff and 36ff.]. Indeed, he takes the latter theorist as embodying the prototypical "postmodern approach to history" [quoted on p. 44]. It is clear from this that his notion of postmodernism is one of (more or less extreme) 'textualism' which has to be opposed (again, predictably, from a Marxist viewpoint).

> elements of the story he would tell. He makes his story by including some events and excluding others. This process of exclusion, stress, and subordination is carried out in the interest of constituting a story of a particular kind. That is to say, he 'emplots' his story. [White 1990, 342][11]

A similar argument for a more complex approach to history than either naive empiricism or naive scepticism is made by Laurence Lerner in his essay "History and Fiction"[12]:

> [I]f perception is not wholly objective, it does not follow that it must be wholly subjective: that would be to ignore the more complex possibility that it results from an interaction between the external world and our method of perceiving. I have claimed that any text can be related to at least three contexts: its ideology, its strategies of writing, and social reality. To eliminate any of these completely is a dogmatic oversimplification: and a total rejection of positivism would be as naive—and as fanatical—as its total acceptance. [Lerner 1990, 335]

A moderate position along these lines appears to be desirable and necessary. Some sense of the past as important and to some extent

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[11] White repeatedly points to this difference in his essays (cf. also e.g. the beginning of "The Fictions of Factual Representations", White 1978, 121-34), which is significant in view of the fact that his work in particular has frequently been used as the theoretical background to the conflation of literature and history. However, Johanna Tiitinen has alerted me to the still somewhat controversial and provocative views of White and to the fact that he clearly favours the similarities and not the differences between history/historiography and literature. Cf. also the much more comprehensive treatment of these problems in her book on Gray.

[12] From his *The Frontiers of Literature* (1988), reprinted in Walder 1990, 334-41. Incidentally, Lerner in this essay refers to R.G. Collingwood's 1946 book *The Idea of History* as "[t]he best account I know of the relation between history and fiction" [336], which again shows that the ideas which are often connected to postmodernism have in fact been around for some time.

accessible has to be retained alongside the important insights into the complexity of history, its dependence on ideological, political and narrative formations, and the influence of present concerns on its (re)construction. Ultimately, however, taking position on these issues is connected once more with moral or ethical judgements, with "standards of legitimacy". Not surprisingly, therefore, both Hawthorn and Earnshaw end their discussions of history and its relation to literature in our 'postmodern' world on this note. The latter states in the conclusion of his chapter on "Postmodernism and History", significantly entitled "Ethics", that "in the current drive of postmodern thought, geared towards an ahistorical belief in the immanence and sublimity of current existence [...], the past, and therefore the unknowability and unrepresentability of past events, the view from this side of the divide is challenged not on theoretical grounds [...] but according to ethical demands",[13] while Hawthorn argues in his "Tentative Conclusion" (a similarly significant heading) that even a Marxist belief in the sovereignty of economic forces in human society and history (which he supports, being himself a declared Marxist) "does not necessarily make a quietistic surrender to such forces inevitable. Such a surrender [...] is an abdication of our moral responsibility. A realistic political agenda must needs seek to yoke these forces to our own moral priorities; to subdue rather than ignore, or to capitulate to, them." [Hawthorn 1996, 226]

With the discussion of "standards of legitimacy", "ethical demands", and "moral responsibility", as well as the mentioning of "a realistic political agenda" we are arguably firmly back on Gray territory, so to speak. However, this should not be separated from the important theoretical insights concerning the complexity and subjectivity of history, its implication in social, cultural and ideological contexts. What will be attempted in the following, therefore, is an investigation of whether—and if so, how—this, as

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[13] Earnshaw 1996, 80. Importantly, for Earnshaw, too, it is the Holocaust and other examples of systematic genocide in the twentieth century which constitutes "the ethical context from which to begin, in the future, any discussion of postmodernism and history." [ibid.]

well as the ethical issues mentioned above, informs the concept of history as it emerges from Gray's (science-fiction) works. In the process I will be paying due attention to more general theories/ideas on contemporary (British) fiction and history, such as Linda Hutcheon's concept of "historiographic metafiction".

Historiographic Metafiction

The developments, ideas and theories concerning the concept of history and its relation to literature and culture which I have tried to briefly outline above have naturally been taken up by and have considerably influenced contemporary literature, not only in Britain but worldwide. Novels such as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *A Maggot*, and more recently in Britain A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man*, Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* or the novels of Graham Swift, particularly *Waterland*, all testify to this. Referring to the 1980s, Malcolm Bradbury points out that "many novelists began looking back to history. Retrospective fiction now became highly popular; indeed the return to the past began to assume near-epidemic proportions during the decade." [1994, 404] Importantly, it was not nostalgia that motivated these visits to the past in British fiction: "Perhaps it was less that novelists were returning to the fictional verities of the past than making the relations of past and present narratives a matter for self-conscious literary examination. Among novelists, as among historians themselves, the question of the nature of history and history-writing was at issue." [ibid., 406] It is not surprising, therefore, that the historical mode of narrative has even been declared by some as *the* dominant fictional mode of (post)modern novels.

Obviously, this is another meeting point of literature and theory that offers itself for investigation. A helpful tool for analysis of this aspect is Linda Hutcheon's concept of "historiographic metafiction", which stresses precisely this 'historical-theoretical' dimension in postmodern literature. Since its first appearance in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), it has achieved an

almost universal currency in writings on contemporary historical novels, making it impossible to pass it by. She describes this category as follows:

> By ['historiographic metafiction'] I mean those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages [...] Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains [i.e. literature, history, theory]: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past. [Hutcheon 1988, 5]

> [H]istoriographic metafiction [...] asks us to recall that history and fiction are themselves historical terms and that their definitions and interrelations are historically determined and vary with time. [ibid., 105][14]

It is easy to see these concerns at work in Gray's novels, most clearly perhaps in *Poor Things* and *A History Maker*. The first of these is also an example of a particularly lively subgenre within historiographic metafiction in Britain in the 1980s and 90s: the 'retro-Victorian' novel. Once again, this is clearly motivated by contemporary concerns:

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[14] What can be seen as problematic in Hutcheon's concept is her assertion that historiographic metafiction is *the* expression of postmodernism in fiction, thus practically conflating it with postmodernist fiction. This has subsequently been criticised, among others by Ansgar Nünning [1995, e.g. vol.II, 386 ff.]. He also proposes a much more sophisticated system of analysis for the contemporary (English) historical novel, distinguishing among others five different types of historical novels, only one of which he calls "historiographische Metafiktion" [ibid., vol.I]. However, since Hutcheon's concept and term are almost universally used (note that Nünning himself uses the term in the title of his monumental study) and are useful for our purposes despite their shortcomings, we will keep to her terminology in the following.

> In a time when Mrs Thatcher sought to restore 'Victorian values,' and Charles Dickens and Victorian classics enjoyed a striking publishing revival, a good number of writers—encouraged, perhaps, by John Fowles' art of self-conscious retrospect—took to revisiting the era when individualism seemed stronger, the social realities clearer, and our modern history was shaping, frequently pastiching past novels or writers in this recuperative process. The End of Empire remained a dominant theme[...]. [Bradbury 1994, 404]

There is also a link here to the apocalyptic and end-of-century theme: "A good deal of [British Eighties fiction] felt like a *fin-de-siècle* fiction, and it was in fact filled with strong, self-conscious echoes from the previous *fin de siècle*, when the clock seemed to stop on the edge of danger." [ibid., 411] This timeframe certainly has a bearing on the discussion of history in theory as well as literature: "what we understand by history, the means by which we construct significant histories, and the way we relate those histories to our understanding of our own situation, are constantly in change, and such concerns are likely to sharpen when writers feel they come toward the close of an epoch, near the end of history—as, it seems, many contemporary writers do." [ibid., 432]

In the Scottish context, too, history was becoming more important with the 'new' literary renaissance of the (late) 1970s and after, if perhaps with a slightly different emphasis. The doyen of contemporary Scottish literary studies, Professor Douglas Gifford, has pointed out in different recent essays[15] that he discerns a new, positive engagement with history in Scottish literature since the early eighties, which he specifically connects with the publication of, among other works, Gray's *Lanark*. There is a venerable tradition of dealing with history in Scottish literature, of course, going back far beyond Sir Walter Scott, as the volume *The Polar Twins* and particularly its

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[15] Cf. especially "Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction" (1996) and "'Out of the World and into Blawearie': The Politics of Scottish Fiction" in *The Polar Twins* (1999), as well as the introduction to that volume, co-written with Edward J. Cowan.

introduction by the editors Edward J. Cowan and Gifford exemplifies. Interestingly, in their survey several points emerge that can be productively related to Gray's work as well as to the broader context of this study. For example, in addition to the close relation of literature and history especially in the early ages, they detect "evidence of a democratic, populist, and frequently reductively egalitarian strand in Scottish thought" [Cowan/Gifford 1999, 5], which we will bear in mind for our analysis of Gray's work. It will also be interesting to investigate why in *A History Maker* we find echoes of the fiction of James Hogg, especially his "*The Three Perils of Man* (1822), with its totally anachronistic and unapologetically confused folk-view of Scottish-English Border history, which easily merges the historical and the supernatural." [ibid., 10] Gray's favourite intertextual 'relation' R.L. Stevenson also reappears, and is interestingly linked to the postmodern theoretical developments in the essay: "[...] Stevenson seems to anticipate [Hayden] White's conclusion that, in the final analysis, history and creative literature share the same basic tropes and the same organising principles which manipulate their material to suit author and audience." [11] This seems to be the underlying theme of the whole volume of essays, summarised at the end of the introduction as follows:

> While not pretending that history is simply story-telling, and while recognising that at one end of the spectrum lies the immensely important work of the recorder of events, and at the other end the more simple activity of diversionary and escapist entertainment, we can surely allow that, somewhere in the middle ground in which lie committed but unavoidedly biased and didactic history, propaganda, and imaginative and emotional recreation of the past, the two human activities meet, not in fratricide, and not just as polar twins, but as interpreters of human experience. In this middle ground the twins work together with the past, the present and even the future, never achieving final truth, but equally trying to lend validity to the human experience. [ibid., 16]

That can stand as a good resumé, not only of the relation between Scottish literature and Scottish history in general or Gray's treatment of history in particular, but also of the more theoretical debates on the question of (postmodern) history. It might well function as a guideline for my investigation of this particular aspect in this chapter.

My survey of contemporary discussions of history and its role in literature and culture has shown that many of the theories and approaches share a lack of faith in objectivity or permanence, in 'History', and emphasise instead the importance of histories (or even stories) in the representation or rather construction of the past. In the following I will therefore analyse Gray's writing in this context in order to detect parallels or contradictions to the theoretical debates. However, it has also emerged from the foregoing that the potentially liberating tendencies in the discussion of history can also lead to a crippling relativism in their extreme varieties and that political and ethical issues are therefore indispensable. This will be the second aspect we should bear in mind in the process of analysis. Let us now proceed to a closer look at those works of Alasdair Gray which I have identified as 'science fiction' in the previous chapter and try to describe the idea of history that emerges from them, using the above theories and concepts as background. The more recent novels *A History Maker* and particularly *Poor Things* will be the centre of my attention here, but I will begin my analysis with Gray's first and most ambitious novel *Lanark*.

Lanark and the Complexities of "His Story"

In discussions of the relations between literature and history or of historiographic metafiction one will often find mentions of the aspect of (auto)biography as an important sub-theme of the topic. David Leon Higdon, for example, writes in *Shadows of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction* that "much contemporary fiction turns to the retrospective dialogue created when an individual confronts his past" and that "a number of [...] novelists [...] believe that unexamined lives are not worth living and hence have turned their talents to retrospective narratives in which the act of looking backwards transforms the individual who becomes both subject and object. These narratives reflect the necessity of the historical consciousness [...]" [Higdon 1984, 9] In keeping with the more general (post)modern approaches to history, what is frequently emphasised in this context, too, is the problematic nature of memory, the impossibility of reconstructing an 'objective' or 'truthful' personal past/history. Linda

Hutcheon writes in a chapter of the above-mentioned book entitled "Subject in/of/to History and His Story" about a postmodern "de-centering of the concept of the subject" [Hutcheon 1988, 159]. In postmodern works of art "[t]he humanist notion of the unitary and autonomous subject is both installed [...] and then subverted". [ibid.][16] Thus, "[i]n historiographic metafiction, [...] we find overt, deliberately manipulative narrators [but also frequently] no one single perspective but myriad voices, often not completely localizable in the textual universe. In both cases, the inscription of subjectivity is problematized". [ibid., 160] The link between autobiography and history which is implicit in many of these novels (Hutcheon's examples here are Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*) therefore also "subverts [...] the traditional notion of history as non-contradictory continuity." [162] Phrased differently, "[o]ne way to look at the writing of history [...] is in terms of how memory defines and gives meaning to the subject." [174] This is also the background for my analysis of the treatment of (personal) history in *Lanark*.

Lanark is quite obviously a strongly autobiographical novel. This is particularly evident in Books 1 and 2 (i.e. the realistic Duncan Thaw narration), which are a thinly disguised version of Alasdair Gray's childhood, adolescence and early adulthood.[17] I am not so much

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[16] The general criticism of 'humanism' in so much postmodern theory and the meaning they attribute to 'humanism' and 'humanist' is certainly problematic, as I have mentioned before. But I will return to these issues in my next chapter and therefore neglect the problem here.

[17] For a detailed look at Gray's life and the parallels to his work, particularly in *Lanark*, cf. Charlton 1988+1991 as well as Jansen 2000, chapter VII. The latter quotes Gray on *Lanark* as follows: "Book 1 is the most autobiographical section... Book 2 is true to my art-school experiences until the last chapters... while being busy, and often happy, and sometimes sick with asthma ... I was making notes for a story about someone *like* me, but more rigid, with less of a sense of humour, who would bring his life to a more rapidly disastrous conclusion than I ever would, by way of a fit of hallucinatory madness which I have never experienced, but found it easy

concerned with the parallels and differences of this part of the book to Gray's real life, however (this is often dangerous ground, and not always rewarding), but rather with the way in which the rest of the book (i.e. the Lanark narration, including Books 3 and 4 as well as Prologue, Interlude and Epilogue—the science-fictional part, in other words) reflects it, reworks it and in the process problematises the issues of memory, (auto)biography and history. The structure of the novel (Book 3—Prologue—Book 1—Interlude ["to remind us that Thaw's story exists within the hull of Lanark's"!]—Book 2—Book 4—Epilogue [four chapters from the end]) makes it clear that the two parts form one whole and should be viewed as such by the reader.[18] There are also passages in the book that more or less clearly link the two narrations, and these are particularly interesting in our context. The first appears at the end of chapter two[19], when Lanark tries to remember how he came to Unthank and begins to write these memories down:

> He became restless and started walking up and down the room. This restlessness happened whenever his thoughts blundered on the question of who he was. "What does it matter who I am?" he asked aloud. "Why should I care why I

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to imagine experiencing. Books 3 and 4 contain some personal experiences, but it would take me too long to point to them all among the mass of invention and fancy" [217].

[18] Notwithstanding their possible origin as two separate works in the real-life genesis of the novel [cf. Charlton 1991a] and the footnote in the Epilogue asserting that "the plots of the Thaw and Lanark sections are independent of each other and cemented by typographical contrivances rather than formal necessity. A possible explanation is that the author thinks a heavy book will make a bigger splash than two light ones." [L, 493]

[19] Despite the 'wrong' order of the Books in the novel, the chapters are numbered sequentially, i.e. Book 3 starts with chapter one, Book 1 with chapter twelve etc. This could also be seen as an indication that there is a time dimension that follows the reader, as it were, on her/his exploration of the life story of Lanark/Thaw and encourages a reading of him as one person.

> came here?" He went to the window and pressed his brow to the glass, hoping the cold pressure would banish that problem. It did the opposite. The window overlooked a district of empty tenements, and he saw nothing through it but the black silhouette of his face and the bedroom reflected dimly behind. He remembered another window with only a reflection in it. [...] [He] sat down and wrote in small precise letters on the first page: *The first thing I remember is* After a few more words he scored out what he had written and started again. He did this four times, each time remembering an earlier event than the one he described. At last he found a beginning and wrote steadily [...] [L, 15]

This passage obviously stresses the difficulties involved in remembering one's own past, and even more in writing it down; it can be represented only as a "dim reflection," a "black silhouette" and it involves endless rewriting.

This emphasis on the (im)possibility of the recreation of the past becomes even stronger in the following chapter, where we read the recollections that Lanark writes down. It turns out that he does not in fact remember much of his past, his mental state almost bordering on amnesia. He remembers waking up in a railway compartment on his way to Unthank and the shock when he saw his face reflected in the window: "My head was big and clumsy with thick hair and eyebrows and an ordinary face, but I could not remember seeing it before." [16] He then discovers a small rucksack above his seat:

> This made me wary. Since waking up I had felt wonderfully free and comfortable [...], but the knapsack frightened me. I knew it was mine and held something nasty but I was reluctant to throw it through the window. So I took it cautiously down, telling myself there was nobody looking and I need not be bound by what I discovered. [16-7]

There is a sense here of the past as a threat, as "something nasty" to be escaped from. Even if there is a chance of getting a glimpse of it, it is doubtful if this is really advisable. Consequently, what Lanark does in this situation is to throw anything that could have constituted a link to his past life (i.e. a map, wallet, key and diary) out of the window of the moving train. It is only after about 350 more pages of the novel, at the end of Book 2, that the reader realises that these things, together

with the knapsack and the grit and seashells which Lanark finds in his pockets, actually connect him to his former self Duncan Thaw.[20] The same point is made perhaps even more explicitly some pages later, when Lanark is offered a name by a social-security official:

> I was shocked at this and told him that I knew my name. He stared at me, not believing. My tongue felt for a word or syllable from a time earlier than the train compartment, and for a moment I thought I remembered a short word starting with *Th* or *Gr* but it escaped me. The earliest name I could remember had been printed under a brown photograph of spires and trees on a hilltop on the compartment wall. I had seen it as I took down the knapsack. I told him my name was Lanark. [L, 20]

Also, later on in the novel, when Lanark tries to cure Rima in the Institute, she asks him: "Is that you, little Thaw? Have you come to say goodbye? I'm not cold now, Thaw, I'm warm and soon I'll be shining." [94]

These and other examples show that the links between the two parts of the novel make it possible to view them as a narrative of one and the same life (note the subtitle "A Life in Four Books"). However (and this is crucial), it becomes clear at the same time that this can never be a linear, chronological autobiography—not when the adult

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[20] Thaw carries these things with him when walking in the hills before he steps into the sea, where he may or may not drown, thus making the Lanark narration either a near-death or after-life vision/experience, or alternatively a somehow distorted version of Thaw's (and/or Gray's) adult life. Although it is not clearly stated in the novel, the interpretation that Thaw is dying at the end of Book Two is probably the most plausible one. The last sentence (with Thaw already under water) seems to suggest as much: "And when at last, like fingernails losing clutch on too narrow a ledge, he, tumbling, yells out last dregs of breath and has to breathe, there flows in upon him, not pain, but annihilating sweetness." [L, 354] Gray himself has referred to Thaw killing himself in *Lanark*, and there are also hints in the novel itself (e.g. in the Epilogue, cf. my quotes later on in this chapter).

life of the protagonist is concerned, anyway—but is necessarily fragmented, distorted and full of contradictions. In this way, Gray is able to write about his own life while simultaneously reworking it creatively into fiction, thus making a general point about the (im)possibility of 'objective', 'truthful' (personal) history.[21] This, on the other hand, connects the novel to the "de-centering of the concept of the subject" or the "problematisation of the inscription of subjectivity" as diagnosed for historiographic metafiction in general by Linda Hutcheon. The same idea is expressed in the following statement by Alison Lee: "the issues of individuality and identity are vital for historiographic metafiction, which simultaneously creates and subverts the Realist convention of an unproblematically constituted, individual 'subject' who is the prime mover of events, and from whom essential meaning emanates." [Lee 1990, 54-5]

There are other points in the novel where the same issue is treated more or less explicitly. For example, Lanark's 'real past' as Duncan Thaw (comprising Books 1 and 2) is told to him—and the reader—by an "oracle" in the Institute because he explicitly enquires after it: "I'm wondering about the past, you see I can't remember it. [...] I'm trying to find out about my past. My name is Lanark. ..." [L, 103] Once again, the link to the end of Book 2 is established when he is told that he "reached Unthank through water" [104] and when he finds a seashell and a small stone in his room at the Institute, which help the oracle to "see the way backward" [ibid.]. Interestingly again, the

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[21] *Lanark* has been seen by some critics as the outcome of a kind of self-therapy by Gray to avoid/overcome a mental breakdown. This view is reinforced by the obvious autobiographical elements of the novel as well as the fact that Gray was treated in hospital several times during the writing process. In an interview for the *Glasgow University Magazine* (Candlemas issue 1998), he replied to the question as to whether he had ever come close to death as follows: "Not very close. Two suicide attempts were so discreet (overdose of ephedrine pills which for years I had been prescribed for my asthma, thus rendering me immune) that the first time nobody believed I had tried it. So the second time I told nobody at all." [p. 6]

objectivity of the oracle is doubted by Lanark before it has properly started telling the (hi)story of his earlier life as Duncan Thaw:

> "I'm sorry to interrupt again," said Lanark, "but how do you know this? Who are you anyway?" A voice to help you see yourself. "But I've heard too many of these voices. None of them belonged to liars, even Sludden and Ozenfant told a lot of truth, but only the truth which suited their plans. What plans have you? What bits will you leave out?" [105]

These remarks about telling the truth that suits one's plans (implying that there are many different 'truths') and leaving out bits of the history are indeed reminiscent of the more theoretical discussions on history/historiography and its "discursive formation". What the oracle consequently does in the novel—in the passage called Prologue but inserted between Books 3 and 1—is to tell Lanark its own personal (hi)story before it moves on to his, thus abandoning all pretensions to unbiased objectivity and laying open instead its own motivations, limitations and dependencies.

Another angle of the same problem is brought in by the fact that Rima, the girl Lanark has cured and with whom he is in love, is also listening to the same oracle at the same time in the same room with him. After it has finished, at the beginning of Book 4, Lanark complains to her about the account of his past:

> "That was very unsatisfying. I can respect a man who commits suicide after killing someone (it's clearly the right thing to do) but not a man who drowns himself for a fantasy. Why did the oracle not make clear which of these happened?" Rima said, "What are you talking about?"—"The oracle's account of my life before Unthank. He's just finished it." Rima said firmly, "In the first place that oracle was a woman, not a man. In the second place her story was about me. You were so bored that you fell asleep and obviously dreamed something else. [...] We must have been listening to different oracles. I'm sure you imagined all that." [L, 357]

Again, the emphasis here is on the fundamental importance of personal, subjective, and in this case especially gender-specific aspects in the (re)construction of (personal) history. Once more, this brings to mind the theoretical context mentioned above, if we think,

for example, of feminist concepts of history—or "herstory", as a fashionable term has it.

The complexity and unreliability of memory/history continues to be stressed or at least implied in the rest of the novel. In the "Intercalendrical Zone" which Rima and Lanark have to cross to get from the Institute back to Unthank, for example, even time as such is unreliable (this probably being the most traditionally science-fictional part of the novel): "A month is as meaningless there as a minute or a century." [374] This leads among other things to Rima and Lanark meeting their *doppelgänger* of some hours earlier, as it were, which prompts Rima to scorn Lanark, when he attends to the "old" Rima: "Stop living in the past." [378] There are also further half-concealed flashbacks to Lanark's/Thaw's (or Gray's) childhood [cf. e.g. p. 470-1]. The most interesting in the context of (auto)biography/personal history is certainly the Epilogue, in which Lanark confronts "the author". After the more or less realistically autobiographical figure of Duncan Thaw and the more surrealistic Lanark who is in several ways reminiscent of Gray himself[22], a third 'autobiographical' character is introduced here. This further complicates the way in which personal history is reflected in the novel (the confrontation of two autobiographical characters is itself a clear indication of this). Already the room in which Lanark and the "author" meet (who is also called Nastler, an allusion to Alasdair), reminds one of the kind of Glasgow flat that Gray was living in at the time. Furthermore, the "author" is also a painter and the way his appearance and behaviour is described strongly suggests Gray himself (he is also an asthmatic like him). In the course of their conversation, the "author" tells Lanark in this significant passage:

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[22] Apart from the elements already mentioned there is also the disease Lanark is suffering from, called "dragonhide". This starts with a hard patch of skin on his elbow and stretches further whenever Lanark is scratching the itching edges. This can easily be interpreted as an allusion to the excema which Gray is known to have suffered from. Cf. also the short story "Job's Skin Game" in *The Ends of Our Tethers* [Gray 2003, 66-90].

