Groundings Undergraduate Academic Journal

University of Glasgow | Glasgow University Union

Scotland is Fucked: Irvine Welsh, Andrew Drennan and the Deconstruction of Nationalism

Author(s): Anikó Szilágyi

Source: Groundings Undergraduate, April 2010, Vol. 3, pp. 55-70

Published by: Glasgow University Dialectic Society, University of Glasgow

ISSNs: 1754-7474 (Print) | 1755-2702 (Online)

Scotland is Fucked[1]: Irvine Welsh, Andrew Drennan and the Deconstruction of Nationalism

Anikó Szilágyi

Welsh and Drennan's work demonstrates significant changes in the literary depiction of the Scottish nation. Moving away from traditional counter-colonial and separatist rhetoric, they direct attention to the problem of consumerism as a new colonising power. Their discourse is permeated by violence, which is also made manifest on a thematic level. Drennan's novel inverts the implications of the treatment of violence by suggesting that it can be both self-inflicted and self-indulgent.

Irvine Welsh's debut novel, *Trainspotting*, became an instant success after its publication in 1993. It was followed by *Marabou Stork Nightmares* in 1995, a text that deals even more explicitly with questions of national identity. *Cancer Party* by Andrew Raymond Drennan, published in January 2009, treads a similar path exploring Scotland and Scottishness in terms of an all-pervasive violence. All of these texts were written in and about postcolonial Scotland and are concerned in different ways with the legacy of its colonial history.

The first three words of the title nicely encapsulate the essence of the strand of Scottish fiction that the texts discussed in this essay represent. Of course Welsh was not the first to depict urban working-class Scotland using the vernacular, or the first to write about drug abuse: Trocchi shocked his reading audience with

---

ANIKÓ SZILÁGYI is in the final year of her Joint Honours programme in English Literature and Celtic Studies at the University of Glasgow. She is fascinated by the ways in which national identities are constructed and deconstructed in literature. She comes from Hungary.

[1] A reference to Alasdair Gray's *1982 Janine*. See Zoë Strachan, "Is that a Scot or am Ah wrang?", in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene, 51-56 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 53.

Cain's Book as far back as 1960, and James Kelman's first novel, *The Busconductor Hines*, was published in 1984, the year Michael Gardiner identifies as the starting point of 'the current Scottish literary boom'.[2] However, when *Trainspotting* came out in 1993, it was still seen as transgressive, representing 'contemporary counterculture' and part of a literary tradition which can now safely be said to have become 'mainstream'. The fact that many 20th and 21st century Scottish writers – Alexander Trocchi, Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard, James Kelman, Louise Welsh, Zoë Strachan, and so on – invariably engage with the themes of poverty, deprivation, drug addiction, sexual abuse and crime, coupled with the proliferation of Scottish crime fiction as well as 'true crime' writing since the 1980s,[3] suggests that as far as literature is concerned, Scotland does indeed seem to have 'a culture of failure'.[4] In other words, it is 'fucked', and vulgar language is nothing but appropriate for this kind of subject matter.

The word 'fucked' also has clear connotations of sex and sexual abuse, an important trope in postcolonial literature in general. The idea of colonial subjection as 'rape' lies at the very heart of *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, where the protagonist, Roy Strang, struggles in vain to come to terms with his involvement in the the violation of a young girl. In a chapter titled 'The Praying Mantis', Roy recounts his vision of two prostitutes suddenly turning into giant insects. The imagery is highly suggestive: the female praying mantis often eats the male during intercourse, and Roy's perception of the women as threatening can be read as a symbol of anxiety of reverse colonisation. Drennan's novel includes an interesting 'reversed rape scene' where Adam, the main character of *Cancer Party*, is bullied into sexual intercourse by a girl he sees as pushy, intimidating and physically repulsive.

---

[2] Michael Gardiner, *From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 10.

[3] I find the fact that the major bookstores in Scotland have a separate 'Scottish crime' section both appalling and intriguing.

[4] Strachan, "Is that a Scot", 55.

> *It's nae good blamin it oan the English fir colonising us. Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can't even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by. No. We're ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation. Ah don't hate the English. They just git oan wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots.*[5]

If such a term existed, this would be called a counter-counter-colonial rant. Renton makes two important points here: Scots are miserable, and Scots can only blame themselves. These ideas are picked up on (a little more subtly) in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, where one of the characters explains that it is only weak lions that attack humans, only those unable to deal with anything stronger or more agile.[6]

Welsh's second novel, with its "continued interrogation of the Scottish past",[7] is particularly relevant to a postcolonial enquiry. It