> Your survival as a character and mine as an author depend on us seducing a living soul into our printed world and trapping it here long enough for us to steal the imaginative energy which gives us life. To cast a spell over this stranger I am doing abominable things. I am prostituting my most sacred memories into the commonest possible words and sentences. [L, 485]

Even allowing for the fact that we cannot really take the "author" very seriously (he is not portrayed as a likeable character at all), the last sentence of the quotation seems especially important. There is a sense in which the novel is full of Alasdair Gray's "most sacred memories", as I hope to have made clear.[23] On the other hand, these memories, this autobiographical background is "prostituted", as it were, in the novel, because it is creatively reworked into fiction and can never 'truthfully' represent Gray's real life. However, it is vital to note that this does not mean that it represents nothing or that it has no connection to Gray's biography. On the contrary, precisely by fragmenting his biography into the different versions and characters of the novel, Gray allows the reader to try to glimpse through this fragmented picture something of the historical/autobiographical 'truth'

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[23] If more proof is needed, consider the last entry of the "Index of Plagiarisms", called "Zoroaster", and its mentioning of "the Apotheosis and Coronation of the Virgin AmyAnnieMoraTracyKatrinaVeronica MargaretIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeIngeMarianBethLizBettyDanieleAngelTinaJanet Kate [...]" [498-9] The endless repetition of the name Inge evokes Gray's problematic marriage to Inge Sørensen: they married in 1961 and separated less than ten years later. Inge S. is also the mother of Gray's only son, Andrew [cf. Charlton 1991b; see also Bowditch 2000 and Gray's autobiographical essay in Moores 2002]. "The author" also tells Lanark, "My first hero was based on myself. I'd have preferred someone less specialized but mine were the only entrails I could lay hands upon. I worked poor Thaw to death, quite cold-bloodedly, because though based on me he was tougher and more honest, so I hated him. Also, his death gave me a chance to shift him into a wider social context. You are Thaw with the neurotic imagination trimmed off and built into the furniture of the world you occupy." [493]

from which it developed.[24] The main point once again is that this 'historical truth' can not be described or explained by some kind of master narrative, it can only be "emplotted" in different, competing and sometimes contradicting versions. With this we are back at the problems sketched at the beginning of our chapter, thus claiming for *Lanark* the status of historiographic metafiction due to its involvement with many of the issues discussed in contemporary 'postmodern' theory.

The fact that as historiographic metafiction *Lanark* "lay[s] claim to historical events and personages" [cf. Hutcheon quote above] is an integral part of that category, as we have seen, and is absolutely central to Gray's concerns. This is not only evident in the autobiographical dimension of the novel. In so far as it means emphasising the relevance of the past while simultaneously problematising its representation, it is in fact one of the fundamental themes of the book. I have already mentioned the importance of Monboddo's final speech in the chapter called "Explanation" for the interpretation of the novel. Significantly, it is also in this speech on "the work of the council, Then, Now and Tomorrow" [563] that the ultimate importance of the past in understanding the present and planning for the future is stressed. A brief historical survey by Monboddo (the name itself being a historical allusion) from prehistoric times into the future is meant to serve as a kind of Queen's Speech, outlining the necessary measures to be taken in the present and future. Although again Monboddo may not be the most trustworthy of characters, it does seem that regarding the importance

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[24] This way of presenting one's personal past is probably even more honest than trying to cast it as a coherent story, as Douglas Gifford remarks: "[P]art of the book's meaning is a satiric comment on our inability to organise memory and experience—so that, as 'authors' of our own lives, we bungle in recall, we cheat in interpretation, we glamourise or falsify just as Gray does about Thaw or Lanark. Surely Gray is saying continuously—via all these fictional characters who *could* be him—that his book is a comic fiction as well as a tragic biography." [Gifford 1981, 11]

of the past Gray the author is speaking more directly to the reader here than in other passages of the book.

In fact, the structure of the whole book can be seen as commenting on the complicated issue of history in our time, as Cairns Craig points out:

> Thaw-Lanark live in a society which has lost its historical significance, has entered into a kind of historical entropy in which there is no longer any forward momentum. [...] The double perspective, [...] from within the trudge of history and from a perspective that is outside of it, is the foundation of the generic doubling of the novel. Neither perspective will suffice by itself—only the dialectical interaction of the two will allow us to live with the unendurable weight of a history that we still have to believe may go somewhere. [...] We must be inside and outside at the same time: we must live in history and yet with the consciousness of being outside it. [Craig 1991, 103-4]

This sums up again Gray's approach towards (personal) history and its presentation in *Lanark* which I have tried to investigate, and it also links these ideas with the more general issues and discussions on history/historiography. The emphasis on a "double perspective" is particularly important here, since it hints at an acknowledgement, on the one hand, that (personal) history is a vital part of our lives and that it has to be, and can be to a certain extent, represented (through writing). On the other hand, it highlights the fractured nature of this representation, drawing attention to its discontinuities and contradictions and thus avoiding the myth of a seamless, objective 'master' narrative. This approach recalls the balanced position that is increasingly propagated in current theoretical debates.

If history is thus an important theme in *Lanark* and the novel can be seen as historiographic metafiction, this is certainly true to an even greater degree for Gray's 1992 novel *Poor Things*. It can arguably be regarded as his most "historical" novel to date, not least because of its Victorian setting, but maybe even more because of its involvement with issues of history/historiography in general, as I will try to demonstrate in the following.

Victorianism Revisited—Multiple Histories in *Poor Things*

Writing HiStories

The most obviously 'historical' aspect of this novel certainly is its nineteenth-century setting and the recreation of the late Victorian period and society. A large part of this section therefore discusses this question, also in reference to wider movements in contemporary British historiographic metafiction. However, in the light of the stress put in the theoretical discussion on 'histories' as opposed to 'History', one of the most striking aspects of the novel is without doubt its proliferation of rival narratives and different versions of the central story. After the two blurbs giving two different versions of the content of the book and two opposed 'reviews' on the cover, the title page tells the reader that he is going to read "Episodes from the early life of Archibald McCandless M.D. Scottish Public Health Officer, edited by Alasdair Gray". The printed 'facsimile' of McCandless's memoir is prefaced with an Introduction by the 'editor' Gray in which he discusses and defends the historical accuracy of the 'document'. This is followed by "A Letter from Victoria McCandless M.D. to her eldest surviving descendant in 1974 correcting what she claims are errors in *Episodes from the Early Life of a Scottish Public Health Officer* by her late husband Archibald McCandless M.D. b.1857—d.1911", which was allegedly found together with the memoir, as well as "Notes Critical and Historical" by Gray, in which the different versions are again discussed and 'annotated' in mock-scholarly fashion and complemented with nineteenth-century illustrations. The effect of these various competing discourses is that the reader is left disoriented by the end, unable to decide between the different versions and narratives. However, as Marie Odile Pittin writes in a passage I have already quoted, "[t]he point is not to tell the 'truth' from the 'fantasy' but to enjoy the weird, totally phantasmagoric result of their being pitted against each other in a story that clamours in various ways for the supremely elusive, ironical notion of 'reality', a problem which indeed is *not* to be solved" [Pittin 1996, 213]. In other words, it is the different "emplotments" of the (hi)story and their cumulative effect, rather than any fixed historical "reality", that is important here.

This is reminiscent of the more theoretical discussion on history, but in the novel it is also very funny and hugely enjoyable.

The implicit question of the reliability of history and the blurred boundary between history and fiction is also addressed more directly in the text itself. The beginning of the Introduction already highlights this central theme of the novel:

> The doctor who wrote this account of his early experiences died in 1911, and readers who know nothing about the daringly experimental history of Scottish medicine will perhaps mistake it for a grotesque fiction. Those who examine the proofs given at the end of this introduction will not doubt that in the final week of February 1881, at 18 Park Circus, Glasgow, a surgical genius used human remains to create a twenty-five-year-old woman. The local historian Michael Donnelly disagrees with me. [PT, IX]

The "history of Scottish medicine" is set in opposition to "a grotesque fiction" in the very first sentence of the novel. Also, the authority of historical proofs is invoked. Ironically, it is the 'editor', the writer Gray[25] who makes the historical claims whereas the "local historian" disagrees. This changing of roles is made more explicit at the end of the Introduction, when Gray writes:

> I fear Michael Donnelly and I disagree about this book. He thinks it a blackly humorous fiction into which some real experiences and historical facts have been cunningly woven, a book like Scott's *Old Mortality* and Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. I think it like Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*; a loving portrait of an astonishingly good, stout, intelligent, eccentric man recorded by a friend with a memory for dialogue. [...] I also told Donnelly that I had written enough fiction to know history when I read it. He said he had

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[25] The fictional 'editor' "Alasdair Gray" is not identical with the real-life writer Gray, of course, as Johanna Tiitinen has pointed out to me. Cf. her extensive discussion of these issues (literature vs. history etc.), especially in relation to *Poor Things* [Tiitinen 2004, esp. ch. 2+3].

> written enough history to recognize fiction. To this there was only one reply—I had to become a historian. I did so. I am one. [PT, XIII-XIV]

Now the role reversal is complete, the writer has become a historian and the historian "*writes* history". There follows a list of historical events, "prov[ing] the McCandless story a complete tissue of facts" [XIV], which were supposedly collected by Gray "[a]fter six months of research" [ibid.] in various libraries and archives. The 'real' historian is not convinced: "Michael Donnelly has told me he would find the above evidence more convincing if I had obtained official copies of the marriage and death certificates and photocopies of the newspaper reports, but if my readers trust me I do not care what an 'expert' thinks." [XV-XVI] The trust of the readers is what counts for the 'historian' Gray, not the factual evidence (the original book by McCandless also gets lost "[s]omewhere between editor, publisher, typesetter and photographer" [XVI]). This is again reminiscent of modern theories such as those of Hayden White, who sees the historian as selecting from the available facts or documents those which allow him to tell a coherent and convincing story [cf. above].

Gray's appeal for the trust of his readers is of course also ironic in light of the fact that the (hi)story that follows is far from convincing and coherent. It consists of a cacophony of different and differing voices telling their personal version of a story which is itself truly bizarre and begs belief. The reader first gets the version of Archibald McCandless, whose first-person narrative in the 'authentic' memoir takes up the largest part of the novel. Even here more than half of the 200 or so pages is taken up by the narratives of other characters, either in epistolary form or as rendition of conversation.[26] More often than not the different narratives contradict each other: examples are the letter by Duncan Wedderburn, with its conspiracy theories of the

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[26] For example, we get Bella's long diary/letter, part of which is again reproduced as "facsimile" [cf. p. 145-50; see also fig. 4], and Wedderburn's letter; as well as long conversations between e.g. Godwin Baxter and McCandless, or Dr Hooker and Harry Astley.

"Antichrist" Baxter and his creature, the "White Daemon" Bella Baxter as opposed to the letter by Bella herself; or the theories and "wisdom" of Harry Astley as opposed to the views of Dr. Hooker. Within the memoir, there is at least still the somehow authoritative voice of McCandless framing the other voices. This authority is in turn lost with Bella (or Victoria, as she significantly calls herself) McCandless's letter to posterity, which follows it. In this, she gives her own version of the central story, substituting the more fantastic elements by 'rational' explanations: thus, she denies her pregnancy, suicide and the following operation by Baxter which revived—or recreated—her by implanting her the brain of her unborn child, at the same time giving plausible alternative reasons for the scars on her head and belly. If the reader now tends to believe this obviously more rational account rather than McCandless's strange story, he has already been warned by Gray in the Introduction that her letter, "[i]f read before the main text [...,] will prejudice readers against that. If read afterward we easily see it is the letter of a disturbed woman who wants to hide the truth about her start in life." [XIII][27]

Consequently, in the "Notes Critical and Historical" Gray goes to lengths (they take up another 40 pages) to prove McCandless's version with an arsenal of (pseudo-)historical evidence including quotations from diverse scholarly studies and reference works, nineteenth-century illustrations and extracts from the literature of the period. Not surprisingly, these notes do not remain unchallenged either. For one, they are often clearly ironic (as the one about the monograph by "Professor Heuschrecke" quoted earlier) and do not seriously pretend to be scholarly historical notes, also because of the sort of passages from the text which are annotated.[28] They are

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[27] Gray adds, in his typical tongue-in-cheek manner (referring to Donnelly's wish to print the letter as an introduction): "Furthermore, no book needs two introductions and I am writing this one." [ibid.]

[28] Cf. the following note, which refers to a passage from Bella's letter where she is trying to explain to Dr. Hooker that "[...] god is movement, because it keeps stirring things to make new ones", using a Scottish recipe as example: "CHAPTER 15, page 134. *Movement turns...flour butter sugar an egg and a tablespoonful of milk into Abernethy biscuits*. According to

obviously part of Gray's by now familiar strategy of mocking academia, together with the blurbs and spoof reviews on the covers of almost all his works and similar devices in the other novels.[29] Moreover, the dispute with the real historian Donnelly mentioned in the Introduction continues here, as the following two examples show (both notes again refer to passages which are decidedly marginal in McCandless's text):

> CHAPTER 3, page 22. *A narrow garden between high walls*. Michael Donnelly, indefatigable in his efforts to prove this history a work of fiction, points out that the garden here described does not mention a coach-house on the far side of it. He has visited Baxter's old home (18 Park Circus) and asserts that the space between back entrance and coach-house is too small and sunken to have ever been more than a drying-yard. This, of course, only proves that the coach-house was built at a later date. [PT, 280]

The Scots Kitchen (by Marian McNeill, Blackie and Son, Bishopbriggs, 1929) this recipe omits two vital ingredients: half a teaspoonful of baking powder and a moderate amount of heat" [PT, 287]. Likewise, the captions of the illustrations have to be taken with some caution. Most of the pictures are authentic and in some cases well-known nineteenth-century engravings. On page 297, for example, we find a picture entitled "Auctioning Loot in Mandalay after Burmese Expedition". This is also found in the *Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* with the caption "Auctioning loot from the palace at Mandalay, 1885." [Cambridge 1996, 74-5] In Gray's version, however, it is marked as one of the "Events in General Blessington's career as shown and reported in the Graphic Illustrated Weekly News" and accompanied by a 'quote' ("'Thunderbolt' Blessington believes that the common soldier who preserves the peace of the Empire deserves more than mere wages.") which links it with one of the fictional characters of the novel, thus once again blurring the boundary between history and fiction (cf. also the other illustration on the same page and the one on p. 298).

[29] Cf. for example *Lanark*'s "Index of Plagiarisms", the "Notes and Glossary Explaining Obscurities" of *A History Maker* or the "Critic-Fuel" of *1982 Janine*.

> CHAPTER 9, page 60. *When the gloaming comes so will he, stepping quietly from the lane through that door in the far-away wall*. Michael Donnelly has shown me the original plans of Park Circus[30], designed by Charles Wilson in the 1850s, plans which show a coach-house dividing the backyard of 18 Park Circus from the lane. But the fact that an architect designed such a feature would not prevent it being built till much later. The builders of the gothic cathedrals took centuries to complete their architects' designs. The National Monument in Edinburgh, though designed to commemorate the Scots soldiers who died fighting Napoleon, is still little more than a facade. [285]

It seems that for the 'historian' Gray (note that he calls the book "this history") the story by McCandless and his desire to prove it as 'fact' is more important than the historical evidence. On the other hand, even if Gray's analogies are certainly far-fetched, it demonstrates the possibility of interpreting factual evidence in contrasting ways, according to the (predetermined) goal of the investigation—Donnelly, too, is motivated by his desire "to prove this history a work of fiction". While being playful and enjoyable to the reader, these Notes still succeed in making a serious point about the writing of history.

As we have seen so far, in *Poor Things* Alasdair Gray confronts the reader with a number of different "emplotments" (influenced by the personalities and environments of the individuals that tell them) of the same underlying facts that cannot be accessed directly by the reader, just as the past cannot be accessed directly from the present. He manages to raise issues about history/historiography by emphasising the role played by the individual in shaping history, thus stressing the ultimate subjectivity and relativity of history. Of all Gray's novels, *Poor Things* can therefore be regarded as the one in

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[30] Gray includes this plan among the other illustrations in the Notes with the following caption: "Number 18 is coloured black. The shaded area behind indicates the garden and 'coach-house'" [PT, 294]. Cf. fig. 8a.

which he is most 'directly' involved with the contemporary debates on history. In the following, I will try to demonstrate that the novel also illustrates the close connection of the present with the past. On the one hand, this reinforces the aspect of relativity—the (re)construction of the past from the present. On the other hand, significantly, it also allows Gray's present concerns and interests to manifest themselves in his use of history, thus emphasising the importance it has for him and more generally for our present. It is in this context that the relevance of the Victorian setting becomes apparent.

Postmodern Victorianism: Gender, Class and Empire

Even before the reader arrives at the first page of *Poor Things* he is confronted by the "Blurb for a High-class Hardback", printed on the cover, with the following summary of the book:

> Since 1979 the British government has worked to restore Britain to its Victorian state, so Alasdair Gray has at last shrugged off his post-modernist label and written an up-to-date nineteenth-century novel. Set in and around Glasgow and the Mediterranean of the early 1880s, it describes the love-lives of two doctors and a mature woman created by one of them. [...]

Together with the "Blurb for a Popular Paperback", which advertises the book as typical would-be Victorian romance, and two spoof reviews,[31] this is Gray's characteristically entertaining way to highlight one of the central themes of the novel: its involvement with the (late) Victorian period and therefore the implicit theme of (the writing of) history in general. What makes this particularly interesting in the context of the present chapter, i.e. the relation to

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[31] One is praising Gray for "us[ing] science fiction to resurrect England's Empire at its most spacious and gracious" and "satiriz[ing] those wealthy Victorian eccentrics"; the other calls "*Poor Things* yet another exercise in Victorian pastiche, a fictional genre which deserves to be neglected for a century or two".

history/historiographical metafiction, is that it is far from being an isolated case among contemporary British historical fiction, as I have pointed out. On the contrary, the accumulation of British novels, especially in the 1980s and 90s, (partly) set in or concerned with the Victorian age has even led one critic to speak of a kind of sub-genre, the "retro-Victorian novel"[32]. The model for this literary vogue certainly was John Fowles's immensely successful novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969)[33], and well-known 'followers' include A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) and *Angels and Insects* (1992) as well as Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992).[34]

There might indeed be a link between the general debates on history and this contemporary interest in the nineteenth century. Significantly, the Victorian age is the period in which history was established as an (academic) discipline in its own right. It is to this time that the "Whig interpretation of history", so much derided by modern historians and theorists, is usually attributed. Seen from this

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[32] Cf. Sally Shuttleworth, "Natural History: The Retro-Victorian Novel" (1998). See also the quote from Alison Lee on one of the following pages on the use of nineteenth-century traditions in contemporary historiographical metafiction. This phenomenon can even be said to transcend merely literary modes of representation, as the following publication argues: John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff, *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (2000). The spoof review from *Poor Things* quoted above clearly shows that Gray is well aware of this tendency.

[33] It is interesting to note, in the light of our classification of *Poor Things* as 'science fiction' in the preceding chapter, that Fowles has written about his recreation of Victorianism as—precisely—science fiction: "Writing as I have been today—about two Victorians making love—with no guides except my imagination and vague deductions from the spirit of the age and so on—is really science fiction. A journey is a journey, backwards or forwards." ["Notes on an Unfinished Novel", in Malcolm Bradbury, *The Novel Today* (London: Fontana, 1990), 147-62; 152]

[34] Apart from Swift's novel, all of these have also been made into films, which is another proof of the popularity of this sort of narrative.

angle, it acquires a new significance for our purposes as the paradigmatic period of the 'old', realist or liberal-humanist, unproblematic view of history which most (post)modern theories are reacting against: "In Victorian England, history is much more than the events of the past or the account of those events. History is a regime of truth to which knowledge in general is subject [...]" [Crosby 1991, 10] It is this "regime of truth" in particular which is so vigorously opposed or denied by many contemporary theories, as I have shown above.

If this can be seen as one of the reasons for the obvious fascination with the Victorian age at the end of the twentieth century, it is certainly possible to find other equally important ones. There is Margaret Thatcher's call for the return to Victorian values in 1982, alluded to by Gray in his blurb. There is the parallel (at least to the *fin de siècle*) of living at the end of a century, with all the fears of the end of the world and apocalyptic visions which this unfailingly produces (as could be seen in 1999 in the flood of publications and programmes on the topic). A sense of fragmentation, of uncertainty, and the motto "anything goes" seem to describe the *condition postmoderne* as well as the age of enormous scientific and technical changes and of Darwinist evolutionary theories.[35] Elaine Showalter has pointed out that "[f]rom urban homelessness to imperial decline, from sexual revolution to sexual epidemics, the last decades of the twentieth century seem to be repeating the problems, themes, and metaphors of the *fin de siècle*". [Showalter 1991, 1] In general, the interest in

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[35] Darwinism and various evolutionary theories seem to enjoy a kind of renaissance at the moment. [cf. e.g. R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (1976); D. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (1995); A. Brown, *The Darwin Wars* (1999)] This development has also led to investigations of the influence of Darwin and his ideas on literature and vice versa, as well as to a proliferation of Darwinian themes and ideas in contemporary fiction [cf. G. Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983); R. Young, *Darwin's Metaphors. Nature's Place in Victorian Culture* (1985); G. Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction*; J. Schnackertz, *Darwinismus und literarischer Diskurs* (1992)].

Victorianism and its crisis is thus motivated by the continuities and connections that link it to our present. Taking a slightly different perspective on the same question, Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken reach a similar conclusion:

> [A]t a time when cultural theory is dominated by issues pertaining to gender, class and 'race', and when the so-called 'new world order' of the late twentieth century is collapsing into a morass of competing nationalisms, with socialism apparently on its knees and feminists having to deal with 'post-feminism', it is surely instructive to scrutinize the fissures and interrelationships between gender politics, class politics and the politics of empire as they emerged in the late nineteenth century. To the extent that the fissures remain today, the crisis of Victorianism at the *fin de siècle* is a crisis which persists in the final years of our own century. [Ledger/McCracken 1995, 41-2]

Incidentally, gender politics, class politics and the politics of empire are issues that Alasdair Gray is particularly interested in, both in general and particularly in *Poor Things*, which is why I will investigate their importance in the novel together with the relevance of the Victorian context in more detail below. His own answer to the question of why he seems to be especially interested in the nineteenth century, however, is rather pragmatic: "I have sometimes paid unusually close attention to the 19th century because its close proximity to the 20th makes it unusually accessible." [personal letter, 31 Dec 1997] However, this also points to the essential importance of the present in reconstructing the past, and we have seen before what some of the issues are that Gray is particularly concerned with—class issues being certainly among them.

The reflection in *Poor Things* of the centrality of gender politics, class politics and the politics of empire in both our own age and the (late) nineteenth century link the novel more closely to other novels of the 'sub-genre', such as Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* or Byatt's *Possession*. They also seem to be of fairly general interest in the present literary and cultural debate. Referring to Victorian studies in general, Hans Ulrich Seeber remarks that "the topics and discourses chosen for close study do not merely reflect the 'objective' reality of Victorian culture; they are at the same time preoccupations and even

obsessions of the observers themselves" [Seeber 1998, 324], and he goes on to mention, among others, "the woman question, love and sexuality, [...] colonialism and the Empire, marginalized and suppressed sections of society, social and political problems and relocations, [...] history and the uses of history". [ibid.] This could equally well serve as a summary of the major topics dealt with in *Poor Things* and, in fact, in many other 'retro-Victorian' novels. It should be stressed that they are "preoccupations and even obsessions of the observers themselves", i.e. the writers'—in this case Gray's.

One of Gray's most constant obsessions certainly is the 'woman question' and the issue of sexuality. This was already apparent in *Lanark*, especially in the problematic relation of Thaw/Lanark to women in general and Marjorie/Rima in particular, but it is certainly most pronounced in the two novels *1982 Janine* (1984) and *Something Leather* (1990). These provoked a controversial discussion among reviewers and critics, some accusing Gray of sado-masochistic fantasies.[36] He has been exceptionally open about his own sexual problems and how they are related to his fiction.[37] I cannot go into the details of Gray's portrayal of women in his fiction in general, but it is obvious that issues of gender and sexuality are among his prime concerns. The question here is to what extent the Victorian historical background allows him to deal with these issues in *Poor Things*. Hans Ulrich Seeber has pointed out that

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[36] Cf. e.g. the essay "Black Arts: *1982 Janine* and *Something Leather*" by S.J. Boyd [Crawford/Nairn 1991, 108-23], which starts with the statement: "The publication of *Something Leather* confirms beyond doubt what was already strongly suggested by *1982 Janine*: Scotland's greatest living literary light is a pornographer." [108]

[37] In a recent interview in the *Sunday Times* (21 May 2000) he confided that "for most of my life [...] my sexuality was mainly a matter of masturbation." He also confirms the links between his own youth and adolescence and the torments of the protagonists in *Lanark*. [Bowditch 2000, 1]

> [t]he influence of contemporary thinking and discourses on Victorian studies has been particularly pervasive in research focusing on the woman question and on sexuality. Especially in the latter field, the spirit of curiosity has been excessive, and well-nigh Herculean efforts have been made to lay open—or, rather, to use an appropriate metaphor, penetrate—the dark recesses of Victorian sexual life. [...] Was Victorian England a 'culture of scandal' in which people were preoccupied with sexual behaviour but were not allowed to speculate about it openly and therefore forced to camouflage the facts by using a special symbolic language? Or must we not assume, rather, that such a hypothesis issues from the brain of a modern observer projecting contemporary experiences and notions into the past? Or is the truth somewhere in between? [Seeber 1998, 324-5]

These are also some of the questions that contemporary 'Victorian' novels are interested in. John Fowles's novel is strongly concerned with the double standard morality of the Victorians and presents in the heroine Sarah Woodruff an independent-minded 'New Woman' as one of the central characters. A.S. Byatt uses a similarly unconventional woman character with her protagonist Christabel LaMotte. Both authors also quite intentionally "project contemporary experiences and notions into the past", when Fowles comments on our distorted view of the Victorian age and Byatt has a late twentieth-century feminist scholar research the work of her Victorian poetess.

Likewise, in *Poor Things,* the character of Bella Baxter/Victoria McCandless is the centre of attention most of the time, not only when she is the narrator but also in the accounts of the other protagonists. Her gender, and above all her sexuality is in fact integral to the progress of the story.[38] In one of the 'reviews' on the cover she is announced as "an oversexed blend of Eleanor Marx, Annie Besant and Alice in Wonderland" and in the "Blurb for a Popular Paperback" as "rich, beautiful, tempestuous Bella Baxter". In the novel, she is

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[38] This is also signalled in the engravings from Henry Gray's *Anatomy* that illustrate McCandless's text, which include male and female genitals as well as tongues.

'recreated' by Godwin Baxter for his own needs: because he was despised for his monstrous appearance but, as he puts it himself, "dreamed of a fascinating stranger—a woman I had not yet met so could only imagine—a friend who would need and admire me as much as I needed and admired her." [PT, 38] Apart from the currently debated questions of genetical engineering implied here, this can also be seen as emphasising the male-dominated society (of the Victorians as well as our own), in which the image of women is tailored to the needs of men. It soon becomes obvious that Bella is at least as unconventional and independent-minded as the other women protagonists mentioned above, although also still naive and childlike, because she has the brain of a small child. First she falls in love with McCandless and promises to marry him, then she elopes with the unlikeable 'macho' Duncan Wedderburn, whom she drives mad on a voyage around Europe by her sexual insatiability. She leaves him in Paris to work in a brothel, where every night she "knocked off forty and earned four hundred and eighty francs" [PT, 180].

It is here that Victorian sexual morals are criticised, when we learn that wealthy Englishmen (such as the perverted "Mr Spankybot", who later turns out to have been Victoria's former husband Sir Aubrey de la Pole Blessington) come to this place because "[k]nocking was illegal in Britain", and that "many men preferred strangers because they could not wed[39] those they knew best. Most [...] customers were married men, and some of them had mistresses too." [177] Also, the prostitutes at the brothel are regularly checked for venereal diseases in the most humiliating way, which leads Bella to protest that "this medical inspection is unfair and inefficient. Your girls are healthy when they start working here so it is the clients, not the staff who spread the diseases. It is the clients who should be medically examined before we let them into us." [183] Consequently, Bella returns to Glasgow where she finally marries McCandless and embarks on her career as a woman doctor, suffragette and member of

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[39] "Wedding" is what Bella calls sexual intercourse in her idiosyncratic infantile style of speech.

the Fabian Society.[40] On the whole, therefore, Bella/Victoria is maybe closer in her attitudes and actions to the (post)feminist late twentieth century than to her own *fin de siècle*. She also resembles similar strong women characters from Gray's other books (cf. e.g. Rima from *Lanark*, Helen from *1982 Janine* or Kittock the henwife from *A History Maker*). Thus, the Victorian setting allows Gray to "lay open the dark recesses of Victorian sexual life" while at the same time "projecting contemporary experiences and notions into the past".

Much the same can be said of his treatment of class politics, or problems of "marginalized and suppressed sections of society, social and political problems and relocations" in the novel. As the preceding chapter should have made clear, issues of class and power, of the suppressed sections of society concern Gray greatly. I have already touched on the aspect of social criticism in *Poor Things*, too. It should be sufficient to stress here how these criticisms simultaneously apply to Victorian society which is the setting and to Gray's 'neo-Victorian' Thatcherist world. On her tour through Europe, Bella experiences a crisis when she sees a begging girl with a blind baby in Alexandria and is not allowed to help her. In her letter to Baxter and McCandless she writes how the Malthusian cynic Harry Astley afterwards told her that

> my pity was natural and good if confined to the unfortunate of my own class, but if acted on promiscuously it would prolong the misery of many who would be better dead. I had just seen a working model of nearly every civilized nation. The people on the veranda were the owners and rulers—their inherited intelligence and wealth set them above everyone else. The

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[40] There is another interruption when her former husband General Blessington appears at the wedding ceremony and demands to take her with him. It is subsequently revealed that he treated Victoria badly and that because of her "insane appetite for carnal intercourse" [213] he wanted her to undergo a clitoridectomy, to "cure her by *cutting out* the centre of her nervous excitement." [218-9] This led her to escape to Glasgow and kill herself (or in her own version to ask Baxter for shelter).

> crowd of beggars represented the jealous and incompetent majority, who were kept in their place by the whips of those on the ground between: the latter represented policemen and functionaries who keep society as it is. And while they [Astley and Dr. Hooker] spoke I clenched my teeth and fists to stop them biting and scratching these clever men who want no care for the helpless sick small, who use religions and politics, excuses to spread misery with fire and sword and how could I stop all this? I did not know what to do. [PT, 175-6]

Bella says about the section of her letter in which this passage appears that "it is so important that I will divide it from the rest of my letter with another line." [173] With some knowledge of Gray's other works and his general convictions, it is not difficult to infer that for him, too, this is very important indeed, and that it is just as much about late-twentieth-century Britain as it is about Bella and Astley's Victorian world—as he says, "a working model of nearly every civilized nation" (the use of "civilized" being particularly sarcastic here). Once again, therefore, Gray can be seen as using the Victorian setting as a convenient background for his own contemporary concerns, investigating the past to illuminate the present (cf. also my discussion of 'Glasgow's poor things' below).

Related to this general interest in questions of class and political power is the third aspect I named above as an important topic for both Victorian studies and Gray in his novel *Poor Things*: "colonialism" and the "politics of empire". First of all, there is a link to the more general aspect of this chapter when we learn—as part of "Astley's bitter wisdom", this one noted down by Bella under the heading "History"—that

> [b]ig nations are created by successful plundering raids, and since most history is written by friends of the conquerors history usually suggests that the plundered were improved by their loss and should be grateful for it. Plundering happens inside countries too. King Henry the Eighth plundered the English monasteries, the only institutions in those days which provided hospitals, schools and shelter for the poor. English historians agree King Henry was greedy, hasty and violent, but did a lot of good. They belong to a class which was enriched by the church lands. [PT, 156-7]

While reinforcing the (post)modern view of history as ultimately influenced by ideological, political and class interests,[41] this extract explicitly links the topic to the Empire when it says that "history is written by friends of the conquerors" and "suggests that the plundered were improved by their loss and should be grateful for it". It is clear from this that Gray neither approves of the instrumentalisation of history nor of the enterprise of imperialism.

This is reinforced by the entry on "Empire" (always bearing in mind that this is "Astley's bitter wisdom" as reported by Bella):

> No thickly peopled place has lacked an empire—Persia, Greece, Italy, Mongolia, Arabia, Denmark, Spain and France have had turns. The least warlike and biggest and longest-lasting empire was Chinese. We destroyed it twenty-five years ago because its government would not let us sell opium there. The British empire has grown rapidly, but in another two or three centuries the half-naked descendants of Disraeli and Gladstone may be diving off a broken pier of London Bridge, retrieving coins flung into the Thames by Tibetan tourists who find the sight amusing. [PT, 160-1]

Apart from the cynic Astley, who has a rather untypical view of empire at the height of British imperial enthusiasm,[42] there is the

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[41] Cf. also the following extract from the entry "Education": "Prosperous parents [...] send [their children] to schools where they [...] are taught to admire killers and stealers like Achilles and Ulysses, William the Conqueror and Henry the Eighth. This prepares them for life in a land where rich people use acts of parliament to deprive the poor of homes and livelihoods, where unearned incomes are increased by stock-exchange gambling, where those who own most property work least and amuse themselves by hunting, horse-racing and leading their country into battle" [PT, 155]. This also highlights the concerns about power in society and their contemporary relevance once more.

[42] This leads Gray in one of his typical 'historical' notes to speculate: "Who could Astley have been? Our only clue is in his undoubted links with Russia and his history lectures to Bella. These prove that behind his English facade lay no love of the British Empire. He was probably a

zealous American missionary and proto-imperialist Dr. Hooker, who thinks that "the smaller Chinese skull made it hard for the Chinese to learn English" [131]. His credo is fully revealed a little later in the conversation, when he explains "how much better the world is than in the bad old days":

> Because the Anglo-Saxon race to which she and I and Mr. Astley belong have begun to control the world, and we are the cleverest and kindliest and most adventurous and most truly Christian and hardest working and most free and democratic people who have ever existed. We should not feel proud of our superior virtues. God arranged it by giving us bigger brains than anyone else, so we find it easier to control our evil animal instincts. This means that compared with the Chinese, Hindoos, Negroes and Amerindians—yes, even compared with the Latins and Semites—we are like teachers in a playground of children who do not want to know that the school exists. [PT, 139]

The contrast between the two characters of Harry Astley and Dr. Hooker and their frequent debates of political and ideological questions in the novel[43] is another instance of Gray's use of competing discourses. As usual, this device is meant to reveal an underlying reality that must be reconstructed by the reader, who somehow accompanies Bella on her learning process, her voyage of discovery of the Victorian world. The implication is that the complex issue of (British) imperialism is better viewed from a variety of partly opposed

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Tsarist agent, visiting London to spy on the emigré Russian revolutionaries who sheltered there." [PT, 287]

43 I have already pointed to the conspicuous resemblance of their discussions to the late twentieth-century sociological or geopolitical debate about the "end of history" (Francis Fukuyama) versus the "clash of civilisations" (Samuel P. Huntington). I will come back to Fukuyama's thesis below, but it should be stressed here that this debate in turn "bears a certain resemblance to that at the end of the nineteenth [century]: it pits an almost Victorian optimism against a deep cultural pessimism". [Patrick Glynn on Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations*, *TLS*, 11 April 1997]

perspectives than by trying to find one 'master narrative' that pretends to give a totalising, definitive account.

Astley and Hooker's views are in turn complemented by another character in the novel, who is arguably even more important for the issue of empire: General Sir Aubrey de la Pole Blessington, the former husband of Bella/Victoria. He is something like the epitome of the British Empire, a famous military leader in different corners of the world and revered "national hero",[44] who is shown to be a cruel and perverted person and ends up committing suicide. This protagonist is significant for Gray's treatment of imperialism in the novel as I see it. First of all, he is probably the most unlikeable character in the whole book, the closest Gray gets to portraying a pure villain—which can be transposed to the general attitude towards imperialism in *Poor Things*. Moreover, he is the personification of Bella/Victoria's past, which Baxter is trying to hide and which comes back to haunt her in the worst possible moment, when she is about to marry McCandless. This seems to suggest that the British Empire, or the imperialist ideology, is a suppressed part of the history of the UK, that is coming back to haunt it in the (late) twentieth century. There are numerous indications that this is the case, from the final loss of empire in the 1960s/70s and Britain's subsequent inability to find a new role in the world, through the waves of immigration to Britain and the problems caused by this, to the cultural/literary aspect of the renewed vitality of the former British colonies as the home of the "new English literatures", famously captured in Salman Rushdie's statement that the "empire writes back". If this interpretation seems construed, it is certainly

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[44] His biography is detailed at the beginning of chapter 22, in an alleged entry from the 1883 edition of *Who's Who*. It shows him to have served e.g. in the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny, in China, Patagonia, Burma, Canada etc., to have been wounded several times and to have received a number of medals and honours in recognition of his achievements. His status as one of the greatest empire builders is further 'proved' in the Notes Critical and Historical by the illustrations mentioned earlier and by a long note [290-92 and 299], which supplies further details of his life as well as 'quotations' of literary references to his person from works of Carlyle, Tennyson, Kipling, Dickens and Hilaire Belloc.

implied in the novel. On her tour of Europe, Bella slowly senses that there is a blind spot in her past and she demands to be told about it by Baxter. But, as McCandless says, "[w]e were all too full of plans for Bella's future to investigate or call up the past together—we hoped it would leave us in peace." [PT, 207] Of course the past does come calling unexpectedly, in the person of General Blessington, and only after confronting it/him face to face can Bella/Victoria and McCandless get married and start a new life. Therefore, Gray's treatment of the question of empire in the novel has a decidedly contemporary resonance.

This possibly becomes even more obvious if we narrow our focus from the British background to a Scottish one. Scotland has always occupied an ambiguous position within the British Empire. On the one hand, it was an integral part of the colonising enterprise and profited enormously from it.[45] On the other hand, Scotland has always regarded itself at least partly as a nation colonised by the English, ever since the Union of Crowns in 1603 and the final political union of 1707. Arguably, this feeling has grown rather than subsided over the years and centuries (particularly in the twentieth), and can be seen as having reached a high point in the 1990s, which was clearly demonstrated in the referendum on devolution in September 1997 and consequently led to the opening of the first Scottish parliament in 300 years in 1999. Against this background it is surely significant that Blessington is English (his educational background includes Rugby

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[45] It has been pointed out that Scotland played a role in the British Empire that was disproportionate to its size and population. Two of the most famous British explorers, Mungo Park and David Livingstone, were Scottish, as well as a considerable number of colonial administrators and military men. Emigration to the colonies, especially Canada, was also proportionately higher than in England. Gray's hometown Glasgow was particularly involved in the imperial project, as it acquired wealth through the tobacco trade with the American colonies and became known in the nineteenth century as "the second city of the Empire", due to its importance as an industrial centre and trading port (Wedderburn says at one point in the novel that the "British Empire [...] was invented in Glasgow" [95]).

and Sandhurst), and Bella is clearly portrayed as Scottish. Although she was first born in Manchester and still speaks with a Manchester accent, her 'second birth' and subsequent education (which includes among other things playing "The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond" on the piano) took place in Glasgow. At different points in the book she is called "Mary Queen of Scots" [83] and "the mistress of Robert Burns [and] Bonnie Prince Charlie" [211] and McCandless thinks that through his relation to her his "love-life might be entering history as the love-lives of Rizzio and Bothwell had done" [207-8]. Most obviously, in her portrait on page forty-five she is depicted against a background that is clearly a panoramic view of Scotland (rather reminiscent of the one on the frontispiece to Book 4 of *Lanark*). She wears a thistle on her hat and the caption reads "Bella Caledonia" [cf. fig. 7]. This would almost seem to invite an allegorical reading in which she represents the Scottish nation, and something along these lines has been attempted elsewhere.[46] Even if this interpretation certainly has its limits (and there are too many contradictions in the novel to make it really convincing), it makes the fact that Bella/Victoria has been brutally treated by Blessington and fled from him to commit suicide (but is 'saved' and starts a new life) seem significant. In any case, contemporary connotations are clearly attached to the issue of imperialism, as I hope to have made clear.

I have demonstrated so far that the Victorian setting allows Alasdair Gray to deal with, among other things, the issues of gender, class and imperialism, which are genuinely Victorian topics whilst at the same time having a strong contemporary relevance. It has been shown that this double perspective is characteristic of both modern 'Victorian studies' in general and the revisionist 'retro-Victorian' novels in particular. It should have become apparent that with this emphasis on contemporary contexts and ideologies in their account of the past and

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[46] Cf. for example Kirsten Stirling's "Imagined Bodies and the Landscape of Home: Woman as Nation in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray" (2000), which is well aware of the contradictions this interpretation entails, it should be added.

especially through breaking up a coherent narrative into a multitude of different 'voices' (which is a conspicuous feature of the novels by Fowles, Byatt and Swift as well as of *Poor Things*), these novels reflect the more theoretical developments in the field of history. However, as Gray is nothing if not idiosyncratic, there are also specific features in the novel that convey his more 'local' concerns, while still being connected to the overall theme of history/historiography.

Remembering Glasgow's 'Poor Things'

Besides being linked to the issue of imperialism, Gray's hometown Glasgow can be regarded more generally as one of the specific motivations that might have led Gray to choose the Victorian age as the background for *Poor Things* in the first place. In the preceding chapter, when discussing the novel in the context of social fable and epic, I already briefly touched on some of the connections that can be drawn to the 1980s and '90s concerning Glasgow and Gray's criticism of its 'modernisation'. In fact, he can be seen to pursue here a project of giving imaginative life to the city. This project can be traced back to a frequently quoted passage from *Lanark*:

> "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." [L, 241]

The need to "imagine" Glasgow, voiced here by Gray's alter ego Duncan Thaw, has since been a motivation for Gray and a number of other writers from the city to try to fill that gap. *Lanark* itself certainly was a major contribution to the project, and it has been followed by a

long list of works by distinguished writers, notably Edwin Morgan, Liz Lochhead, James Kelman, Tom Leonard, Janice Galloway, A.L. Kennedy and many others. If other representations of the city, such as films and television series,[47] and also the image campaigns surrounding Culture Capital 1990 are taken into account, it is clear that Glasgow can no longer be seen as the imaginative nonentity that Thaw implies.[48] However, Florence, Paris, London, New York are still miles away, and not only in geographical terms, even if "Glasgow's miles better", as a well-known slogan of the nineties has it. What seems to be missing in particular is a place in the "history books", and this is stressed again by Thaw a little later in the above-quoted conversation, when he remarks that "Glasgow never got into the history books..." [ibid., 244]. What is lacking is a balanced view of the history of the city, something the modernising authorities do not seem to be especially interested in.

In this context, it is instructive to have a look at the Introduction of *Poor Things* again. Gray describes how the book by McCandless was discovered by Michael Donnelly during the period of wholesale restructuring of huge parts of the city in the seventies:

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[47] Cf. e.g. the TV series *Taggart* and *Brond* as well as John Byrne's *Tutti Frutti*, and the feature films *The Big Man* (based on William McIlvanney's novel), *Small Faces*, *Ratcatcher, My Name is Joe*, *Orphans* and *Sweet Sixteen*, to name only a few examples. For more information on Glasgow/Scotland and film cf. Petrie 2000 and Pendreigh 2002.

[48] In fact, it is debatable whether it ever was such a thing, if we look at the work of Moira Burgess, a Glasgow writer and literary historian who has specialised in the study of Glasgow fiction: cf. above all her *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction* (1998), but also *The Glasgow Novel: a Complete Guide* (3rd ed., 1999) and *Reading Glasgow: A Book Trust Scotland Literary Guide to Authors and Books Associated with the City* (1996). However, Burgess also acknowledges the importance of *Lanark* by calling it "a new beginning in Glasgow fiction." [1998, 247] There is also a recent anthology of writing about the city called *Mungo's City: A Glasgow Anthology*, ed. Brian D. Osborne and Ronald Armstrong (Edinburgh, 1999).

> In the local history museum on Glasgow Green the curator Elspeth King, her helper Michael Donnelly, worked overtime to acquire and preserve evidence of local culture that was being hustled into the past. Since the First World War the City Council had given the local history museum (called the People's Palace) no funds to buy anything new, so Elspeth and Michael's acquisitions were almost all salvaged from buildings scheduled for demolition. [PT, IX]

It is on one of these 'expeditions' that Donnelly finds McCandless's book, together with the letter by his wife. It is therefore part of the effort "to acquire and preserve evidence of local culture that was being hustled into the past"—and so is, by implication, Gray's novel. In the assessment of Moira Burgess, he is supremely successful: "The dense texture of *Poor Things*, the games it plays with truth, fiction and Glasgow social history, make it ultimately a more satisfactory work than *Lanark*, and perhaps the most aware and accomplished Glasgow novel so far." [Burgess 1998, 301-2] Much of "Glasgow social history" is in fact contained in the "Notes Critical and Historical", the majority of which expand on some 'forgotten' aspect of the city's history that is mentioned in passing in the main text.[49] In addition, we get the authentic nineteenth-century engravings of various places in the city that are mentioned in the book, such as Park Circus, the Stewart Memorial Fountain with Glasgow University, Lansdown United Presbyterian Church and the Necropolis [cf. e.g. pp. 293-6; see fig. 8]. The fact that most of Glasgow's landmarks, from the West End

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[49] Cf. the following example: "CHAPTER 14, page 109. *Do you remember taking me to see the Glasgow Stock Exchange? It looked like that.* The Royal Exchange, in Queen Street, was erected and opened on 3rd September 1829. It was built by subscription at an expense of £60,000, and was not only a lasting monument of the wealth of the Glasgow merchants, but the noblest institution of the kind in Britain for many decades afterward. This splendid structure is built in the Grecian style of architecture from designs by David Hamilton. The building is entered by a majestic portico, surmounted by a beautiful lantern tower. The great roof is 130 feet in length and 60 in breadth; the roof, supported by Corinthian pillars, is 30 feet in height. The interior is now occupied by Stirling's Public Lending Library, and as magnificent as ever" [PT, 286].

with Park Circus and the University via the city centre with George Square and the City Chambers to the Necropolis, were in fact built in the nineteenth century points to the importance of that age for the city and to one of the reasons why Gray chose it as a setting for his novel. The Victorian age was doubtlessly the heyday of Glasgow. At that time it was a major centre of the Workshop of the World, by virtue of its industries, especially shipbuilding, and the Second City of the Empire. It grew enormously rich and at the same time had one of the worst slum areas in the whole of Britain. It was certainly the period that 'made' Glasgow in various respects.

One aspect that the novel highlights is the scientific tradition, which has always been strong in Glasgow, but arguably never more so than in the Victorian age, when people like Sir William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) were active in the city. Even if the "daringly experimental history of Scottish medicine" and the 'innovative' operating techniques of Godwin Baxter and his father Sir Colin described in the novel, as well as the later career of Bella/Victoria as a woman doctor, need not be taken too seriously, the background of high scientific standards at Glasgow University and of science in Glasgow generally is certainly plausible.[50] Therefore, one motivation for Gray in choosing the Victorian setting might have been a certain

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[50] Among other things, Baxter and McCandless discuss the theories of Darwin, Huxley and Haeckel as well as the advantages of aseptic medicine, and they attend a lecture by Clerk Maxwell. Incidentally, the life and career of Bella/Victoria show some interesting parallels to the Scottish pioneer in women's medicine Elsie Maud Inglis (1864-1917), who studied in Glasgow in the 1880s under the tuition of the eminent surgeon Sir William McEwen, became dedicated to the cause of women's suffrage and later opened a maternity hospital for women, run by women. [cf. Lily Seafield, *100 Famous Scots* (New Lanark: Lomond Books, 2000), 40] In the novel, Victoria "opened the Godwin Baxter Natal Clinic in Dobbie's Loan near the Cowcaddens. It was a purely charitable foundation, and she ran it with a small staff of local women trained by herself." [PT, 302-3] and "From 1900 onwards Dr. Vic (as the papers started calling her) was an active suffragette, and her work for the movement can be read in histories of it." [305]

nostalgia for the glorious past of his hometown as an economic and scientific centre of the United Kingdom.[51] This seems far removed from late-twentieth-century reality while at the same time being rooted exactly in that reality, as I have tried to illustrate above.

However, and probably more importantly, the Glasgow setting of *Poor Things* also allows Gray to criticise contemporary developments in the city, especially in connection with its status as European City of Culture in 1990 (the novel was written exactly at that time). It is here that Gray's concern with the "poor things" of society becomes again apparent. One of the aims of the Workers' City group, with which Gray was associated, was to show how very little Culture City would benefit the workers, the unemployed and the homeless.[52] As Eilidh Whiteford writes, "In [...] *Poor Things* Gray is engaged in an on-going struggle for the soul of his native city, a struggle that has been intensified by 'culture capitalism'; his tactic in this struggle is to create counter-discourses of Glasgow which use the city's history and terrain to expose concrete examples of cultural cannibalism." [Whiteford 1997, 157] The relevance of the late Victorian setting is evident in this context, since it was the time when the social hierarchies and differences, the gulf between rich and poor was most

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[51] Cf. also the following quote from Wedderburn's letter to Baxter: "The British Empire is the largest Empire the world has ever known. It is wholly *material*, being based on industry, trade and military might. It was invented in Glasgow. Here James Watt conceived the steam engines which drive the British rail trains and merchant fleets and battle fleets, and here the best of these locomotives and ships are built. Here Adam Smith invented modern capitalism. Here Sir William Thomson devises the telegraph cables binding the empire together over the ocean floors, also the diesel electric engines of the future" [PT, 95-6].

[52] A detailed account of the problems and arguments surrounding Culture City 1990 and their influence on Gray's novels *Something Leather* and *Poor Things* can be read in Whiteford 1997, 154ff. + 170ff. Apart from Gray's literary reworking of the issue (especially in chapter 10 of *Something Leather*, called "Culture Capitalism"), his own view is best expressed in his introduction to the verse collection *A Real Glasgow Archipelago* by the Glasgow poet Jack Withers [Gray 1993b, 11-21].

glaringly obvious. That is true not only for Glasgow with its infamous slum areas but also for the whole of industrial Britain, which led Benjamin Disraeli, among others, to speak of the "two nations". It is the contrast between the glorious aspects of Victorian society/Glasgow as illustrated above and the underside of extreme poverty that Gray wants to emphasise, immediately drawing parallels to the contemporary Glasgow of Thatcher's 'new Victorianism': "*Poor Things*, despite being set mostly in the nineteenth century, is directly concerned with the events and politics of 1990." [ibid., 170] This contrast is also part of Bella's *éducation sentimentale* in the novel, part of "Astley's bitter wisdom" that she is taught, and influences her decision to set up a hospital for the poor. It is in this sense that Gray's recreation of Victorianism allows him to combine several of his deep concerns: for his native city Glasgow as well as for the "poor things" of society,[53] and not least for history and historical consciousness in general.

On the one hand, then, *Poor Things* is clearly joining the ranks of contemporary historiographical metafiction, and the 'retro-Victorian' novel in particular, in emphasising the complexity of history and the subjective and constructivist elements involved in its representation, which is ultimately influenced by present concerns and interests. These are also the themes that dominate contemporary historiographical debates. As we have seen in the introduction to this chapter, they encompass the dangers of an ultimate relativism, of the postmodern "anything goes" approach where there is no chance of deciding between alternative versions of history, which are supposedly all equally "true" or "valid". However, it should also have become evident in what I have been saying regarding *Poor Things*, especially concerning the issues of gender, class and imperialism as

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[53] Gray once said that *Poor Things* was "the funniest book I have ever written. It's also the most socialist, really ... but people don't need to notice that." [quoted in R. Carter and J. McRae, *The Routledge History of Literature in English. Britain and Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 534]

well as the Scottish/Glaswegian context, that on the other hand there is a clear sense in the novel of the importance of history. Just as the fragmentation of (personal) memory in *Lanark* does not prevent the reader from finally glimpsing some kind of integrated Thaw/Lanark/Gray personality, however complex, so in *Poor Things* he gets an idea of the need for history, for personal as well as for local and national identity. At one point in the novel, Bella cries out "I need more past." [PT, 61] In other words, the complicated nature of history/historiography does not mean that it is rendered superfluous or meaningless. On the contrary, it is necessary today more than ever, but it has to be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be constantly questioned and revised to prevent its instrumentalisation by the powerful of society against the "poor things". This is also expressed in the following conversation between Godwin Baxter and Bella/Victoria, where he tells her not to forget any experience from her former life, even if negative or painful:

> "Forget nothing," he said; "your worst experiences in Manchester and Lausanne and Porchester Terrace will enlarge your mind if you remember them with intelligent interest. They will stop you thinking clearly if you cannot." [...] "Never forget it, Bella. Most people in England, and Scotland too, are taught not to know it at all—are *taught* to be tools." [PT, 262-3]

To "remember" history, but "with intelligent interest" in this sense seems to be, for Gray at least, the middle way between ideological instrumentalisation of history and unabashed relativism and constructivism.[54] This is certainly also needed in the theoretical discussion of the issue.

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[54] Interestingly, Gray printed a quote from Seamus Heaney on the cover of his latest short-story collection which seems to express much the same position: "Remember Everything—And Keep Your Head!" [Gray 2003]

Historicising the Future?—*A History Maker*

If *Poor Things* can be seen to be deeply involved in discussions of history and its role in the modern world, then Gray's subsequent and latest novel *A History Maker* already signals in its title a similar if not stronger commitment to the same theme. We will see in the following whether a close examination of the book can serve to fulfill this expectation. In any case, it is already becoming obvious that Gray is increasingly interested in the debates concerning this issue. As Stephen Bernstein remarks in his study of Gray's fiction, "history comes more and more to occupy the center of Gray's concerns. Though all of his novels dwell on history to some extent, it is in the period settings of *Poor Things* or *A History Maker* that Gray offers his most trenchant criticism of the present and his most considered reflections on historical process." [Bernstein 1999, 151-2] These two novels do not only share the general interest in history but they are also remarkably similar in a number of other aspects.

The structure of *A History Maker* bears a striking resemblance to that of *Poor Things*, being another neglected "manuscript" written by the main protagonist Wat Dryhope, and edited with a Prologue and "Notes and Glossary Explaining Obscurities" by his mother. This raises the same sort of questions about reliability, historical objectivity and the relationship between fact and fiction, even if there is not so much contradiction between different versions of the story but rather additions of (vital) information in the Prologue and Notes, including the progress and defeat of the conspiracy that is central to the plot. This novel can therefore be seen as another example of historiographic metafiction as described by Alison Lee, following Hutcheon: "[Some] recent metafictional texts which deal with history [...] borrow from the nineteenth-century tradition of displacement, in that they appear to present themselves not as novels, but as biography [...], autobiography [...], memoir [...], and, above all, as documentary history." [Lee 1990,

36][55] Accordingly, the Prologue again insists on the factuality of the account by saying that "four fifths of Wat's story is proven fact on the testimony of a whole horde of independent witnesses" [HM, xi], including the people mentioned in the story, who "all say he tells the truth as they recall it." [xii] The novel thus assumes the form of an annotated (auto)biography of an important historical person, and parallels are drawn in the Prologue to Augustine's *Confessions*, Caesar's *Gallic Wars* and T. E. Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (not to be taken entirely seriously, of course). In this way, the theme of history and its representation is established as a central concern from the beginning. Once again the issue is also addressed directly when the "editor" Kate Dryhope talks (in 2234, the year the Prologue is written—which would incidentally also be the year of Gray's 300th birthday!) of "a dangerous easy-oasy habit of thinking the modern world at last a safe place, of thinking the past a midden too foul to steep our brains in" [xiv] and goes on to exemplify this view:

> This wish not to see how we got here is ancient, not modern. Over three hundred years ago Henry Ford said, "History is bunk." [...] He was not nasty or stupid by nature, but ignorance of the past fogged his view of the present and blinded him to the future. *A History Maker* shows that good states change as inevitably as bad ones, and should be carefully watched. [xiv-xv]

This is a plea for the importance of history in the present and the future, not dissimilar to the underlying concerns I observed in *Poor Things*. It is also significant because it contradicts the notion of a posthistoric or ahistoric society that is implied in the account by Wat following the Prologue.

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[55] Apart from linking *A History Maker* to *Poor Things*, this is also another indication of the importance of the nineteenth century in contemporary (British) historiographical metafiction.

Surviving the "End of History"

I have already mentioned the piece of "historical jargon" on "Economics" that is printed as an initial epigram in the novel. The implication that the historical days are over and that in this 23rd-century society there is no need for history is repeated several times in the novel. Wat's brother Joe, for example, refers to the battle of the Ettrick warriors which opens the story by saying: "If history wasnae a thing of the past I would say Ettrick *made it* two days ago." [32] Allusions to "the bad old historical days" [e.g. 47] or "the late historical era" [84] are repeatedly made, including Wat's remark that "secret societies (like governments, stock exchanges, banks, national armies, police forces, advertising agencies and other groups who made nothing people needed) had ended with the historical era." [108] Taking into account that the novel was written in the early 1990s, it is difficult to avoid drawing parallels between the situation described and the thesis of the "end of history" formulated by Francis Fukuyama in his 1992 study *The End of History and the Last Man.*[56] In this book Fukuyama argues that history as we know it will come to an end in the foreseeable future because the Western capitalist system in its liberal, democratic form is being accepted and taken over on a global basis. This caused a fierce and lengthy debate in academic and public circles, especially in relation to the opposed view of a "clash of civilisations" by Samuel P. Huntington. Fukuyama's study can be seen in the context of other revisionist theories that I have mentioned, as "a book among many others in the 1990s that declared the end of science, nature or other fields or concepts as we know them." [Tiitinen 1999, 270] I have already noted how this discussion seems to be reflected in *Poor Things* (in this case *avant la lettre*, as it were, because the novel was written before Fukuyama's book was published), but this is arguably even truer for *A History Maker*. Indeed, there are grounds to believe that Gray used the thesis deliberately here, since in the novel history seems to have "stopped"

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[56] Cf. Johanna Tiitinen's essay "A World at the End of History? *A History Maker* by Alasdair Gray" in Cowan/Gifford 1999, as well as Tiitinen 2004. Stephen Bernstein also mentions this parallel [Bernstein 1999, 140].

precisely around the end of the twentieth century, for example. As Johanna Tiitinen points out, Gray is challenging the notion of the end of history rather than endorsing it (of which the above-quoted statement that "good states change as inevitably as bad ones" is a clear indication). I have pointed out how ambiguous the 'utopia' of this society really is. Not surprisingly, the myth of a historyless society is also being undermined at every possible turn in the novel, for allusions to political, literary, cultural and linguistic history abound.

Apart from the prologue and the notes, which are self-consciously historical, in Wat's narration itself hardly a page is without reference to historical events, personalities or documents. These range from literary references to Hogg, Burns and Scott via the mentioning of a whole gallery of "heroes" and events from the history of mankind to the evocation of clan structures and border warfare. In addition, the narrator indulges in the deliberate overuse of archaic and obscure Scots words, which are then explained in Kate's "pedantical lang-nebbed notes at the end" [xv]. The historical theme is already established by the design of the book. On the page facing the title page the reader finds a map of "Households Round Saint Mary's Loch Year 2220", which is reminiscent of a nineteenth-century adventure novel [cf. fig. 9]. Then there are the two early-nineteenth-century engravings bracketing the text: "Dryhope Tower and Saint Mary's Loch, Bowerhope to the left on the far shore, around 1822" at the beginning [n.p.] and "Altrieve Cottage, home of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, looking toward Mountbenger around 1820" at the end [n.p., cf. fig. 5][57] The significance of the setting in the Scottish Borders signalled here can be interpreted in various ways, but a strong historical element is doubtlessly involved. The region is associated with two of the most famous Scottish writers: James Hogg (who was in fact born precisely in the region where the novel is set, as the

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[57] The text itself is also frequently partitioned by Gray's drawings (a different one in each chapter, e.g. two swords and two circled eyes for chapter one), every time there is a change of perspective or scene (this might be due to the origin of the novel as a screenplay). This also gives the novel a certain archaic quality.

illustrations suggest) and, of course, Sir Walter Scott, whose home Abbotsford House is close by. The significance of these two writers and their work for Gray in general and for *A History Maker* in particular goes beyond the setting. Hogg has been mentioned as an influence before, especially in connection with *Poor Things*, but the same also holds true for *Lanark*, concerning above all the theme of the supernatural and of division, the "Caledonian antisyzygy". Here he is referred to several times in the text, mainly in the notes. For example, there is a note mentioning the "Warrior house" of the Ettrick clan:

> This modern structure was on the site of Tibbie Sheils' Inn where James Hogg (poet, novelist and tenant farmer at Altrieve and Mountbenger) gathered with his neighbours in the first decades of the nineteenth century. A large statue of the poet with crook, plaid and sheepdog was placed on the lower slope of Oxcleuch Rig near the end of that century, and now overlooks the Ettrick veterans' garden of remembrance. [178-9]

One page later we find an allusion to one of his songs. Eilidh Whiteford goes as far as finding "an overt inter-textual reference to the work of James Hogg whose *The Three Perils of Man: War, Women and Witchcraft* shares a geographical location (Mount Benger, where Hogg farmed) and no small measure of thematic overlap with *A History Maker*, as might particularly be suggested by the subtitle of Hogg's work." [Whiteford 1997, 203][58] However close the

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[58] Peter Cudmore also suggests that "[t]here is deep and widely-read scholarship behind the Borders clan system Gray describes, modelled largely on Hogg and Scott. The business of the brilliant draw is preceded by a passage lifted—with spin of Gray's own making—from Hogg's *Three Perils of Man*, where the Northumbrian, faced with the execution of his brother, chooses to fight on rather than concede to the enemy, even though reason dictates the latter course." [Cudmore 1995, 89] Douglas Gifford, on the other hand, thinks that the novel "in the end more confuses than profits by its evocation of the ghosts of Hogg and *Three Perils of Man*; such literary exploitation may seek to imply traditional continuity, but there is really no meaningful connection between the worlds of Hogg's border fiction and Gray's contemporary creations." [Gifford 1995, 10]

intertextual relation may be, the reference to Hogg certainly is an historical element, evoking the literary heritage of the Border region and Scotland as a whole, and especially his fascination with folklore and history.

The same is arguably even more true for Sir Walter Scott, the famous Border 'minstrel' and instigator of the historical novel.[59] He is also alluded to several times in the novel. The first reference comes on the third page of the Prologue when Kate Dryhope describes her son's narration as follows:

> He [...] writes so cannily that, like Walter Scott in his best novels, he gives the reader a sense of being at mighty doings. Adroit critics will notice his sly shift from present to past tense in the first chapter. Like Scott he tells a Scottish story in an English easily understood by other parts of the world but leaves the gab of the locals in its native doric. [xi]

This refers to two further historical aspects of the novel: the (alleged) mythologising or 'making' of great historical events and the archaic Scottish language. However, the importance of Scott as a reference is perhaps mainly in his use of the landscape and its folklore as a reservoir of local history, as a lengthy quote from one of his poems in the notes on p. 169 and another allusion to a song on p. 180 suggest. The latter ends by saying that "[l]ike other Scottish songs its local popularity was ensured by emphatic use of place names", which is

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[59] Writing about *Lanark*, Angus Calder has pointed out Gray's relations with Scott: "Anthony Burgess has said that Gray is the best Scottish novelist since Scott. I think this may be true in that he resumes, as no other novelist save Grassic Gibbon has done, two of Scott's projects. First, Scott vivified through fiction a recently invented conception of history, seen as man's development by stages from primitive hunting and gathering to the industrialised 'civilisation' which was emerging in Europe in his own day. *Lanark* is an historical novel in that three different but overlapping constructions of Glasgow are used to illuminate the progress of twentieth-century man from barbarism to barbarism via the application of new technologies. [...]" [Calder 1994, 203].

another of Gray's tongue-in-cheek remarks, if we consider that he does exactly the same in his novel.

The history of the Border region thus evoked is a very rich one and also highly symbolic for Scotland, with its connection to Scottish national heroes, such as Robert Bruce (whose heart is supposedly buried in Melrose Abbey) and to the almost constant warfare with the English neighbours in the Middle and Early Modern Ages. Scott's influence in making this "a region important for its romanticized, bellicose past and its current centrality to the tourist economy" is stressed by Bernstein [Bernstein 1999, 136], and he sees Gray's novel reacting against this picture of "Scotland as a theme park" [137]. He also detects less obvious links to Scott when he traces the name of Wat Dryhope to Scott's distant ancestors (apparently, his great-great-great-great-grandmother was born at Dryhope Tower) [135/6]. However, the Border landscape itself and its description in the novel is probably the closest link to both Hogg and Scott as well as to the (Scottish) historical theme. There are several points when the landscape is described and it is usually linked to a sense of the past. When Wat rides to the Warrior house through the woods surrounding St. Mary's Loch at the beginning of chapter three, for example, we read that

> he was soothed for a while by lonely distances which grew more visible the higher he came. Houses, cultivation, everything human was hidden in dips between a wilderness of grey heights. [...] Nothing he now saw had changed since these hills divided Scotland from England in the historical epoch, the killing time when huge governments had split the world into nations warring for each other's property. He recalled with pride that for centuries the border clans had held aloof from England and Scotland, siding with whichever nation was too weak to tax them. But theft and murder had flourished in these rough hills too. The old ballads were full of it. [60-1]

There are several passages like this in the novel, which stress the strong historical associations of the setting [cf. e.g. pp. 15, 30, 168ff.].

This historical background suggested by the setting and constant allusions to the past (e.g. via literary or linguistic links) should in itself

be sufficient to explode the myth of the 'posthistoric' 23rd-century society. As I mentioned above, there are many additional historical references on almost every page of the book, thoroughly discrediting the idea of a period that has no need for history. In the first chapter, when the battle between the clans is described, the soldiers are compared to "a commander in a painting by Velasquez [*sic*]" [6] and readers are reminded that "the Picts made a historic stand here once." [15] At a later point Wat is pondering the thought that "[h]e would soon command the first determined army of late starters the world had seen since Cromwell's in the historical era. Then he remembered George Washington's troops—Napoleon's generals—Ulysses S. Grant—Leon Trotsky—Che Guevara. The world would be watching him with these in mind, a wonderful, fearful thought!" [97] There are further references to topics such as the history of secret societies since the earliest Christian churches [108], the French Revolution [116], Russian Communism [118], and the mentioning of "Socrates, Pericles, Voltaire, Frederick of Prussia, Pushkin, Czar Nicholas, James Kelman[60] and Margaret Thatcher" [142] etc. When it comes to the Notes and Glossary, this historical focus becomes even stronger. What is striking about these references is that they seem to be thrown in more by chance than by any overall plan or design, being often confused, ridiculous or even outrageous.[61] They resemble Sir Walter

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[60] It is typical of Gray to insert the name of his fellow Glaswegian writer and friend James Kelman into this list of illustrous historical personalities.

[61] Besides the examples already quoted, the confusion and ridicule is illustrated by a scene in which a very old grandmother orders a doll from the powerplant, which she remembers from her childhood, specifying the clothes it should have: "The dress had also been of a historical kind called *dirndl* worn by the women of Bolivia or California—that should be a clue—the dress was illustrated in a book called *Heidi Grows Up* which had been published she thought in the eighteenth or perhaps nineteenth century." [26] At other points, the references are more sinister, for example when Wat is compared to Hitler and Stalin because of his newly won position as Commander of the Ettrick clan [81], when one of the circus people is "waving in a comically threatening way a parasol shaped like a nuclear bomb cloud" [83], or when one of the commanders that accompany Wat to the circus is "Siegfried Krawinkel of the Fifth Reich"

Scott's collection of historical memorabilia at Abbotsford House much more than any clearly directed historical argument. While they show the constant presence of the past in this allegedly 'ahistorical' society, they also lay bare the insufficient engagement with this past for use in the present and as a guide for the future. A 'history maker' is certainly needed here.

It is exactly in this context that there is a 'return' to history at the plot level. Both the 'hero' Wat and the conspirators of the Puddock Plot into which he is drawn are motivated by a desire for the "bad old days" [56], to bring back history to this rational but boring Utopia. Even if this attempt is unsuccessful (in the novel at least—as I have pointed out, the original TV play did end with a rather violent 'return to history'), there is a certain throwback to (pre)historic times when the virus spread by the plotters destroys most of the powerplants. At that point "men put their military discipline into planting crops, building wind and watermills to provide local energy supplies, building and manning fishing fleets—luckily the oceans were as throng with life as in prehistoric times, since for over a century only sportsmen had fished them." [HM, 210] It is difficult to envisage this kind of development without any historical knowledge or awareness of past cultures and societies. If therefore the importance of history and the impossibility of eliminating it are built right into the story and plot of this novel, this insight also pervades a more abstract level of meaning that can be attributed to the book.

Making History Last

In fact, in many respects *A History Maker* can be seen as a prolonged meditation on the concept of history, its uses, its problems and ambiguities. Besides the examples already given above, this is most

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(the others, by the way, are "Sheer Khan of Mongolia [and] Jack Ripper of Texas") [155]. There is certainly some degree of criticism involved here, but the way in which these 'ancestors' are mentioned makes it difficult to take it seriously.

apparent in one of the Notes at the end, which starts: "Breaking the past into easily labelled sections is a habit as ancient as thought. Ways of doing so is a brief account of mankind." [195] Not by chance is this the longest of all the notes, and it proceeds to outline the different ideas of history of different epochs and peoples, divided into the following sections: PREHISTORIC folk, EGYPT AND CHINA, GREEKS AND HINDUS, ROMANS, JEWS, OFFICIAL CHRISTIANITY, THE RENAISSANCE, MARXISM, POSTMODERNISM, and MODERNISM [196-203]. This passage is significant for a number of reasons. For one, it testifies to a view of history as something that is changing, culturally and ideologically conditioned. It also stresses the close links between official history and political power. In ancient Egypt and China, we are told, for example, "the civil servants invented pictographic writing and by keeping no record of earlier times mythologized their state by teaching that the one landlord, his surveyors and tax collectors were incarnations and agents of gods who had made the universe. This meant that everybody else must serve them forever." [196] Even the Christian division of time is instrumentalised when "[i]n the fourth century after Christ the Emperor Constantine saw the political usefulness of a history which promised mankind a happy future if it left the management of the present time to landlords like himself." [198-9] This criticism becomes strongest when we reach the present (Gray's and ours, that is, not the novel's), so I will quote the entry for this period in full:

> POSTMODERNISM happened when landlords, businessmen, brokers and bankers who owned the rest of the world had used new technologies to destroy the power of labour unions. Like owners of earlier empires they felt that history had ended because they and their sort could now dominate the world for ever. This indifference to most people's wellbeing and taste appeared in the fashionable art of the wealthy. Critics called their period *postmodern* to separate it from the modern world begun by the Renaissance when most creative thinkers believed they could improve their community. Postmodernists had no interest in the future, which they expected to be an amusing rearrangement of things they already knew. Postmodernism did not survive disasters caused by "competitive exploitation of human and natural resources" in the twenty-first century. [202-3]

This significantly reiterates in large parts Gray's concerns with power structures and oppression in present-day (Western/British) society. More importantly for our purposes here, it also criticises "postmodern" notions of history. First and foremost among these, Gray openly attacks the above-mentioned "end of history" thesis, which is also ironised by the novel as a whole. He puts it in the larger context of "postmodernism", which brings to mind various other developments and theories such as I have described at the beginning of this chapter and in chapter one. As with the criticisms there, Gray's objections also seem to turn on ethical or moral issues, as the formulations "indifference to most people's wellbeing" and "competitive exploitation of human and natural resources" indicate. It is obvious from this that Gray regards history as an important part of life and that he sees a connection between developments that denigrate it and contemporary Thatcher-style neo-liberal capitalism with its emphasis on the individual rather than the community.[62] It is certainly debatable just how far this can be equated with "postmodernism" (a question to which I will soon return), but the direction of Gray's argument is clear enough. Those who are not interested in the past do not believe in the future; extreme individualism and competition will inevitably lead to disaster. This view is also expressed at other points in the novel.

Gray's plea for the ultimate importance of memory to personal and communal identity and society, quite similar to the one detected in *Poor Things* to "remember experiences/history with intelligent interest", becomes obvious, for example, in one of the science-fictional devices of the novel. There is the possibility of immortality in

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[62] The connection with Thatcherism is certainly ambiguous, since it does not so much deny history but rather instrumentalises it, as Thatcher's call for the return to "Victorian values" shows. This is also borne out by the link Delilah Puddock—Margaret Thatcher, exemplified when she talks about the "fine old English Tory days" in the novel [120]. So even if Delilah Puddock/Meg Mountbenger wants to bring back history, it is in order to "divide humanity once more into the desperate poor and selfish prosperous", so that "[a] stern military patriarchy would [...] replace mild matriarchy as a system of government." [188-9]

23rd-century society as it is described in the novel. This is meant mainly for people working in the "satellites", preparing other stars and planets for human settlement, who call themselves "neo-sapiences". There is, however, a serious drawback in choosing immortality, explained by a minor character in the novel as follows:

> [P]eople who chose immortality must prepare to live almost completely in the future. The main difference between *neo-sapience* and *proto-sapience* (that is what immortals call themselves and us) is, that the longer neo-sapiences live the more they know of their future, the longer we live the more we know of our past. [...] [M]ortals cling harder to the past as they age, so our lives have a tragic sweetness neo-sapience lacks, a painful sweetness got from memories of lost childhood, lost love, lost friends, lost opportunities, lost beauty et cetera—lost *life*, in other words. [45]

The reason for the loss of memories is a regular rejuvenation treatment that the immortals have to undergo. Wat Dryhope therefore rejects life as a neo-sapience, and Delilah Puddock alias Meg Mountbenger, who did choose this status, starts her conspiracy partly out of a desire to be near Wat, whom she remembers from her adolescence (the "rejuvenation treatment still retains an embarrassing wealth of early memories," [45] which are brought back every time the immortals rejuvenate). The implication clearly is that this "painful sweetness got from memories" is something precious, that it somehow makes life worth living. At an earlier point in the novel Wat even spells it out clearly: "Our memories are our character" [38].[63] This is again in opposition to 'postmodern' notions of history, as Stephen Bernstein writes: "[I]t is postmodernists of his own day that Gray to

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[63] There is also a lengthy note to be found in the Glossary about the development of immortality and the rejuvenation treatment. This reinforces the negative impression by talking about the initial stages of the discovery: "Since the businessmen and scientists who financed and discovered this process valued information more than sensed experience they embraced the treatment but kept it secret." The note ends: "Since fear of death is an obvious sign of an unsatisfying life few nowadays want their bodies to exist forever." [HM, 177]

some degree has in mind in his portrait of the neo-sapiences [...]. With their virtual memories copies for which there are no originals, the neo-sapiences are consumers of Baudrillardian simulacra." [Bernstein 1999, 144] According to him, Meg/Delilah can be seen as "the living embodiment of several of Fredric Jameson's earmarks of the postmodern, with its 'pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces 'real' history'" [ibid., 145].[64] The preservation of 'real' history in this sense can therefore be regarded as one of Gray's priorities.

This is further underlined by the connection that is implied in the novel between this task of preserving the cultural memory and writing or literature. Most obviously, the reader of *A History Maker* is only able to learn about the story because (as the novel has it) Wat has written it down and his mother Kate Dryhope, alias Kittock the henwife, has edited and published it. Besides this apparent link there are other connections within the novel. From the beginning of Wat's narrative, he is presented as somebody who reads (history) books, which is rather extraordinary in 23rd-century society, as it is depicted here. Before the initial battle, the leader of the clan addresses him as follows: "You are our thinker Wat—you read history books" [8]. It is implied that he therefore will be able to judge the situation best (even if his suggestion not to fight is then ignored—which is an indication of the nationalist-militaristic attitudes of the clan leader and many of the warriors). Later on, when he asks one of the mothers for a history book (which can be "synthesised" by the powerplants), he is given the choice: "The foundation of Israel, A.D. or B.C.? [...] The rise of Islam? Children's Crusade? Peasants' Revolt? French Revolution? More books have been written about each than there are brands of

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[64] Jameson and especially Baudrillard are among the more controversial of the postmodern theorists, as I have pointed out (the quote here is from Jameson's *Postmodernism*, 20). Baudrillard is often explicitly connected to the relativist end of the postmodern theoretical spectrum, which makes Gray's criticism more plausible—whether it is intentionally directed at Baudrillard or not is another matter. I will come back to criticism of Baudrillard below, and to questions of Gray's more general criticism of postmodernism in the next chapter.

alcohol." [28] Collective memory of the past still seems to lie with books, even in this technologically advanced society. When Wat cannot decide which book to read (he wants one about a "period of excitement when folk thought they were making a better world" [ibid.]), *Ten Days That Shook the World* is suggested to him, which he chooses.[65]

Significantly, it is Kittock the henwife who makes the suggestion—"without lifting her eyes from the novel on her lap." [ibid.] She is an important character in the novel, not only because she is the "hero's mother" and editor of the "manuscript", but because she is at the centre of a kind of counter-culture in this future society, one that has to do with books, reading and the preservation of the past. It is therefore not by chance that the last chapter of Wat's narration is mainly about her and is called "The Henwife" [122-156]. She does not live with the others in one of the matriarchal households, but on her own in an old tower (Dryhope Tower) by the lochside—she lives virtually 'in the past', so to speak.[66] The tower is in fact a big library where "[f]rom floor to ceiling the walls were hidden by shelves packed with every size of book, some in good condition but most appearing to have been often read by people with dirty hands." [136]

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[65] John Reid's account of the Russian Revolution, published in 1919, is an interesting choice. One could certainly relate it to Gray's socialist ideas, but the connection to the totalitarian regime that later developed in the Soviet Union makes it rather suspect, on the other hand. It can probably be seen as one more of Gray's many ambiguities. Cf. also the note on "Marxism" in the Glossary, which ends as follows: "In 1914 an inbred clique of owners who had inherited the Russian Empire went to war. They commanded a vast, obedient, conscripted people but could not give them enough food, boots and bullets to defeat smaller armies of industrially efficient neighbours. This caused a workers' revolt. A clique of middle-class Marxists rushed back to Russia and seized control in the name of World Communism. The new clique created a party dictatorship which died of broken promises before the end of the century" [HM, 202].

[66] This impression is reinforced by a note at the end which links her to European folklore in general and to "[a] fifteenth-century Scottish poet (sometimes thought to be Dunbar)" in particular [168].

The "people with dirty hands" referred to here are the "gangrels", a class of outsiders (just as Kittock, and also Wat and Meg) who are described by Kittock as follows:

> Their lives are short but never dreich because they see more than settled folk—they can only feed and keep warm by seeing more. They have added reading to their old skills of song and story-telling. Some are still Christians—it adds zest to their swearing. Most are fiercely monogamous and often unfaithful. They need no powerplants and telecoms because the world is their house. [137]

This is the counter-culture within 23rd-century society that still holds up the values of reading, face-to-face communication and monogamy. They seem to embody some kind of historical principle in the novel, which is also reinforced by one of the notes at the end. It refers to the first mentioning of gangrels in the text and starts: "*gangrels* = tinkers, tramps, vagabonds, vagrants, gipsies, nomads of no fixed abode. The earliest kind of humanity were of this sort and wandered around the land for millennia in small family groups, improvising tools and shelter, gathering and consuming their food as they went." [162] The reference to the beginning of humanity seems significant, making the gangrels the symbol of continuity, of a connection to earlier ages, in some ways of history itself. At the end of the note quoted here, their position as the powerless, oppressed of society (the "poor things" that are so often Gray's real champions) is stressed:

> Governments of the historical era who wanted to distract public attention from their greed or uselessness usually went to war, but when war with outsiders seemed too dangerous or expensive they declared war on a part of those they ruled, and for at least two thousand years Jews and gangrels were the traditional victims. [...] At the start of the twenty-first century for every tramp, gipsy, tinker or vagrant who liked the life there were a dozen too poor to rent a home and twice as many migrants in temporary accommodation where employers used them to cheapen the wages of settled workers. Before homes became self-supporting and the commons were restored to everyone most people became travellers after forced eviction. [163-4]

This clearly establishes the group as a community that Gray sympathises with, embodying the values he is most concerned with. It is not surprising, therefore, that all the main protagonists of the novel are connected to the gangrels in some way. Kittock says at one point "I am the henwife because I'm too selfish to be a housewife, too feart to be a gangrel. We should all be gangrels." [136] She is an enthusiastic reader and collector of books, provides shelter to the gangrels in her tower, entertains them, has long discussions with them and lets them sleep in her bed. Both Wat and Meg become gangrels at the end (if we are to believe the "Postscript by a student of folklore"), and they are also both book lovers and have a longing for the "old days".

The gangrels can indeed be seen as the meeting point of two important concerns in the novel: the socio-political issue on the one hand and the historical theme on the other. It is certainly no coincidence that the central passage about the different concepts of history in different political systems and societies quoted above comes precisely in a note which refers to the conversation of the gangrels at Kittock's tower (Wat being there as a child). They discuss "whether ten thousand years of civilization should be called The Dark Ages because of their greed and cruelty, or The Middle Ages because they had achieved some splendid things." [142] The symbolism of the gangrels and Dryhope Tower is also discussed by Stephen Bernstein in a similar context when he writes:

> Kittock and the gangrels are the only characters in the novel who seem able to use the past for anything other than a form of escape, and their ability to do so is significantly linked to reading. [...] The tower offers that familiar mainstay of enlightenment in Gray's novels, elevated perspective, [...] [and symbolises] the literate values of accumulated knowledge. [Bernstein 1999, 146]

He goes on to state that "the philosophical debates that the tower hosts [are] predictably concerned with historical consciousness" and that "[w]hat is at stake in Gray's portraits of Kittock and of Dryhope Tower is a kind of cultural memory, one that Gray suggests is far better preserved through books and, importantly, the critical awareness necessary for the interpretation and discussion of books, than through infinite quantities of digitally stored information." [ibid.,

147-8] This plea for the role of literature, writers and readers for cultural memory is certainly one of the most important insights to be gained from Gray's novel in the context of the topic of this chapter. Linking this back to the more general debates about the issue, it becomes clear that while the connection between history and literature, fact and fiction is constantly highlighted it is not implied that they are interchangeable or that no truth is to be found in either of them. The focus is rather on the vital role that literature has to play in preserving history, "making" it in many ways, and passing it on to other generations.[67]

This emphasis on books/literature as the guardians of history rather than other media leads to another aspect highlighted in the novel: the role (electronic) media and more generally propaganda can play in the representation of history. I have already briefly mentioned the media critique implicit in the device of the so-called "public eye". This is also significant in the context of representing history, I would argue. One indication of how far the society described in the novel is influenced by the media is that several times television is invoked as a point of reference for measuring time itself, e.g.: "since the dawn of television" [32] or "to the last days of [...] television" [10]. At several points, history is indeed "made" by the public eye or the media more generally. This is obvious from the outset, since the first chapter—significantly entitled "Public Eye"—starts with a description of the public eye and continues with the 'historic' battle between the clans of Ettrick and Northumbria, as it is presented by it. Very quickly the reader realises that this 'war' is televised as a sports event, complete with clan emblems ("the Milburn football, the Storey pencil, the Dodds thunderbolt, the Shafto buckle, the Charlton winged boot" [3]), commentators (with remarks like: "Four minutes from now the massacre of the decade begins [...] The day is mild and dry, visibility good, the ground in fine condition."[13]), umpire and "bell for end of play" [18]. The connection to televised warfare in the late twentieth

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[67] It is exactly in this context that we can view Gray's latest major work, *The Book of Prefaces* (2000). For a short discussion of its approach to history cf. the conclusion of this chapter below.

century, most notably the (first) Gulf War, can easily be drawn. This issue is discussed at some length in Eilidh Whiteford's study on Alasdair Gray's work, in which she writes that "Gray [...] questions the ease with which the discourses of television documentary acquire cultural authority and can construct 'authentic' histories relatively unchallenged." [Whiteford 1997, 219] With that, she also sees him engaging in 'postmodern' debates about the fabrication of 'facts' and history that surrounded the Gulf War, mentioning Baudrillard and Christopher Norris. In reference to the latter's book *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War* (1992), she states that he

> uses the debate around media representations of the Gulf War to challenge the theoretical frameworks within which the distinction between epistemological representations and ontological events can be blurred to such an extent that it is impossible to determine any 'facts' at all. Norris rejects any notion that all historical narratives are relative and have an equal claim to truth. [ibid., 221]

With this, we are right in the middle of the debates that we have started from at the beginning of this chapter (Whiteford is also drawing parallels between the "public eye" and Foucault's concept of "the gaze", by the way). Once again, Gray can be seen to look for a position between the extremes, on the one hand emphasising the extent to which history is 'made' by the public eye[68] but on the other hand leaving no doubt about the "underlying ideological critique [...] of a particularly restrictive method of constructing historical discourse" [ibid., 224]. Instead, he stresses the alternatives of reading and discussing history, which will enable different views to be heard and weighed against each other, possibly but not necessarily leading to some sort of synthesis.

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[68] Whiteford quotes the warning that Wat is given in the original screenplay: "If you frighten the televisors, they won't screen the battle; nobody will see us fight so we might as well not fight at all" [222].

This objection to simplifying, one-dimensional explanations or discourses[69] and the plea for complexity and also ambiguity that we have found to be so important for Gray's writing seems to be especially significant in the field of history. History simply cannot be pressed into a neat linear explanatory narration, let alone be deliberately influenced or 'made', as the novel makes clear. As Bernstein writes, "Gray emphatically holds that no one can foresee the consequences of determined efforts to chart the course of history. [...] [He] show[s] history as the more powerful actor." [Bernstein 1999, 150-1] This is also reminiscent of contemporary developments in historical theory among (British) historians, where the traditional (nineteenth-century/Whig) interpretation of history as continuous improvement culminating in the present has been discredited and replaced by a new emphasis on "contingency" and a variety of social, economic and cultural factors that influence history and make a clear and uncontradictory picture or narration of the past almost impossible.[70] However, there certainly is a big difference between this and attempts to deny the validity of history as a whole or even the existence of historical facts, and my investigation of *A History Maker*

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[69] Another example of this from *A History Maker*, showing that Gray's criticism is not solely directed against the media but generally against contradiction-free, 'progressive' (historical) discourses, is the "evolutionary opera" performed by the circus at the end of the novel, which invokes the whole of history, presenting the Battle of the Ettrick Standard as its apogee [cf. pp. 128-9 + 207].

[70] For some examples of this development cf. the introductions to Hugh Kearney's *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (1989); Norman Davies's *The Isles. A History* (1999) or A. Grant/K.J. Stringer, eds., *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (1995). A field where the discussion about different possibilities of interpreting the past is particularly relevant is of course the history of the British Empire. For views on this see the introductions (and some of the conclusions) to *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire*, ed. P.J. Marshall (1996), Denis Judd's *Empire: The British Imperial Experience, from 1765 to the Present* (1996), Frank McDonough's *The British Empire, 1815-1914* (1994), and the fifth volume of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. R.W. Winks (1999).

should have made it clear that for Gray history is indeed one of the defining aspects of humanity.

Conclusion: Gray's HiStories

It is interesting to note, at this point, that the views outlined above on the connection between literature and history usually associated with postmodern developments, as well as the emphasis on the role history should play in and for the present—in other words, the 'middle way' in the debate that seems to be propagated in Gray's work—can already be found in surprisingly similar form in the historical writings and essays of—precisely—Thomas Carlyle. John D. Rosenberg writes in his study *Carlyle and the Burden of History*[71]: "History, as Carlyle understood it, is poetry, prophecy, biography, and social criticism—all in one" [vii] and uses the term "historical imagination":

> The phrase historical imagination contains a seeming contradiction: *history* suggests a narrative of facts and *imagination* the invention of fictions. But for Carlyle the contrary of history is not fiction but oblivion, the unravelling of the collective human memory that holds civilization together. History is not a record of civilization; it is civilization itself, the past speaking to the present and to the future through the voice of the historian. Without animating voices, we would have no history—only gibberish and unmarked graves. [15]
>
> 'Narrative is *linear*, Action is *solid*': Carlyle's aphorism neatly poses the dilemma facing the writer of all narrative, whether historical or fictional: how to depict beginnings and endings, or even coherent middles, when discrete beginnings and endings are chimeras of the mind and continuity itself is inherently resistant to verbal representation. The *French*

[71] Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. I am grateful to Heiko Weißbach for directing my attention to this book.

> *Revolution* marks an epoch in the development of 19th-century narrative if only because it articulates these limitations so sharply [...] [46]

This is indeed more than reminiscent of the theories of Hayden White, for example. More significantly, it also seems to mirror Alasdair Gray's views on the concept of history. The statement that "[h]istory is [...] civilization itself, the past speaking to the present and to the future through the voice of the historian [or the writer, for that matter]" brings to mind my discussion of his novel *A History Maker* above. In some ways, it is therefore not too surprising that Gray has referred to Carlyle as his favourite historian.[72]

Carlyle is also referred to in Gray's political pamphlet *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland 1997*,[73] where he says about his *French Revolution*: "Like all histories (especially this one) it evoked the past to explain the present." [p. 70] This pamphlet is itself a history written to explain the present, which makes it particularly interesting in the context of this chapter. With this small work Gray has in a way completed the role swap from creative writer to historian that he speaks about in the introduction to *Poor Things* (interestingly, the first edition of the pamphlet was in fact published in the same year as the novel), and has written "A Carnaptious History of Britain from Roman Times until Now", as the subtitle has it. The ironic qualifying adjective "carnaptious" (Scots for "irritable, quarrelsome", according to *The Concise Scots Dictionary*) clearly signals its polemical

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[72] In a personal interview with the author on 12 February 1998. It must be stressed, however, that Carlyle's (later) views about the role of heroic leaders in history are in opposition to Gray's 'democratic history'. However, Gray has inherited something of a preacher's tone as well as Carlyle's admiration for some aspects of the Middle Ages, in particular.

[73] There are two editions of this pamphlet that differ significantly: the one written for the general election of 1997 mentioned here, and an earlier version simply called *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland*, written for the general election of 1992. I will only refer to the more recent edition in this study.

character. It is Gray's account[74] of the whole of the Scottish past, and especially the history of its involvement with England, meant to serve as an argument for the present need to be independent from England. Once again, the 'democratic' aspect is a strong presence, for example when the fourteenth-century Declaration of Arbroath is mentioned: "It is easy to sentimentalize over the Declaration of Arbroath, but as a legal document signed by representatives of the Scottish community it is as revolutionary as the American Declaration of Independence. [...] [It] meant that the ultimate owners of the Scottish *land* were the people living there." [22] And: "[T]he common people also enjoyed some of the freedom asserted in the Declaration of Arbroath." [24] Gray significantly sees a proof of the democratic nature of medieval Scotland in the flowering of literature at the time: "[M]any things must have combined to let this turbulent little nation add a wealth of imaginative poetry to European literature: but nobody who has read some of that literature can doubt that a freedom of thought and speech linking every social rank was the most important." [25-6] This emphasis on the community comprising every social rank and linked by a freedom of thought and speech that is expressed especially in its literature runs through the argument of this history and can be regarded as Gray's contribution to explaining his present, to making sense of history. It is revealing, therefore, to see how closely this pamphlet resembles passages from the novels which I have analysed in this chapter. In all three works we found condensed accounts of long historical processes used as arguments for a specific (usually political or moral/ethical) agenda: in *Lanark* it was Monboddo's speech to the Council (note that in this case we even find the frequent interruptions that also characterise *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland*), in *Poor Things* it was (parts of) Harry Astley's "bitter wisdom" and in *A History Maker* it was the "brief account of mankind" provided in the notes.

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[74] This account is frequently interrupted by the "publisher" who "asked down-to-earth questions when I lost myself in too many details or rhetorical flights", as Gray puts it in the introduction [WS, ix].

Why Scots Should Rule Scotland 1997 therefore more than reinforces Stephen Bernstein's statement that "history comes more and more to occupy the centre of Gray's concerns". This has proved even truer since, as the year 2000 eventually saw the publication of Gray's long-awaited *Book of Prefaces*, a massive compilation of prefaces to (mostly literary) works in English through the centuries with notes and glosses (mainly) by Gray. It is announced on the title page as "A Short History of Literate Thought in Words by Great Writers Of Four Nations From The 7th To The 20th Century". This is obviously another expression of Gray's fascination with (literary) history that we have seen at work in his novels in this chapter. The way he approaches the task is again familiar, as we can read in the "Editor's Advertisement" under the heading "The Pleasure of History":

> Great literature is the most important part of history. We forget this because we are inclined to see great works as worlds of their own rather than phases of the world shared by everyone. [...] It is very hard to imagine a passage of history in any solidity and fluidity for more than a few years, even when we have lived through it. But we may get some experience of a civilization over several centuries from extracts which let us see, on adjacent pages, language changing from decade to decade in words of authors who usually know they are changing it. The taste, rhythm and meaning of a statement is the taste, rhythm and meaning of life when it was uttered. [BP, 9-10]

We also find another condensed account of history from the earliest times of humanity to the seventh century in the introductory essay called "On What Led To English Literature" (which is continued through to the twentieth century in the glosses accompanying the texts as well as eight more introductory essays), this time in order to show developments leading to or influencing literature in English. It is structured by the big questions "Who am I? How did I come here? What should I do? Where am I going?" [21] and Gray says about these: "All ways of life—skills, arts, faiths, traditions, customs, laws, politics, sciences—answer these questions. History is a summary of replies to them." [ibid.] In his initial essay Gray summarises the summary, as it were, in sections such as JERUSALEM, ATHENS, ROME, CHRISTIANITY, BRITAIN, and THE ENGLISH. Once

again, his special interests and concerns are visible, for example in the passage on Athens: "Greek literature shows a multitude of ideas, equally valid but often in conflict. These produce the tragedy and comedy of Greek drama, the fair-mindedness of history books which explain their enemies' viewpoint, the balance of Plato's dialogues and scope of Aristotle's lectures." [27] This praise of complexity and multiple perspectives is predictably again accompanied by the concern for the "poor things", e.g. in the following quote from the section on Rome: "Like all deep thinkers on human history Virgil was more disturbed by the sufferings of the defeated than dazzled by splendid winners." [30] *The Book of Prefaces* therefore serves as a vindication of my findings in this chapter, testifying to Gray's intense interest in history[75] as well as showing his particular concerns in using or writing it.

This chapter has shown, like the preceding one, that Gray's work is certainly illuminated by putting it in the context of broader theoretical debates, in this case the question of history and its relations to culture and literature. One aspect which I have found to be of major importance in both the theoretical debate and Gray's novels is the complexity of history, its integration in various cultural and ideological contexts that make a value-free, objective and disinterested 'master narrative' impossible as well as undesirable. This leads to the recognition of the necessity of providing multiple perspectives on (historical) phenomena in order to achieve a balanced, if not wholly objective view: an emphasis on histories rather than History. This was clearly one of Gray's aims in the three novels discussed here, from the fractured (auto)biography of

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[75] If more proof was needed, a look at the prefaces contained in the book should be sufficient: they include the ones from Bede's *Church History of the English*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *Boece's Chronicles*, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Raleigh's *The History of the World*, Pepys's *Diary*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*, Carlyle's *Past and Present*, Macaulay's *History of England*, and Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*, among many others.

Thaw/Lanark/Gray in *Lanark* through the competing discourses of *Poor Things* to the more antiquarian approach to history in *A History Maker*. This emphasises and at the same time blurs the borderline between histories and stories, between the historical and the literary, which we have seen to be in the centre of interest of theoreticians such as Hayden White or Linda Hutcheon. I have shown that in all three novels Gray explicitly addresses this issue, highlighting the degree to which history and literature overlap, and the importance of strategies of writing and (political) agendas for both these domains.

This "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" is exactly what characterises historiographic metafiction, according to Linda Hutcheon. Gray's novels clearly "question traditional assumptions about history and, in doing so, consider history's relation to concepts such as 'truth,' meaning, and subjectivity", as Alison Lee writes about historiographic metafiction in general [Lee 1990, 79]. This sort of literature certainly exemplifies the challenge to 'realist' assumptions of true, objective and coherent history which is to be observed in postmodernism. The alternative of recognising complexity and ambiguity is seen as an important insight and in many ways the more sophisticated approach, as Jeremy Hawthorn points out in reference to Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*:

> The endless play of mutually exclusive possibilities [...] is, then, for the reader who accepts his or her imprisonment within the world of the fiction, not something by which he or she is expected to become frustrated. On the contrary, as we travel the endless loop of alternative interpretations [...], we should remind ourselves that our ability to maintain such an endless hesitation between alternatives *guarantees our gentility*. We are doing what the vulgar cannot [...]. [Hawthorn 1996, 224]

This is clearly borne out by my analysis of Gray's historiographic metafictions. However, as I have pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, an endless play of mutually exclusive possibilities or endless hesitation along these lines also involves the danger of ultimate relativism. I have stressed the necessity of finding a middle way between these extremes, in keeping with the balanced position in the postmodernism debate in general. It should have emerged from this

chapter that concerning the concept of history Alasdair Gray is neither a naive 'realist' nor a radical constructivist or relativist. While illustrating the complexity and ambiguity of history, the three novels we have looked at clearly demonstrate its ultimate importance for the present and future, for personal as well as national identity, thus stopping well short of the more extreme views held by some theoreticians and scholars (such as those propagating the "end of history" thesis). It is not surprising to find that this compromise is again largely motivated by political as well as moral and ethical considerations, since I have hinted at the ultimate importance of questions of political power and ideology at the very beginning of this chapter and we have also seen their status for Gray in the preceding chapter.

The honest autobiographical picture that emerges in spite or maybe because of the 'double perspective' adopted in *Lanark*, the concern with issues of gender, class and imperialism as well as the Scottish/Glaswegian dimension that are clearly visible in the middle of the competing discourses of *Poor Things*, the serious meditations on the need for history and the role of literature and writing in preserving it glimpsed among the plethora of historical allusions in *A History Maker*—all of this is clearly underwritten by Gray's political and ethical concerns. What consequently emerges from our investigations of the concept of history in his work is his personal idea of what could be termed 'democratic' history, implicit in the words of Jock McLeish at the end of *1982 Janine*: "I had been taught that history was made in a few important places by a few important people who manufactured it for the good of the rest. But the Famous Few have no power now but the power to threaten and destroy and history is what we all make, everywhere, each moment of our lives, whether we notice it or not." [J, 340] The ordinary people are the driving force of history, they are the real "history makers", no matter what the latest theories say.[76] Likewise, at the end of *Lanark*, the little hope that

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[76] This is clearly where Gray differs from Carlyle's views. Indeed, it seems that it is exactly his (Carlyle's) ideas which Gray "had been taught" and is here reacting against.

remains in its otherwise rather dark vision is personified in Lanark's son Alexander, who thinks that "[t]he world is only improved by people who do ordinary jobs and refuse to be bullied." [L, 554] Similarly, it is the "poor things" who are in the centre of the (hi)story in the novel of that title, just as the real "history makers" are the women,—Kittock the henwife, the mothers and grandmothers—rather than the "hero" Wat Dryhope in Gray's latest novel.

This idea of 'democratic' history, emphasising the role of the ordinary people in history, as well as the importance of moral and ethical considerations is also mirrored in the work of many historians and scholars today, who look for the middle ground in the contemporary debate, for a balanced view between the extremes. This is witnessed by the growing interest in social, cultural and "everyday" histories, as well as by more general statements such as the following by Paul Hamilton that "to strive for a just estimation of or undistorted communication with the past is simultaneously to believe that the present can be significantly altered for the better." [Hamilton 1996, 5-6] Steven Earnshaw, too, hints at the potentially subversive political role of memory/history when he states—referring to Milan Kundera's novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*—that "politics is a constant, selective forgetfulness, or, as the character Mirek in the book says, 'the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting'." [Earnshaw 1996, 78] This link between memory/history and the struggle against power is surely implied—even spelled out clearly—in Gray's work.[77] This highlights again how strongly his writing is influenced by his political and ethical views, which we have seen in this and the preceding chapter to inform his treatment of science, ideology and society as well as history. I will finally turn to the question of how these views may problematise the

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[77] It is an almost uncanny coincidence that the same Kundera quote also serves as a motto for the book of Glasgow poems by Jack Withers to which Gray has written the introduction [cf. Gray 1993b], especially because it is in this introduction that Gray "provides the most eloquent, succinct presentation I've seen of his own Scottish Socialist position and where it comes from", as Angus Calder writes [Calder 2000, 3].

connection to postmodernism which was my starting point and has been underlying my discussion of science fiction and history in Gray's work.

Chapter Five: Postmodern Problems

In the preceding two chapters, I have analysed Alasdair Gray's fiction from the perspective of the science-fiction genre and the treatment of history respectively. This has allowed me to study the three novels I am interested in from a variety of angles and in some depth, leading to an appreciation of different 'shades of Gray' (in more than one sense, I hope), concerning above all his literary, political and moral values and priorities. In the course of this investigation several connections have suggested themselves to the theoretical background outlined in chapter one, some of them overtly, others more implicitly. Gray's political, moral and ethical position itself—his personal 'philosophy'—can arguably be seen as the most significant of these. However, while the 'postmodern' quality of his writing (in several respects) has been established, this philosophy seems to sit more uneasily with the concept. This might be one reason for the curious discrepancy between Gray's reputation as a 'postmodernist' and the almost total refusal by himself and many (Scottish) critics to accept this label or to even take it seriously. Therefore, this problematisation needs to be addressed in order to appreciate the many 'shades' of Gray's 'peculiar postmodernism'.

Anti-Postmodernism

Gray's fellow Glaswegian writer Janice Galloway, in an article on Gray's writing, once fiercely attacked literary critics for connecting his work with postmodernism, calling this "self-referential twaddle [...] about Alasdair's 'postmodern postmodernity,' the irritable textbook analyses of his techniques and evasions (few of which ever have the grace to acknowledge the irritability of their authors is often Alasdair's work simply doing what it's supposed to do, i.e., confounding pigeonholing as much as possible)" [Galloway 1995, 194]. Apart from the fact that this statement itself is fairly simplistic

(as far as "postmodern postmodernity" is concerned[1]) and ignores the more perceptive analyses of Gray's work, the question must be faced as to why there is such a strong opposition to the view of his work as 'postmodern'. There is no question that Gray's writing does indeed "confound pigeonholing", probably including that of 'postmodernist'. Thus, while I have shown both the *literary* postmodernism as well as several parallels to postmodern *theories* in his work above (enough proof, I would argue, to call him a postmodern writer), it is necessary to engage with some possible 'counter-discourses' to that interpretation, in order to achieve a balanced and comprehensive understanding of Gray's ambiguous place in the postmodern context.

The biggest complication to any consideration of Gray's work as postmodern is doubtlessly his own intense dislike of the label. I have earlier quoted the passage on postmodernism from *A History Maker*, where this was already apparent. There are several points in other works of his where postmodernism is commented on in a similar vein. In *Something Leather*, the fashionable artist Harry Shetland enjoys a lot of publicity in glossy magazines, including

> Theoretical twaddle about her place in the history of British art. "Aren't you sick of being a Post-Modernist?" asks a man from the colour supplement of a Sunday newspaper. He is famous for his articles on artistic topics because he refers knowingly to famous foreigners in a way suggesting that no intelligent Briton need bother with them. [...] He says, "Listen!

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[1] It is interesting, and indicative of the confusions surrounding postmodernism, that Galloway uses this strange term "postmodern postmodern*ity*" (even if it is meant satirically) and then goes on to link it to "establishment analysis", "objective (i.e., masculinist) discourse", "established notions of 'significance' or 'importance'" and "mainstream literary techniques" [ibid.]—all of which seems to be almost diametrically opposed to what most commentators would identify with 'postmodernism'. Significantly, she contrasts this with "feminist analysis, analysis more properly designed to read in ways more inclusive of what may well be non- or antiestablishment priorities" [ibid.]—to her, this is evidently the antithesis of postmodernism. In my interpretation here, it is in fact very close to the 'balanced view' of postmodernism.

> The last truly great modern artists had reached maturity when you wa still a kid. [...] Do you neva envy these truly creative artists?"—"No."—"But to most people nowadays the new things in the galleries look like doodling! They add very little beauty or intelligence to the places wha they appia, none at all to those who see them. Does it occur to you that yaw art may be a game played for nobody's plesha but yaw own? Like doodling. Or mastabation."—"Yes."—"Does it occur to you often or only when yaw depressed?" Harry says slowly, "It occured to me when you asked me about it." [SL, 145-6]

Although this is another of Gray's very funny satirical broadsides, there is a serious criticism being levelled here. The attitude of the journalist—which, of course, is not necessarily Gray's (the mocking transcription of his 'posh' English accent, for one, clearly distances the reader from this character)—is one that is found quite frequently where postmodern art is concerned. The criticism of this kind of art (Harry's most famous exhibit is going to be the "bum garden") becomes more significant when seen in the context of the structure of the whole novel, where Harry becomes the symbol of the oppressive, capitalist section of society.

This criticism of postmodernism as part and profiteer of globalised mass culture is in fact one often made by its opponents, frequently with reference to the work of Fredric Jameson. It should be clear already that Gray has a strong antipathy to the whole concept. At other points he has admitted a confusion as to what it actually means: "For several years I have been perplexed by the adjective *post-modern*, especially when applied to my own writing, but have now decided it is an academic substitute for *contemporary* or *fashionable*. Its prefix honestly announces it as a specimen of intellectual afterbirth" [MB, 152-3][2] This, while making a valid criticism of some writings which have been called postmodern, is certainly not true for the more serious

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[2] This passage comes in another of Gray's epilogues, this time the seven-page Epilogue to the three-page story "Edison's Tractatus". It also contains more of Gray's 'propaganda' about the development and present state of Britain. [MB, 146-56]

and perceptive studies. Gray's following statement shows a similarly limited understanding of what postmodernism might mean: "I have never found a definition of postmodernism that gives me a distinct idea of it. If the main characteristic is an author who describes himself as a character in his work, then Dante, Chaucer, Langland, and Wordsworth are as postmodern as James Joyce, who is merely modern." [Axelrod 1995b, 111] Although the 'intrusive author' is certainly a standard device of postmodern literature and often highlighted in criticism (especially in Gray's case—cf. e.g. Todd 1990), it is only one of a variety of *literary* techniques, very far from being the "main characteristic" of postmodernism in general. What Gray is reacting against seems to me rather close to what I have called 'vulgar' postmodernism, the simplistic, 'anything goes' brand of relativistic nihilism that is also under attack in the more theoretical debates (cf. Eagleton 1996, for example).[3] In both cases, the criticism is necessary and right, but it must not be extended to all and everything which uses the term without at the same time paying attention to the theories and ideas applied in any single case.

This kind of oversimplification, together with a rather venomous dislike of postmodernism is far from being an exception, however. In a recent review of *The Book of Prefaces*, for example, Angus Calder writes in reference to some "blips and certain incautious generalisations" in the book:

> Unpleasant right-wing people may attempt to use them to discredit the entire venture. Worse still, persons of postmodernist and postcolonial theoretical persuasions may actually extol what might be misconstrued as an arbitrary indifference to fact. Watch this space. [...] [S]ome steroid-

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[3] Eilidh Whiteford, arguing for the relevance of postmodernism to Gray's writing, makes a similar point (after quoting the passage from "Edison's *Tractatus*"): "Gray's view seems rather polemical and simplistic compared to the views of theorists of postmodernism" [1997, 24] and (after quoting the passage from *A History Maker*): "Gray's reluctance to have his work labelled postmodernist may be based on a rather one-dimensional view of postmodernism." [ibid., 26]

> powered theorist in Yale (or Rattlesnake) is no doubt already deep into the argument that *The Book of Prefaces* is actually a work of postmodernist fiction. The worst thing about this kind of rubbish is that its perpetrators think they are on to something new. As Alasdair says *A Propos De Tristram Shandy*, Laurence Sterne, in 1760, used 'every device that late 20th century critics label post-modernist'. [Calder 2000, 9]

This might be a nice piece of polemic, but its idea of postmodernism is equally as limited and confused as Gray's (it would be very difficult, for one, to find a whole movement of writers using Sterne's techniques in 1760). What is conspicuous, however, is the aggressive tone against postmodernism, and I would hold that this is not at all untypical, especially in a Scottish context. Other examples are Galloway's statement quoted above or Hanne Tange's in her "Reflections on the Contemporary Scottish Novel": "Too busy with one's own mind to care about a degenerating civilisation, too preoccupied with one's own intellect to bother about the here and the now. Such is the nature of much of the contemporary, so-called postmodern fiction, and that may explain why the Scots seem so different [...], why Scottish writers refuse postmodernity" [Tange 2000, 16]. Apart from the rather outrageous claim that much of postmodern fiction is not concerned with the here and now, and the slightly nationalistic assertion that the Scots are different (although Tange is in fact Danish) and refuse postmodern*ity* (!), it is again the tone that is striking. We certainly need to look for the reasons for this resentment (and its special acrimony in the Scottish context) in the following.

While it would be easy (as well as unfair) to simply ignore these criticisms by pointing out that they do not engage with what I consider as 'real' postmodernism, it is much more productive to pay closer attention to what they actually criticise, both because they are fairly numerous and often strongly opinionated—as the examples above illustrate—and because they can highlight significant complications that do exist also within the ideas of what I have called 'serious' postmodernism.

When I asked Gray whether he was interested in and/or influenced by ongoing debates about 'postmodernism' and related theories, his answer was a clear

> No. All postmodernist debates and criticism I have encountered devoted so much energy to defining what post-modernism was that they had no time to illuminate anything else. [...] The 19th century method of dividing artists into Classic, Romantic or Realist was inspired by the artists themselves. Cubists, Dadaists, Surrealists, named and formed their own schools. Post Modernism [*sic*] seems the creation of scholars acquiring a territory to lecture upon. [letter to the author, 31 Dec 1997; cf. also the Epilogue]

There are several serious points to be considered here: first, the criticism of excessive defining and (implicitly) theorising. Gray certainly hits his target there. As I have illustrated in chapter one, the whole debate is debilitated by the very problem of definition and also very often by its nearly incomprehensible jargon. I myself am certainly not innocent of excessive explanations of some of the issues involved. On the other hand, exactly because of this problem of definition and the multiple usages of the term, an explanation of one's own understanding of the concept as well as one's position within the theoretical landscape is vital. It may also be that difficult and complex questions sometimes necessitate a complex argument and language. However, this problem is certainly real. It is linked to an obvious resentment on Gray's part of the powerful position of literary critics and their growing occupation of the terrain of literature. He implies that it should properly be left to the writers and their readers (a point echoed in Galloway's text, where she capitalises the sentences "IT'S NOT CRITICISM THAT MATTERS, IT'S THE WORK ITSELF. IT'S NOT CRITICS THAT MATTER BUT READERS." [Galloway 1995, 194]).

This leads into the complicated terrain of the relation of literary criticism and theory to literature itself and to the book market, which is certainly ambiguous in the context of postmodernism and maybe even more so in the case of Gray's work. It has often been remarked, for example, that in postmodernism the boundaries between theory and literature become fluid (which somehow contradicts Gray's

statement), the two becoming closely intertwined.[4] Thus Linda Hutcheon writes: "Recently critics have begun to notice the similarities of concern between various kinds of theory and current literary discourse" [1988, 15] However, she also notices that a lot of theorizing on postmodernism (her example is an article by Terry Eagleton) "separates practice and theory, choosing to argue primarily in abstract theoretical terms and almost seeming deliberately to avoid mention of exactly what kind of aesthetic practice is actually being talked about. This strategy, however clever and certainly convenient, leads only to endless confusion." [ibid., 18] It is certainly the latter approach (which Hutcheon goes on to call "the dangers of separating neat theory from messy practice" [19]), and its regrettably frequent application, that is the problem and which leads to the strong reactions I have quoted. However, Gray's own relation to academicism and literary theory is also rather ambiguous. We have seen how much he enjoys playing with the conventions of literary criticism. In fact, he also enjoys reading it, as he has told Eilidh Whiteford: "criticism is the light reading I most enjoy. I really *enjoy* Leavis" [Whiteford 1997, 20-1] (One could be forgiven for suspecting a slight irony in that "light", however.) His work has been shown to be sometimes influenced fairly directly by literary criticism. Thus *Lanark* owes a debt to E.M.W. Tillyard's *The English Epic and Its Background*, and the device of writing a novel from a woman's viewpoint in *Something Leather* was suggested to Gray by the writer and critic Kathy Acker in an interview. Furthermore, Gray has maintained that with the Scottish elements in *A History Maker* he was reacting to a criticism by the Scottish literary and cultural critic Alan Bold that his books were insufficiently Scottish (as always, one has to be careful with Gray's statements, of course). His relation to academicism is thus at least

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[4] This is plausible in view of theorists whose texts use language very creatively and approach a literary style (such as Derrida, for example) or who are in fact also fiction writers themselves (Umberto Eco being one of the most prominent examples), as well as of writers who have become eminent postmodern critics (such as Ihab Hassan or Donald Barthelme). There can also be no question that many postmodern writers have been influenced by (postmodern) literary and cultural theory, even if Gray (supposedly) is not one of them.

two-sided.[5] One critic went as far as accusing Gray of outright collaboration:

> While [...] his protagonists may find some form of radicalism with which to confront the systems which serve to contain their freedom, Gray, in his handling of postmodernism, in his use of Scottish material and in the genial, almost masonic dialogue which he initiates with academic criticism, is content with other prizes. Perhaps, after all, his fiction provides us not with *critiques* of containment, but rather a series of containing strategies; not with means of *escape*, but comfortable terms of surrender. [Lumsden 1993, 125]

This is a serious accusation indeed, because it questions Gray's moral and ethical integrity. But as with most of Lumsden's criticisms in that essay, it is surely wide of the mark, as I hope to have demonstrated in this study so far. Gray's 'dialectical' relationship with academic criticism to me is rather reminiscent of the more general 'postmodern paradox' of simultaneous assertion and subversion, which has a moral quality precisely because of the perpetual self-critique involved.

Humanism, Modernism and Realism

One serious complication in the relation of postmodernism to Gray's work seems to me to be the (supposed) denial or rejection of (liberal) humanism on the one hand and modernism as well as realism on the other, so often claimed for postmodernism by academics and theorists. All three of these categories are arguably important to Gray, and it would be ridiculous to call him either an anti-humanist, anti-modernist or anti-realist. Humanism, understood in general terms (as e.g. in a

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[5] This has become even more true since his period as professor of creative writing at Glasgow University together with his colleagues James Kelman and Edwin Morgan between 2001 and 2003.

dictionary definition[6]), goes rather well with what we have seen to be Gray's concerns and values (apart, perhaps, from the strong emphasis on rationalism). The rejection of humanism is a point that has also frequently been taken up in general critiques of postmodernism. Jeremy Hawthorn writes in a chapter from *Cunning Passages* called "From Essentialist Humanism to the Human in History": "One of the striking characteristics of much of the recent theory that can be described as politically radical [and is often referred to as 'postmodern'] is its break with traditional humanism. [...] [T]his process has been so marked that in some circles it is taken for granted that the term 'humanist' is derogatory." [Hawthorn 1996, 70-1] The reason for this development is an identification of humanism with absolute meaning-confirming centres of authority, with a suprahistorical (European) bourgeois view of unchanging human essence, and with the ideologies of capitalism, imperialism and rationalist techno-scientific progress (Hawthorn links this identification especially with deconstruction).

To say that Gray in his work opposes *these* is perfectly tenable, indeed central to his concerns as I have analysed them. However, to identify (liberal) humanism wholesale with them, as indeed much postmodern theory does, is certainly less than half the truth—the same holds, by the way, for postmodernism's critique of Enlightenment thinking and ideology (in any case often used interchangeably with humanism). Thus Hawthorn points out that "humanist ideals and beliefs have, generally, been ranged on the side of those wishing to oppose reactionary, élitist and oppressive centres of power" and that "there are humanist traditions that can by no means be accused of basing themselves on a view of an unchanging, suprahistorical human

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[6] Cf. the following from *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, for example: "Humanism: an outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters. [...] In philosophy, the term has encompassed systems of thought stressing rational enquiry and human experience over abstract theorizing or orthodox religion. More broadly, humanist beliefs stress the potential value and goodness of human beings, emphasize common human needs, and seek solely rational ways of solving human problems."

essence." [ibid., 74] At this point it should be made clear that by no means all postmodern theory rejects humanism outright. On the contrary (and not surprisingly), the more 'balanced' approach does indeed recognise the central importance of the category for contemporary culture and literature, and stresses the ambivalent reaction to it:

> The tenets of our dominant ideology (to which we, perhaps somewhat simplistically, give the label "liberal humanist") are what is being contested by postmodernism [...]. Postmodernism teaches that all cultural practices have an ideological subtext which determines the conditions of the very possibility of their production of meaning. And, in art, it does so by leaving overt the contradictions between its self-reflexivity and its historical grounding. In theory [...] the contradictions are not always this overt, but are often implied [...]. These paradoxes are, I believe, what has led to the political ambidexterity of postmodernism in general, for it has been celebrated and decried by both ends of the political spectrum. If you ignore half of the contradiction, however, it becomes quite easy to see the postmodern as either neoconservatively nostalgic/reactionary or radically disruptive/revolutionary. I would argue that we must beware of this suppression of the full complexity of postmodernist paradoxes. Wilfully contradictory, then, postmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within. [Hutcheon 1988, xii-iii]

I have quoted Linda Hutcheon's view at some length here because I think it expresses very well the basic contradictions of postmodernism that give rise (almost inevitably) to the many confusions and misunderstandings which are found in such abundance in the debates about it. It is also exemplary for the 'balanced' view, in the emphasis on "the full complexity of postmodernist paradoxes", and in the admission that 'liberal humanism' might be a simplification of what is actually being contested by postmodern literature. Her emphasis on contradiction and on questioning *from within* echoes Gray's strategies and techniques much more faithfully than a wholesale rejection of humanism does. It is in Hutcheon's sense of the term 'postmodernism'

that I find the most suggestive parallels to the writing of Alasdair Gray. It is no coincidence that many of the more perceptive studies (not only) of Gray's work follow her approach, with more or less explicit acknowledgement [cf. e.g. Lee 1990, Stevenson 1991, Whiteford 1997]. With this perspective in mind, the question of postmodernism's and Gray's alleged anti-modernism and anti-realism can be tackled with a similarly balanced approach.

In chapter one, it was already mentioned that the opposition modernism vs. postmodernism is artificial, and that postmodernism should be regarded as a revisiting or reworking of modernism (with a difference, no doubt), or maybe even as a continuation of many of modernism's concerns. Gray himself has stressed at several points that he regards himself as modern: "I think of Einstein as modern—modern as James Joyce and (I hope) me." [personal letter, 31 Dec 1997][7] As we have seen, this is not necessarily an impediment to Gray's postmodernism. In fact, the interrelationship between the two is the underlying theme of Randall Stevenson's "Alasdair Gray and the Postmodern": "[M]aking sense of postmodernist fiction involves going back to the technical innovations introduced to the novel by the modernists and identifying what consequences—extensions, adaptations, reorientations—have followed in the writing of the past half-century or so." [Stevenson 1991, 48] He investigates this for Gray's work—mainly *Lanark* and *1982 Janine*—and concludes:

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[7] Cf. also Joe McAvoy, "An Old-Fashioned Modernist—Alasdair Gray" (*Cencrastus*, no. 61, 1998, 7-10), in which Gray restates his views on postmodernism: "I don't think I am [a postmodernist]. To me postmodernism is a school of criticism not a school of writing. I think I am an old-fashioned modernist like James Joyce or Laurence Sterne—we've been around for a very long time. Whenever I have tried to find out what the recipe for postmodernism is, a number of ingredients are given. One has to do with being terribly knowing about all previous writing and therefore to dip into and consciously employ it. But I sometimes think—what writer hasn't done that?" [7] This clearly stresses the modernist connection, even if it is again rather polemical and simplistic about postmodernism.

"*1982 Janine*, [...] as much as *Lanark*, shows Gray's writing sharing in styles and concerns which can be traced logically and historically back to modernism." [56] Significantly, Stevenson goes on to stress the importance of the link for postmodernism in general:

> Gray's work, then, belongs with a phase of fiction which does descend from modernism, however much or little Gray himself may appreciate description of it, or of his own writing, as postmodernist. [...] Placing contemporary postmodernism in relation to twentieth-century literary history, showing how it follows from modernist innovation, is increasingly necessary if the term is to continue meaning anything specific for literary criticism. There is a further, particular need for this historical perspective in the context of British writing, which is often thought to lack direct or consequential descent from modernism almost altogether. [ibid., 57-8]

This last point is echoed in Geoffrey Lord's assertion that "Modernism did not remain the dominant literary mode in Britain until the advent of postmodernism, since modernism had earlier been supplanted in English fiction by non-modernist forms. [...] During the 1950s, the atmosphere in England was anti-modernist, and at first English post-war fiction was seen as a return to realism". [Lord 1996, 20] Lord's easy switch from "Britain" to "England" in this passage may indicate a different picture for Scotland. In fact, as I have pointed out elsewhere, contemporary Scottish literature can be regarded as having a special and positive relationship with modernism for several reasons (among them the importance of the Scottish literary renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, connected with the name of Hugh MacDiarmid and others).[8] In any case, the importance of modernism for postmodernism in general and for Gray's work in particular must be emphasised in order to do justice to both.

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[8] Cf. Böhnke 1999 (e.g. p. 87ff.), where this point is made in connection to the work of James Kelman. Cf. also Robert Crawford's *Devolving English Literature* (2000).

As Lord's statement indicates, realism is certainly not a mode usually and primarily associated with modernism, but it is also seen by many as being alien to postmodernism. One of the basic arguments of Alison Lee in *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction* is precisely the subversion of realist traditions by postmodern writers: "My focus in this study is on the challenge to literary Realism by postmodern techniques and conventions which seek to subvert the assumptions that Realism and its related ideology—what we usually call liberal humanism—have encouraged readers and teachers of literature to think of as 'natural,' 'normal,' and 'neutral.'" [Lee 1990, x] Her argumentation, however, following Linda Hutcheon, is a complex one which concedes the importance of Realism to postmodern works (like Lord, she sees this as particularly significant in the British context) and takes them as questioning it from within and attacking above all its ideology of neutrality. In this sense, Gray's writing can be seen as postmodern in its ambiguous attitude towards realism. But there can be no doubt that he is certainly no 'anti-realist'. Gray has been praised for his imaginative fusion of realistic and fantastic modes, as in *Lanark* or *Poor Things*. He himself has said: "I have to start any work I do—painting or writing—in a conservative way which uses an already well-known form. Only when safe with it does the possibility of fracturing it somewhere and grafting in something unexpected (to give new height or depth) occur." [Axelrod 1995b, 112] Moreover, Realism may be suitable for ethical and political reasons, too, above all because of its 'democratic' nature: "[T]he province of the novel expands to include not only the drawing room, but also the ordinary, the ugly, and the low. Whatever, in fact, can be observed is a fit subject for the novel. In this particular aspect of Realism, there is some correspondence between theory and fiction." [Lee 1990, 7] Lee also sees in Realism a strong moral element [ibid., 13], and although she takes postmodern works to challenge this, it is clear that Gray has inherited a fair share of this moral attitude. Incidentally, one of Lee's examples for this moral tone of Realism is Gray's old friend Thomas Carlyle. It is possible to say, therefore, that realism as well as (liberal) humanism are among Gray's basic 'tools'. It is something he cannot and does not want to do without, even if his work challenges and at times leaves behind both the technique and the ideology. His political and moral message might be one of the reasons for this attachment, and this leads to two further complications or

qualifications which we need to consider regarding Gray's 'postmodernism'.

Political Involvement

One of the major criticisms against postmodernism concerns its alleged apolitical attitude, its celebration of or complicity with contemporary globalised consumer capitalism, as displayed in its playfulness and eschewal of absolutes, its 'anything goes' approach. This complaint often goes with a strong political or ethical agenda, such as feminism. In this context, Jenny Wolmark states that "postmodern theory undermines the rationalist and humanist agenda of the Enlightenment, in which is enshrined the notion of equality that provides the political impetus for social change, without proposing alternative mechanisms for change." [Wolmark 1994, 18] Gray himself of course also has a very strong political agenda, as we have seen. On the one hand, this leads back to the arguments about postmodernism's attack on Enlightened humanism. The above quote makes clear how problematic such an attack is, even if most postmodernists would probably maintain that the notion of equality is precisely *not* enshrined in the humanist agenda of the Enlightenment as they understand it, but rather in their own ideas about alterity or the incredulity towards metanarratives. On the other hand, there is—quite independent of the humanist question—the real problem of how a political or moral message (or even action) can be achieved within the non-essentialist and pluralist framework of postmodernism.

Stephen Baker, in his book *The Fiction of Postmodernity*, attempts an answer to this question, "[o]pposing the prevalent Marxist definition of postmodernism as a culture of assent, a culture generally emptied of political radicalism and a sense of history" [Baker 2000, 9], in reference mainly (but not exclusively) to the (neo-)Marxist views of Terry Eagleton or Fredric Jameson. After examining a number of postmodern literary examples, he reaches the conclusion that a critique and therefore a political message/attitude can indeed be found in many individual postmodern works, in contrast perhaps to an overarching theoretical framework: "It is the particularity of the

individual postmodern text when viewed in relation to the theoretical model of postmodernism that principally interests me. Moreover, it is perhaps here that the critical distance, whose necessity and absence Jameson notes in his discussion of the postmodern, might be situated." [ibid., 204] This is reminiscent of Hutcheon's statement quoted above, which also criticised the neglect of "messy practice" in favour of "neat theory". It also reflects my own approach to a large extent. Consequently, Baker writes:

> The critical distance that modernist art had previously retained, but which has been renounced by the culture of postmodernity, might then be relocated in that same conflictual relation of the individual text to the cultural dominant of postmodernism. [...] [W]e should analyse the extent to which texts such as *White Noise* or *The Satanic Verses* already offer both representation and critique of the complicity of that cultural realm to which they owe their production with the social exploitation and domination that they take as their subject. This is a complicity in which the individual text of course shares, but with which it cannot wholly be identified. [...] If postmodernism, as the cultural logic of late capitalism, cannot be held to maintain a critical distance from the social and economic formations of the latter, a contemporary critical distance of the aesthetic can perhaps only be situated between the individual postmodern text and the cultural condition of postmodernity. [...] [T]hose artworks which offer critical reflection on what Jameson calls the cultural dominant of postmodernism, and what Lyotard refers to as the contemporary, eclectic realism of money, can express a similar historical truth-content, reflecting a critical self-consciousness grasped only in the nick of time, in the final instance, in wilful defiance of the condition of postmodernity [...] [ibid., 204-6]

I think that this is very much in tune with my analysis of the works of Alasdair Gray, which do express an historical truth-content and above all reflect a critical self-consciousness. It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the works which lead Baker to the above-quoted conclusions in his book, besides Don DeLillo's *White Noise* or Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, is precisely Alasdair Gray's *Something Leather*, in a chapter significantly entitled "Postmodern Political Fictions" [ibid., 152-97, esp. 152-63]. My own analysis of *Poor Things*, as well as *Lanark* and *A History Maker*, mirrors his

assessment that "what *Something Leather* does [is] offering social, cultural and self-critique. The novel confronts the complicity of culture with social exploitation. The ideological function of art is thus shared by the work of art that is *Something Leather*, but it is also portrayed and dissected there before our very eyes" [ibid., 162] thus "exposing to us readers the culture's own complicity in the maintenance of class structures." [ibid., 163] It is in this sense that Gray's works can be seen as postmodern while allowing for their political and moral message.

This message, including the emphasis on decent, humane values and goodness of heart as well as the concern for the weak and disadvantaged, and the importance of complexity and local truths as opposed to monolithic and hegemonic explanation and power, is always present just underneath the surface in Gray's writing; and it comes through despite his postmodern playfulness. Indeed, some critics have argued that it is partly because of these techniques and games that his concerns are so powerfully felt by the reader: "the playfulness is not merely an exercise to frustrate the notions of realistic fiction but a kind of political temper that advances an ideology that encompasses much if not all of Gray's work." [Axelrod 1995a, 104] And: "Whatever 'games' may be going on in Gray's texts tend, on balance, not to diminish but to add to the satiric, political directions which are a central feature of his work." [Stevenson 1991, 61][9] We have seen at different points how Gray manages to articulate his political and ethical concerns particularly well precisely through these playful devices (such as the Epilogue in *Lanark* or the "Notes Critical and Historical" in *Poor Things*). Indeed, it could be argued that his message is less effective when it is not mediated by such techniques, when it does not stay beneath the surface but is thrust at

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[9] Similarly, Eilidh Whiteford writes that "any strict dichotomy made between the form and content of Gray's work would be misleading—one of my central contentions is that Gray's postmodern stylistcs are inseparable from his social concerns." [1997, 177] Throughout her study, Whiteford shows convincingly how Gray's use of postmodern techniques actually furthers his ideological critique.

the reader directly, because it then risks sounding overtly didactic or even patronising.

This tendency is certainly not entirely absent in Gray's work, as made clear in the following, rather unsympathetic view:

> While Gray has claimed that it is the business of the novelist to avoid the role of moralist, this impulse in his fiction seems an undeniably didactic reflex; a reluctance to leave his fictions *free* in some more ambiguous area where the reader may or may not read some direct social issues (most frequently the state of Scotland, or even more parochially Glasgow) into them. [Lumsden 1993, 122]

Although I am convinced that Gray's fictions are very ambiguous indeed (and the state of Scotland is certainly *not* the most frequent of his social concerns), there is no denying this moral and even didactic impulse. Christopher Harvie describes it in a milder, more fitting way:

> There is a profoundly sermon-like quality to his books, partly dodged out of by adopting a surreal style, in which the documentary-didactic can run in harness with the story, partly by detailed appendices detailing sources and obligations. From this, we have a 'message' which is straightforward and, in these days of triumphant marketism, 'new times' designer-socialism, and European cultural capitalism, unfashionable: a plea for small-scale cooperative socialism rather along the lines of William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. [Harvie 1991, 85]

Here Gray's message is specifically marked as unfashionable and contrasted with triumphant marketism, which makes a connection to postmodernism seem rather awkward at first glance. However, it may not be quite so if we enquire further, as Stephen Baker has shown.

What is interesting is that Harvie also goes on to make the link to the Scottish context that was already mentioned by Lumsden. After the passage quoted above, he continues with a quote from *Lanark*'s Epilogue where Nastler says: "[...] what the *Aeneid* had been to the Roman Empire my epic would be to the Scottish Cooperative Wholesale Republic, one of the many hundreds of small peaceful socialist republics which would emerge (I thought) when all the big

empires and corporations crumbled." [L, 492-3] This is in fact very reminiscent of what actually happens in *A History Maker* and what is implied at the end of the Axletree story. We might also remember that Gray once wanted to be part of such a community in New Lanark. The question is whether there might be a connection between Gray's concerns/message and the Scottish context he is working in (Harvie's essay, after all, is called "Alasdair Gray and the Condition of Scotland Question" [1991]). Gavin Wallace has pointed out, in an article on "The Novel of Damaged Identity" that

> There exists [...] a wider intellectual framework within which the consistent preoccupation of novelists with the symptoms of a tangibly Scottish malaise makes perfect sense as a set of urgent sociological imperatives. Foregrounding such identifiably 'social' themes is equally the concern of the increasing number of Scottish novels which have challenged the limits of realist modes of narrative through excursions into fantasy or postmodern techniques. [Wallace 1993b, 219]

Obviously, the Scottish tradition of social criticism mentioned earlier in connection with Carlyle (and, arguably, Gray's Scottish background in general) plays a role in Gray's work and ideas that should not be neglected. Incidentally, the one work where his didactic quality is arguably at its strongest is his 'polemic' *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland*. Gray's Scottish 'nationalism' is therefore a field that calls for discussion here, in particular since it seems to further complicate his 'postmodernism'.

Nationalism

I have quite deliberately somewhat neglected the aspect of Gray's 'Scottishness' in this study so far.[10] This is not because I think it

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[10] This is only true in so far as it has not been specifically referred to as such, since it has been present at several points in the previous two chapters as well as in this one, sometimes quite prominently, more often in the

unimportant for Gray's work. On the contrary, it is certainly among his major concerns, as he himself continually points out. However, the emphasis on this aspect can also be limiting in many ways, and this appears to be reinforced by Gray's reply to the question as to how important it was for him to be seen as a *Scottish* writer: "As important as it is for Goethe to be seen as a German, Frisch as a Swiss, Jesus as a Jew, Hokusai as Japanese. Everyone has to work with the material they find in their own corner of the human race. But good work is international to those who know some history & geography." [personal letter, 31 Dec 1997; cf. also the Epilogue] This obviously favours a more international approach to Gray's work, one that I have been trying to take in this study. Gray's nationalism, moreover, is also among the most intensively studied and best-documented aspects of his writing.[11] Mostly, the conclusions reached by the various critics stress Gray's intense patriotism and concern about the state of the Scottish nation and its culture and literature,[12] while at the same time pointing out the elements that problematise and relativise the more essentialist notions of nationalism or even chauvinism, as well as emphasising the international and universal aspects implied in his works. The following passage from Eilidh Whiteford's study may serve as an example:

> One of the most consistent, overarching strains evident throughout Alasdair Gray's work is the author's concern about

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background. In particular, the importance of the Scottish tradition in literature has been emphasised time and again.

[11] Cf., for example, Harvie 1991, Whiteford 1994, Maley 1995, Stenhouse 1996, as well as treatment of the topic at different points in Witschi 1991, Hagemann 1996 (esp. Gifford's essay), Whiteford 1997, Bernstein 1999, Craig 1999 and Jansen 2000, as well as Moores 2002 and Tiitinen 2004.

[12] This is best illustrated, perhaps, in his pamphlet *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland*—but it is certainly equally present in his novels and short stories, as witnessed by the adornment of the book covers with Scottish symbols or the slogan "Work as if you were living in the early days of a better nation".

> Scotland's constitutional status, a concern which emerges in his artistic output and is reinforced by the regular public statements he has made in favour of Scottish home rule. Yet, while Gray makes unambiguous political statements, his engagement with the altogether more problematic concepts of nationhood and nationality is subtle and complex. His work can be, and has been, read as a literary reinscription of Scottish national identity and has lent itself to discussions about the relationship between the political sphere and the arts in Scotland. [Whiteford 1997, 96]

This view of Gray's nationalism is also mirrored in Douglas Gifford's analysis of a new creative thinking about the identity of Scotland—or "Scotlands"[13]—which he finds in contemporary Scottish fiction and links to Gray's work in particular in his "Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction" [Gifford 1996]. This resembles my own ideas on this topic, and it therefore seems unnecessary to repeat it here.

However, it will be interesting to briefly analyse the degree to which this nationalism can be reconciled with a notion of Gray's work as postmodern, since nationalism is often seen as one of those metanarratives that international, globalised postmodernism has outgrown—or become incredulous of, as Lyotard puts it. However, as Steven Earnshaw objects,

> it is not the case, as Lyotard posits, that such incredulity can be widely observed, let alone be the common denominator for our postmodern age. All we need to do is look at the rise of fundamentalism to scupper the idea. Or there are problems in what used to be the Soviet Union, and what used to be Yugoslavia. The model narrative here is 'nationhood'. [...] The 'nation' is one of today's pre-eminent world-historical constructs. [Earnshaw 1996, 63]

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[13] Remember also Robert Crawford's idea of "dedefining" Scottishness [1997], in this context. Cf. also Crawford 2000, esp. the last chapter.

In this view, nationalism seems to be incommensurable with postmodernism (at least as defined by Lyotard). Geoffrey Lord, while arguing for the importance of national differences, has tried to find reasons for postmodernism's obvious eschewal of nationalism:

> The propensity to overlook national cultural factors in considerations of postmodernism must in part be attributed to the North American concentration of much work on postmodernism. [...] A distaste for the negative consequences and dangers associated with nationalism has doubtlessly also contributed to the preferences for international similarities over national differences. [...] Nationalism and ideas of national identity are commonly linked to modernity, and this link may in part explain why postmodern constructions have tended to marginalize national contours: modern is national thus postmodern must somehow be post-national. [Lord 1996, 141-2]

A similar view has often been adopted in the Scottish context, which may be one of the reasons for the complicated relation of Scotland and Scottish literature (and therefore Gray's work) to the concept of postmodernism. Gavin Wallace, for example, decries that "'Scottishness' remains the logically acceptable criterion for assessing Scottish literature" [Wallace 1993b, 220] and sees Scottish literature in general (excepting Gray, however) as "a tradition that has been slow to learn the sensitivity to narrative experiment and formal self-awareness taken for granted in other literatures." [228] This attitude is echoed in many other studies,[14] culminating perhaps in Tange's statement that "Scottish writers refuse postmodernity".

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[14] Beat Witschi writes in *Glasgow Urban Writing and Postmodernism*: "Gray has [...] illustrated that postmodern narrative techniques are very well suited for the production of a kind of Scottish literature that points *beyond* its Scottishness. This statement is of course banal in itself when applied to English, or American, or continental literature, as these countries all have their own postmodern writers. But it is still a very valid and necessary statement in the context of Scottish literature, with its persisting hesitance to adopt and use the artistic possibilities which literary postmodernism offers the contemporary author" [1991, 145]. In

Yet, postmodern theories could have something very useful to offer for Scottish identity and literature, as well as vice versa—an insight that is slowly gaining ground, I would suggest. I have already pointed out how the fissures and contradictions of the Caledonian antisyzygy parallel aspects of postmodernism and may be seen through these theories as something positive rather than negative. It is in this context that Randall Stevenson writes: "Postmodernism has much to offer Scotland and vice versa. In discovering this potential, Gray has probably done more than any other recent novelist to suggest opportunities for the future development of Scottish literature and imagination in the the late twentieth century." [Stevenson 1991, 61] A postmodern notion of the nation as something ambiguous and continually negotiated, far from unified, essential and hegemonic may be equally liberating for the "Scottish malaise" of "damaged identity", making a more fluid notion of (Scottish) national identity possible. The postmodern idea that it is the act of questioning or problematising identity and nationalism which is important, rather than the reinscription of a universally valid version of it, could be very helpful in a Scottish context. It is this inclusive and pluralistic vision of "Scotlands" or Scottish identities in the plural that we have found in the works of Alasdair Gray in the course of this study. It is against the background of Gray's and other recent Scottish writers' investigations of Scottish identity that Eleanor Bell writes:

> There is [...] a growing opinion that national traditions should no longer be treated as unproblematically organic. Whereas Scottish cultural and literary critics have often tended to perpetuate this myth, Scottish writers have, ironically, tended to expose this urge for homogeneity as an inadequate means of reflecting lived cultural reality. Where Scottish critics have often tended to reduce the nation in an unhelpful way, recent writers of fiction have, alternatively, encouraged concerns with estrangement and the need for the recognition of greater diversity. [Bell 2001, 40]

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contrast to Witschi's focus on Scotland alone, Geoffrey Lord has detected a general English/British resistance to postmodernism, at least if compared to America. [Lord 1996]

Indeed, speculation may be permitted as to whether this more confident and less angst-ridden notion of Scottish identity as propagated by Gray and other writers following him might not in part be responsible for the new self-confidence in Scottish culture and politics that has led to the successful referendum and subsequent opening of a Scottish parliament in the late 1990s.

In fact, a new concept of "neo-nationalism" along those lines has been proposed by Tom Nairn in his books *The Break-Up of Britain* (1977) and *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland* (2000) and subsequently been taken over by David McCrone in *Understanding Scotland* (^{2}2001), where he writes:

> Just as political sovereignty in the modern world is both layered and shared such that powers and responsibilities operate at different levels for different purposes—Scottish for some, British and European for others—so people appear quite content to attach identity to these levels as and when it suits them. The issue is not which one you are, but which one you choose in different contexts and for different purposes. […] [I]t is as much cultural distinctiveness which generates nationalism, as nationalism which shapes cultural distinctiveness. […] [N]eo-nationalism does seem to have its own dynamic. It seems to stress civic rather than ethnic features—demos rather than ethnos; it has an adaptable political ideology, appealing to Right and Left as circumstances require, and building in features of neo-liberalism as well as social democracy. While Scotland has a quite different social and political history from Catalunya and Quebec, for example, they all seem to confront opportunities and constraints of 'niche' nationalism at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In that sense, they take on the character of progressive rather than reactionary movements. [McCrone 2001, 192-3]

This kind of open and flexible—not to say ambiguous—nationalism certainly seems much more in line with Gray's views than an essentialist and closed version.

It is at this point that another parallel becomes visible: the connection to the literatures of other newly self-governing or independent nations in former colonies and dependencies of the British Empire; in other words a connection to the postcolonial aspect—which in turn is often related to postmodernism. I have found this link suggestive in my study of the fiction of James Kelman [Böhnke 1999], and I think it equally useful in Gray's case.[15] Linda Hutcheon's connection of postmodernism with the marginal, the "ex-centric", with the local and regional, certainly works as well in a Scottish context as elsewhere. We have also seen that Gray is very much concerned with issues of imperialism, most clearly perhaps in *Poor Things*. It is again Eilidh Whiteford who helpfully summarises this issue:

> Gray's frequent allusions to imperial power raise questions which have been addressed most thoroughly in the work of postcolonial theorists and critics. Although the application of postcolonial theories to Scottish contexts is fraught with difficulties, the *methodologies* developed within postcolonial theory are suggestive and helpful in relation to Gray because they often address the interconnections between strands of national, personal, and political identity expressed in literary texts; even more importantly, they offer critiques of structural power. [Whiteford 1997, 97]

The concern with and criticism of power structures in Gray's work has also been one of the recurring themes in this study. Despite the vexed problem of Scotland's position within a postcolonial framework (as coloniser as well as colonised), this concern with power and oppression that I have found to be so pervading in his writing certainly suggests a possible alignment.

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[15] This is a point made by H. Gustav Klaus in his article on Gray, Kelman and Tom Leonard, where he talks of a "growing convergence of recent developments in Scottish writing and the literatures of other 'colonised' countries." [Klaus 1993, 40]. Cf. also Berthold Schoene's essay "A Passage to Scotland: Scottish Literature and the British Postcolonial Condition" (1995), as well as Robert Crawford's *Devolving English Literature* (2000).

In a recent article in *Chapman*, Dave Manderson uses Gray's early story "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire" [US, 85-133 (arguably one of his finest achievements)] to make a similar point, first referring to the 'real' colonial aspect: "[W]e're not out of the empire, not yet. It may be crumbling, but it's far from finished, although the establishment of the new Scottish parliament has at least brought some powers home. [...] It would be dangerous to underestimate the latent power of the old empire, much of which still exists in Scottish institutions." Significantly, he then goes on to stress:

> [M]ost important, colonialism isn't just a question of nations. Internal colonialism has always been with us, of women, of subordinate men, of ethnic and sexual minorities, of dispossessed peasants and the housing scheme poor. In the brave new Scotland, marginalising and disenfranchising social groups—any of them—is just the old process again. We can see it all in *Five Letters from an Eastern Empire*. Because it's all there: politics, gender and repression, and the part they play in the worlds we make. The author may not agree with labels, and other authors may not like it, but feminism, post-colonialism and quite a few other 'isms' are all in the story, or in its shadows, and Welsh, Galloway, Warner, Kennedy and the rest are only building on ground first cleared by Gray and his generation of writers, territory that would never have been there without them. [Manderson 2000, 53]

It is very much in this context of "politics, gender and repression", and of Gray's concern for marginalised and disenfranchised social groups, that the postcolonial aspect becomes meaningful for his work. My analysis in this study should have shown that this is as valid for his major novels *Lanark*, *Poor Things* and *A History Maker* as it is for his short story "Five Letters from an Eastern Empire". This bears out Randall Stevenson's prediction in 1991 that "it seems likely that Scottish authors will continue to contribute, alongside other post-colonial minorities, to a postmodernism which may develop much more strongly in Britain, by the end of the century, than it has in the past." [Stevenson 1991, 59]

Conclusion: Shades of Gray's Postmodernism

It should have become evident in this chapter that a literary work so various and multi-layered as Gray's cannot be captured in its entirety (even when focusing on just three novels) by any single closed and universal theory, literary or otherwise, including the postmodern approach. It is certainly in this sense that Gray has been called by some a 'post-postmodernist': "[P]ostmodernism, once largely directed by the urge to parody and subvert conventional forms of writing, becomes in its turn a recognised, accepted form to be parodied and played with itself. Perhaps this makes Gray a post-postmodernist, though that might really be a term to puzzle him." [Stevenson 1991, 56] This claim for Gray parodying postmodernism has been made elsewhere, too [cf. Bernstein 1999, 144-5; Witschi 1991, 90ff.]. However, if we take into account that self-critique as well as self-parody are already integral parts of postmodernism, it is difficult to see how this can be parodied in its turn. What can be regarded as parodied by Gray is again a certain negative notion of postmodernism as being irresponsible, relativist nihilism.

Since my approach is to allow the literary work and its author to have their own say in the discussion (as far as is possible in the context of such a study), certain complications or qualifications to Gray's 'postmodernism' must nevertheless be considered. They concern the disinclination of Gray himself and many critics (particularly in Scotland) to recognise the relevance of postmodernism, and the underlying motivation for that. Although part of the reason for this might be a largely mistaken equating of postmodernism as a whole with what I have earlier called 'vulgar' postmodernism,[16] it cannot be reduced to that. Indeed, a closer look at

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[16] With relativistic nihilism, in other words. This tendency was also present in the general postmodernism debate, as we have seen, and certainly has some justification in so far as the 'vulgar' view has been gaining ground. I would therefore like to emphasise again that the critique of relativism is valid and necessary, even if it cannot be extended to the whole concept of postmodernism. It is important to note, therefore, that "Gray challenges theoretical conceptions of modernity which lose sight of 'reality' or lose

the counter-arguments revealed genuine problems within the concept of postmodernism (at least in many of its theoretical incarnations). These regarded particularly its sometimes wholesale attack on liberal 'Enlightened' humanism, modernism and realism, as well as its ambiguous position towards strong political and moral messages and nationalism—both themes that are arguably central to Gray's work. The importance of these issues is made clear by Gray himself—though again in his inimitable style—in the 1996 edition of *Contemporary Novelists* (Detroit: St. James Press): "My stories try to seduce the reader by disguising themselves as sensational entertainment, but are propaganda for democratic welfare-state Socialism and an independent Scottish parliament. My jacket designs and illustrations—especially the erotic ones—are designed with the same high purpose." [415]

On the other hand, as I hope this chapter has demonstrated, postmodernism can function as a meeting place for many different theories (including those that even allow us to deal with the issues of political involvement or nationalism—such as Stephen Baker's approach in *The Fiction of Postmodernity*—or postcolonial theories) in a way that few other theoretical concepts are capable of. With a conception of postmodernism as constituting such a flexible 'market' or exchange place for different theoretical approaches it becomes possible to do some justice to as various and committed an oeuvre as that of Alasdair Gray. This, then, can be seen as an alternative view on the postmodernism debate, originating in an engagement with one of the objects of that debate—a 'postmodern' writer and his fiction—while trying to let that 'object' have its own voice, making it a partner in the discussion rather than just the analysed piece of literature to be

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the ability to articulate reality in any politically cogent formulation" [Whiteford 1997, 132] and that "he does not confuse epistemological with ontological issues. Throughout his experimental literary representations, Gray is at pains to assert the value of the material world, emphasising the ontological 'reality' of human experience, however complex and contradictory the processes of representing that reality may be." [ibid., 216-7]

illuminated by some theory. This is again idealised, of course, since there are always preconceptions and more or less subconsciously formed ideas with which we approach a topic or a piece of writing. However, this alternative view stresses the importance of a multiplicity of approaches or perspectives (of which I could only select a few in such a limited study as this one). It also involves a certain self-critical position which recognises its allegiances and limitations—and this is a moral dimension that is deeply significant, as Gray's work has shown. It is the difficulty of maintaining such a view in an academic context, where specialisation and polemical exchanges are the rule (as witnessed in the 'science wars', for example), that is mainly responsible for the controversial and confused nature of the postmodernism debate. As I have pointed out, however, a few signs for a more balanced approach are already observable, in the theories of Hutcheon or Baker as well as in Lawrence Cahoone's category of "positive postmodernism", so that the hope for such a flexible postmodern 'market' may not remain utopian. Such an approach is certainly called for by my analysis of Gray's fiction. This involvement of the object of study itself is significant, according to Linda Hutcheon:

> Postmodernism is not something we can settle once and for all and then use with a clear conscience. The concept, if there is one, has to come at the end, and not at the beginning, of our discussions of it. Those are the conditions—the *only* ones, I think, that prevent the mischief of premature clarification—under which this term can productively continue to be used. [Hutcheon, quoted in Jansen 2000, 15]

At the end of my discussion, then, I would vote for an open and flexible concept of postmodernism that is neither relativist nor essentialist but makes use of the many different (and sometimes even contradictory) theories and approaches that can be gathered under the term, trying to gain a complex—if not holistic or magisterial—view of its object through a multiplicity of perspectives. This, it seems to me, is what the many different 'shades of Gray' demand and deserve.

Conclusion: Colourful Shades of Gray

It has been one of the aims of this study to illuminate several aspects of the work of Alasdair Gray which have hitherto been lying somewhat in the dark. If I have been successful, it should have emerged that the picture of which they form a part is a very colourful one indeed. Seen differently, however, it also provides an infinite variety of different shades of grey/Gray, very much in the style of Gray's own black-and-white line drawings. This should also be understood metaphorically, since one of the central findings of my investigation clearly is the importance of variety and complexity, of differentiation. The vital significance of this insight was obvious not only in Gray's novels but also in the wider context of 'postmodernism' or contemporary theoretical debates in literature and culture, as well as in academic discussions in general. To this extent, both the theoretical/academic debates and the creative literary works react to the same reality and address the same developments in society, including the immense changes which have been taking place during the last few decades. To show these parallels and interrelations in reference to different important areas of current debate, such as science (fiction)/apocalypse, history, and postmodernism as a technique and ideology, has been another goal of my investigation. I would posit that this juxtaposition has indeed been fruitful, demonstrating that not only can literary works be usefully investigated through 'theoretical shades' but the theoretical debates and issues themselves can be helpfully seen through literature's own consideration of the same underlying problems. The emancipation of the knowledge that literature itself provides against the dominance of theoretical insights can perhaps be seen as a—or the—major undercurrent in this study.

There are several important points that my reading of the works of Alasdair Gray in the context of the theoretical debates seems to suggest: above all, perhaps, that a clear moral and ethical position must be taken in any such discussion. In Gray's case this involves a strong humanitarian element as well as his democratic-socialist *and* 'nationalist' values. However, it also suggests that such a position should never become dogmatic, that it must be constantly questioned, undermined and contradicted, to prevent it from becoming 'hegemonic' in any sense. It is only through such a paradoxical,

'antisyzygical', maybe even deconstructive procedure that a more positive and balanced view can be achieved. That such a balanced view *is* achievable and obviously necessary, however, is perhaps the final result of my investigation of Gray's novels in this study. This is probably where literature has an advantage over theoretical debates which often take place in the confrontational climate of academia. Perhaps it is time that academics themselves take on the lesson that so much of contemporary theory[1] and especially literature teaches, exemplified by the writing of Alasdair Gray: that strictly upheld categories and genre distinctions are anathema to the infinitely complex and varied phenomena of reality and society; that truth is more often than not provisional; that it is vital to see every object and topic from a variety of different perspectives and to take other views seriously; that it is necessary always to scrutinise and declare one's own position and approach, which again is a moral imperative. If that was always heeded, the future of academic debates and academia as such (I am talking mainly about the humanities here) would appear much more hopeful. It could be full of colourful shades of grey, as opposed to black-and-white confrontations.

These very general remarks and conclusions from my study take us back to one of the starting points in the introduction: the need to internationalise Scottish literature and culture, to 'dedefine' Scottishness, to take Scottish studies beyond the traditional local/national concerns. I hope that my frame of reference has been helpful in doing precisely this for the work of Alasdair Gray. One of the implications of this study, therefore, would be the viability of broadening the scope of such an investigation. For example, it would certainly be rewarding to include other contemporary Scottish writers, to see how the work of James Kelman or A.L. Kennedy, for instance, 'interacts' with the theoretical background. This need not necessarily involve the same emphases as with Gray, of course: relating Kelman's (literary) politics to postcolonial issues and the 'new literatures in

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[1] Cf., for example, the immensely self-reflexive 'double gesture' inherent in deconstruction, or Wolfgang Welsch's concept of *transversale Vernunft* [Welsch 1996].

English'[2] or Kennedy's works to feminism or magic realism will surely yield insights that are not restricted to the Scottish context and can even be inspiring for those particular theoretical areas. Furthermore, I sometimes think that it is maybe precisely the context of *British* literature and culture that could be productively related to the works of these and other contemporary writers; even if (perhaps exactly because) it is currently somewhat out of fashion. More generally still, it would also be worthwhile to approach wider topics of 'Scottish interest' from an international (or outsider's) perspective. Even the whole issue of Scottish nationalism in general would certainly benefit from a comparison with other (European) regions/nations with similar interests and problems, especially in the current context of European integration.[3] This could be a testing ground for a possible future of the more or less independent 'Scotland in Europe'—a slogan that can be heard with growing frequency in Scotland today. There are many more possible areas of research that could be named which would enrich Scottish studies by providing a

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[2] I have tried to read Kelman's work in the context of some of those theories elsewhere [cf. Böhnke 1999], but there certainly remains much scope especially regarding the feedback on the theoretical debates themselves.

[3] Something along these lines has already been attempted, above all by people involved in Scottish studies outside Scotland. Two volumes in the German series *Scottish Studies International*, for example, look at Scotland and Switzerland in Europe in the eighteenth century (Hans Utz, vol. 17, 1995) and at European identities from Scotland to Slovenia (Drescher/Hagemann, eds., vol. 21, 1996) respectively. In Scotland itself, too, this development has gained momentum recently: cf. several issues of the literary magazine *Chapman* (vol. 68/1992: "The Translator's Art: Scots Abroad"; vol. 88/1997: "Window on Catalonia"; vol. 95/1999: "Scotland into the World"). Alasdair Gray himself printed the flags of twenty different mainly European nations that have roughly the same size or population as Scotland alongside the Scottish flag on the cover of *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland 1997*, and starts his argument by saying: "I argue that by being in Scotland you deserve a government as distinct from England as Portugal from Spain, Austria from Germany, Switzerland from the four nations surrounding her." [p. 1]

broader or simply different perspective. The underlying tendency clearly stresses the desirability of internationalising Scottish literature and culture, and of 'dedefining' Scotland.

If this study has been helpful in suggesting possible avenues for future research in these directions, I would be more than content. The work of Alasdair Gray itself, of course, still provides countless possibilities for comment and criticism, as well as almost unbounded inspiration for future essays and studies. In any case, the work of a creative writer can never be adequately described or captured in any scholarly study (some might wonder whether it should be attempted at all...). It has to be read and enjoyed above all else, and Alasdair Gray's work is a case in point, with its playful writing and illustrations / typography, being very much directed at *entertaining* the reader as well as making him/her think and reflect. Unfortunately, this aspect is too easily lost in a study like this one.

The visual/artistic dimension of Gray's books is an area of particular interest that I could only comment on in passing. It would be interesting to look at his drawings and illustrations more closely in connection with my 'shades of Gray' approach, especially as they are usually black and white and have a clear-cut, almost comic-like quality that seems at first sight to run counter to my theme of constant ambiguity and contradiction in his work. That this is not necessarily the case was already indicated in the few remarks I did make on this aspect, but it certainly merits more detailed attention than I could give it here. One interesting development in Gray's book design, to give just one example, is the increasing use of colour for the cover illustrations. While the cover of *Lanark* was black and white only, with a little gold added—'shades of grey', really, befitting the content[4]—there has been a shift to very colourful covers in the 1990s with *McGrotty and Ludmilla* and especially *Poor Things*, continued with *Ten Tales Tall and True* (1993), *A History Maker* and *Mavis Belfrage*. Whether this can be related to the possibly more optimistic mood of these books (and perhaps even of Scottish culture in general)

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[4] Much the same is true for almost all his publications until c. 1990.

is a question that could be worth investigating.[5] With *The Book of Prefaces*, however, Gray has returned to his earlier black-and-white-cum-red combination of colours, again with some gold added.[6] Whether this is in any way significant—as a sign of a cycle completed, perhaps, as the last lines of the book also seem to suggest—must be left to other investigations or to time to decide, and, of course, to Alasdair Gray himself.

I have hinted at the impossibility of providing a closed study of the work of a living writer in my introduction, and I can only reiterate it here in the conclusion.[7] The latest proof that Gray can be counted on for a surprise at any time, if proof was still needed, was the announcement that he is putting together a book on popular British political songs, originally to have been published in 2002.[8] This opens

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[5] Another interesting case is the new edition of *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* for Canongate Classics in 1998, which has a much more colourful cover than the original 1983 edition (as well as two new stories and an "Author's Postscript completed by Douglas Gifford"), which was still dominated by Gray's typical black and white/shades of grey together with red, a combination he had also used for several of the other books of the 1980s. Cf. also the difference between the sober cover of the 1992 edition of *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland* (which is the only cover of an original Gray publication not designed by himself, as far as I know) and the colourful new edition published for the general election in 1997.

[6] Prefigured, perhaps, in the cover of his play *Working Legs* (1997), which already went back to the black-and-white-cum-red style but had an additional blue border.

[7] As I have pointed out in my personal prologue, there have been several new publications by Gray in the past few years, although certainly no major work. See the bibliography for the details.

[8] See *The Scotsman*, 11 June 2001, p. 3. As far as I know, it has not yet been published. Interestingly, there was some protest in the Scottish press because of his decision to leave out *Flower of Scotland*, the inofficial Scottish national(ist) anthem, since "the writer is said to consider it unworthy of inclusion [because he thinks] it is 'dreary'." [ibid.]

a new dimension to Gray's 'inter-art discourse', including music as well. In any case, out of the fifteen or so books published by Gray to date I have only dealt with three in some detail, trying to include the more important recent ones. This leaves many of his texts to be explored elsewhere, especially his short stories, perhaps, which are by and large neglected in most other studies, too. I have tried to include some comments on a few of them, but there is much more still to be done, in particular since some of them are arguably among the best work Gray has written.

Another interesting approach would include the juxtaposition or comparison of Gray's work with that of other (near-)contemporary writers from elsewhere. I have hinted at several possible connections to non-Scottish writers, including science-fiction writers such as Philip K. Dick or William Gibson as well as more 'mainstream' ones like Kurt Vonnegut or Jorge Luis Borges—the latter being a particularly interesting and rewarding link, in my opinion. In the field of historiographic metafiction, many comparisons suggest themselves, among them several English writers I have mentioned, such as John Fowles, Graham Swift or A.S. Byatt. In this context, one could easily include other nationalities, such as Germany (Grass, Süskind or the less well known Erich Loest[9]) and the Hispanic world (Antonio Gala

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[9] Erich Loest (b. 1926) is a writer from my hometown of Leipzig in the East of Germany who has perhaps done something similar for the city to Gray's 'imagining' of Glasgow. His latest work, *Reichsgericht* (2001), is a collage of fact and fiction about the events surrounding the fire in the *Reichstag* (German Parliament) in 1933 and the following (in)famous trial staged by the Nazis, which took place at the *Reichsgericht*, the highest German court (which was then in Leipzig; the building is still standing and has just been completely renovated to once more house one of the highest courts in the country, the *Bundesverwaltungsgericht*). There are several parallels which can be drawn between this novel and *Poor Things*, even if they are completely different in many other respects. Incidentally, there are quite a few interesting parallels between the two cities of Leipzig and Glasgow, both historically and in the present, including the size and position within the country, the industrial past and following deindustrialisation, the rivalry with another big city in the region/nation which is more outwardly beautiful, having formerly been the royal

or Carlos Fuentes, even Garcia Márquez). Many Latin American writers and their magic realism appear to embody a similar spirit to Gray's, it seems to me: Julio Cortázar and his novel *Rayuela* (1963), which plays on the structure of the novel in a very similar way to *Lanark*, is one good example. I could easily go on at length suggesting further possible areas for research and study, which is at least partly due to the richness of Gray's work. For lack of space in this limited study, the foregoing must suffice to point to the many possibilities for future investigations which would contribute to an internationalisation of Scottish studies with the help of Alasdair Gray's work.

In conclusion, I would like to come back to the current political situation in Scotland. In 1999, when the new Scottish Parliament was opened and took up work, just two years after New Labour had returned to government with a landslide victory in the general election of 1997 and had held the promised referendum on devolution in Scotland and Wales as one of its first political acts, most of the country was jubilant. It seemed that a new historical period was starting, and that almost anything was possible. A new parliament building was being erected in the symbolic vicinity of Holyroodhouse Palace. The general excitement was to be felt in the press as well as in the air. Douglas Gifford's article on "The Politics of Scottish Fiction" written in the same year detects a similarly promising mood in literature and culture:

> The political agenda is never strident, but very much present in the confident, comical, surrealist, and constantly changing genres of the new Scottish literature [...]. Add to this an exciting and similarly varied and adventurous scene in poetry, drama, in painting and music, and a clear sense of bold new possibilities of Scottish identities emerges, a sense of constant experimentation and rising confidence, devoid of political reticence. [...] All this is still more promise than reality, but I

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residence and now the regional/national capital (Edinburgh in Glasgow's case, Dresden in Leipzig's) etc. But again, that would be a whole new study in itself.

> think many contemporary Scots would admit that from education to art, from fiction to reality, change is in the air. [Gifford 1999, 300]

Only twenty years earlier, in 1979, the situation looked very different. The economic problems and rising unemployment which culminated in the 'Winter of Discontent' were followed by the defeat of the Labour government in the general election of that year, heralding eighteen years of Conservative rule in Britain. At the end of this period dominated by Thatcherist policies, the Tories did not retain a single Scottish parliamentary seat—a clear indication of how their policies (including neo-liberal economic measures that saw the closing of much Scottish industry, growing unemployment especially in the Clydeside area, the deepening of the North-South divide and the test run of the poll tax in Scotland) were received north of the border. The same year had also seen the failure of the first referendum on Scottish devolution introduced by a lukewarm Labour government just before their election defeat, dashing any realistic hopes for some degree of self-government in Scotland for the foreseeable future. So what happened in the following twenty years to make this apparently almost complete reversal of fortunes possible? Many commentators have indeed emphasised the role of culture, and literature in particular, in upholding a sense of national identity and keeping alive the hopes for a better future. Without wanting to imply a direct relation, it is an interesting coincidence that the new literary and cultural Renaissance in which Alasdair Gray is such a prominent figure is said to have started precisely in the (late) 1970s and gathered momentum especially in the 1980s. If there really is a connection between this revival and the political development that culminated in 1999, even though possibly indirect or secondary, then this would speak for a role of literature in the real world that justifies our valuing of and attention to it over and above (if perhaps in connection to) academic and theoretical debates. After all, not many theories of culture or society have ever contributed to any real changes in everyday life. However, if it is true that Scottish literature and culture always prosper in inverse relation to the political fortunes of the nation, as Douglas Gifford has posited, calling this phenomenon "one of modern Scotland's outstanding paradoxes" [Gifford 1999, 300], then what are we to make of the current situation? Douglas Gifford's essay ends on a note of open enquiry:

> Is it perhaps the case that Scottish culture and Scottish politics are doomed forever to be at loggerheads, or—at last—are we witnessing the reintegration of all the many split and divided traditions of our cultural and social life? Can we hope that with our re-creation of a new Scottish parliament that [*sic*] we will also see the re-creation—or perhaps, more simply, the creation—of new voices which will, while maintaining our traditions of flyting and debate, speak with a greater willingness to involve themselves with possible new Scotlands? [ibid.]

This is another matter that only time will tell. However, on the evidence of this study, the 'shades of Gray' can certainly be a sign of hope. Even if, at the time of writing (late 2001), enthusiasm in Scotland—and, arguably, in Britain as a whole—has somewhat abated,[10] the future still looks promising if developments in culture

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[10] Even before the sad death of First Minister Donald Dewar, the new Scottish parliament had become more conspicuous for its internal quarrels and the profiteering of the MSPs than for imaginative or innovative policy-making. The developments under his ill-fated successor Henry McLeish led one commentator (Tim Luckhurst in the *Independent* on 16

and literature are anything to go by. If the honesty and commitment, the humour and irony, the attention to different views and perspectives, the recognition of irreducible complexity that we have found in the writings of Alasdair Gray were emulated by Scottish politicians and by Scottish society at large, the future would indeed be resplendent with colourful shades of grey—and Gray.

April 2001) to entitle an article "It's time to face the facts, Scottish devolution is a complete disaster". McLeish had to step down over a scandal in the meantime, and the first act of his successor was to publicly apologise for an extramarital affair. Admittedly, this does not exactly justify the highest of hopes for the future of Scottish politics and the new parliament. In a British context, similarly, enthusiasm for New Labour has somewhat subsided, even if Tony Blair and his party were able to secure a second landslide victory in the general election of May 2001. Even there, however, the low turnout was also cause for concern.

Epilogue, by Alasdair Gray Mainly

In what follows, I am quoting passages from two personal letters which Alasdair Gray sent to me, dated 31 December 1997 and 17 March 2004 respectively (my sincere thanks are due to him for his permission to do so). What I cannot reproduce, however, is the materiality of these handwritten letters, which are several pages long, completely covered with Gray's clear, almost child-like writing, full of tippexed corrections, deleted phrases and sometimes pages crossed out entirely. With the second letter, Gray even sent several (discarded) versions of his reactions to my questions with the following comment:

I received your letter of the 3 March when in bed with a cold and began replying at once: but nowadays I can write nothing without being driven to as much revision as a work of art needs. After a couple of false starts I saw I was attempting my own critical guide to my books: work for which I have no time when in health. I therefore enclose these, hoping you find them useful, though scrappy. I will keep photocopies, perhaps for my own use in later years. On second thoughts, no I won't. Make what you like of this. [2004]

These letters are, I find, in several ways typical of Gray's work and his general approach. There is constant revision work going on here, highlighting the provisional quality of the statements; there is a deep honesty and openness, as well as concern about what other people (I am tempted to say even critics) think and write about his work; there is also evidence of Gray's more general convictions and beliefs which can be found in his other works too. In including Gray's own views and statements here in this epilogue (which sometimes perhaps in their turn relativise what I have been saying earlier), I hope that I can 'repay' some of his honesty and trust, and in some ways continue the dialogue between theory/criticism and literature/the writer, which has been an important theme in this study. I have loosely grouped Gray's statements into different themes that roughly correspond to my interests in this book and have indicated the dates of the replies in each case.

Literary Theory and Postmodernism

Your essay and <u>*Shades of Gray*</u> *outline*[1] *seemed both true and complimentary, but being theoretical analysis I feel they could be equally true of very boring work, if it was cleverly made. Teachers and critics too often tell students & the public what to think of work before it has been enjoyed, thus making enjoyment difficult. You can only have given a lot of your life to my work because you enjoy it, so I hope your theoretical analytical outline is only a supporting structure, a skeleton to which you are adding muscles that let it move, organs of sense that give it vitality—the meat of your book. In which case, forgive this impertinent first reaction.* [2004]

[in reaction to a question about the influence of 'postmodern' debates (e.g. in the sciences, but also generally) on Gray and his work:] *All postmodernist debates and criticism I have encountered devoted so much energy to defining what post-modernism was that they had no time to illuminate anything else. I accept the theory of relativity but then, I think of Einstein as modern—modern as James Joyce and (I hope) me. The 19th century method of dividing artists into Classic, Romantic or Realist was inspired by the artists themselves. Cubists, Dadaists, Surrealists, named and formed their own schools. Post Modernism seems the creation of scholars acquiring a territory to lecture upon.* [1997]

I cannae be bothered discussing post-modern critical theory, its chief weakness [being that] *nobody seems to be able to use it without*

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[1] Gray is referring here to my article on his 'postmodernism' [Böhnke 2003] and a brief outline of my arguments in this book, both of which I sent to him in March 2004.

discussing it. A verse on page 6 of the smallest enclosed booklet says what I feel.[2] [2004]

Intertextuality and Typography in *Lanark*'s Epilogue

I can think of no writer I have read with much pleasure who has not hugely informed nearly all my books in a microscopic & macroscopic way—or (to put it more cryptically) through implags and difplags. And the Epilogue of Lanark, like the shorter Epilogues of my other books, is, though playful, about 95% truthful. The main body of it—the dialogue between Nastler and Lanark in which the self-proclaimed author and demi-urge explains the tragic outline and outcome of his grandly planned work, thereby exposing his ignorance of its crucial part (that the love of Lanark and Rima has given the world a son—a new life) and thereby earning the scorn of Lanark who knows more than he does—this dialogue derives partly from the Dedalus/Cranly talk about art in Portrait of the Artist—the Devil/Leverkühn dialogue in Mann's Dr Faustus—the Satan/Don Juan discussion in Shaw's Man and Superman and debates in his other works, which were my serious reading. The critical dialogue about the book-as-a-whole, with the by-no-means-omniscient author's grand plan of adding it to world literature, with the puncturing footnotes of the dismissive academic Stanley Workman, from Flann O'Brien's Third Policeman; a marginal index suggested by Nabokov's index in Pale Fire; rhymed running heads derived from those in Thackeray's childhood romance The Rose and the Ring. The assembly of these in double-page spreads was suggested by the layout of early bibles discovered in large coffee-

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[2] The reference is to "Postmodernism", a poem from the collection *Sixteen Occasional Poems 1990-2000*: "In the beginning was the Word, / and the Word was with God, / and the Word was God. / All things were made by him. / In him was life; / and the life was the light of men. / And the light shone in darkness; / and the darkness partly understood, / and lectured on it. // Light died before the uncreating word. // Now darkness lectures to darkness on darkness and the darkness sees it is good" [Gray 2000b, n.p.].

table-size illustrated books about illustrated books. One of these (Great Books and Book Collectors by Alan G Thomas, published by Chancellor press, London W1 in 1975) had a reproduction of a Hebrew Pentateuch's double page spread, printed by Elieser Toledano in Lisbon in 1491. This impressed me so strongly that I was sure it was germinal to the whole Lanark Epilogue scheme: until half an hour ago I referred to the Thomas book and found an inscription on the endpaper proving it was a present to me from a close friend who gave it in 1983. BUT the Epilogue was my first exercise in more than one stream of discourse on adjacent pages, here unified by them ALL being critical commentary.

The Epilogue chapter contains also the last material written for Lanark. After 4 or more years of delay it appeared in 1981, but on receiving the proofs a year or two earlier I found the printers had set the marginal index so badly that two or more pages of column space for that index were blank. This prompted me to fill them with quotations from works by contemporary Scottish writers who were also friends, locating them in five more chapters than Lanark contains. This enabled me to do three equally pleasant things at once:

1. *To amuse readers by scrambling a part of them that feels additional scholarship is a better guide to a book than its story;*
2. *To include, by quotation and reference, the modern Scottish writers I knew best in a list of famous dead and foreign artists: just as Joyce brought Yeats, Synge, A E, Moore, Gregory in conjunction with great English literary folk from Shakespeare to Newman.*
3. *To indicate, beyond the final chapter, a happy utopian ending to balance the grim apocalypse poor old Nastler prophesied.*

And a typesetter's error allowed this.

This detailed analysis of the Epilogue chapter is not because I think it the most essential part of Lanark. The four types of text in it are like gargoyles on a gothic church: grotesque additions to collect and deflect from the main structure, rainwater falling on the church's building, academic criticism on mine. Most visitors will merely glance and smile at them. I mention this assembly of texts because it instructed me in writing my two next books. [2004]

Science and Science Fiction

As a member of the general public my notions of current developments in science and technology are always out of date. When writing A History Maker in 1993 however I felt a need to know how the kind of future I imagined might be achieved through current thoughts about the future of engineering and human colonies in space. I consulted Chris Boyce, a writer of science fiction who (unlike most such writers) is a student of contemporary science. He lent me some useful books whose names I now forget. The extra scientific knowledge needed to make some parts of my work convincing was got through conversing with doctors or scientists or technicians who had an interest in the arts.

I believe scientists are as responsible for the harm they do others as are politicians, stockbrokers, civil servants, industrialists and advertising agencies. They are not more responsible for the state of the world than those I have just listed.

I define science as knowledge gained through imaginative guesses confirmed by practical experiment—an activity no human being can live without, so I cannot deplore it. Only human greed and ignorance make me worried about the future.

If Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is the work of a science fiction writer then so is Poor Things. If Wells's Time Machine and Huxley's Brave New World are science fiction so is my A History Maker and some chapters of Lanark. But I have worked in other genres. [1997]

History

Yes, history concerns me because it holds more existence than the immediate present. It exists through every work of art I ever enjoyed. No human society has existed without communal memories, experience of past lives through present works. Neither the present nor the future would make sense without many more memories than those of our own small life. I have sometimes paid unusually close attention to the 19th century because its close proximity to the 20th makes it unusually accessible. But please don't assume I think history

more valuable than geography. We old space-timers depend equally on both. [1997]

Art and Politics, Scottishness etc.

Everyone influences the society and government they have, especially those who accept it without question. The best artists and writers have always been questioners, which is why dictatorial governments censor, ban or silence them. Their influence on comparatively free societies is hard to judge since it is mingled with so many other mind-changing forces, but since dictatorships fear them they must have some good influence. [1997]

[in reply to the question of how important it was for Gray to be seen as a *Scottish* writer:]
As important as it is for Goethe to be seen as a German, Frisch as a Swiss, Jesus as a Jew, Hokusai as a Japanese. Everyone has to work with the material they find in their own corner of the human race. But good work is international to those who know some history & geography. [1997]

[about *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* and *1982 Janine*:]
Most *of Unlikely Stories, Mostly was written between 1977 & 79 when I had a writer's fellowship at Glasgow University. Sandwiched between halves of a parable about the growth and final collapse of civilization are three long stories told in the first person: 5 Letters from an Eastern Empire about the poet as bureaucrat, Logopandocy—about the poet as aristocrat, Prometheus—the poet as democratic socialist. The aristocrat is Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty, a Scottish knight who published in 1652 and 53 two or three fascinating pamphlets, though verbose ones, while on parole in London as a prisoner of the Parliamentary army. I saw how to incorporate extracts from his works into a part of my own, setting them in two columns per page like double entry book-keeping, headed at first PRO ME & CONTRA ME, changing to PRO SCOTIA & CONTRA SCOTIAM and subdivided into ARMS and ARTS, a system that keeps breaking down as his excitement about the enemies of his fortune and political class*

cram the contra column so full that it widens and squeezes the pro column into smaller type and narrower width. The technical device of typographically narrowing a text I first enjoyed in the mouse's tale, Alice in Wonderland. A later part of the story is my pastiche of Urquhart's style: an apocryphal diary in which two passages—supposedly nibbled away by mice—are replaced by a block of asterisks where the reader has been led to expect a very interesting explanation. This device was learned from Swift's Tale of a Tub.

First person narrative fiction was new to me. Another story in that kind of voice, also intended for Unlikely Stories, Mostly and a main reason for Mostly in that title, swelled up in the writing to become a second, wholly unexpected and unplanned novel, 1982 Janine, the first half being written in 1982. It had more immediate contemporary references to the state of Britain then than anything else I had written—the Thatcher government—Falkland's war, removal of Scotland's mining and steelmaking and machine building and textile industries—their replacement by nuclear and delivery systems, both naval and aerial. [2004]

Appendix

Figure 1: Real and mock criticism from the paperback edition of *Poor Things* [Gray 1992b, iii].

Figure 2: ‘Split text’ from the Epilogue in *Lanark* [Gray 1981, 496].

Figure 3: 'Breakdown' page from *1982, Janine* [Gray 1984, 184].

Figure 4: ‘Breakdown’ page from *Poor Things* [Gray 1992b, 145].

Figure 5: Illustration from *A History Maker* [Gray 1994, 224].

Figure 6: Frontispiece to Book Four from *Lanark* [Gray 1981, 355].

Figure 7: Portrait of "Bella Caledonia" from *Poor Things* [Gray 1992b, 45].

Figure 8a/b: Illustrations depicting Victorian Glasgow from *Poor Things* [Gray 1992b, 294-5].

Figure 9: Map from *A History Maker* [Gray 1994, ii]

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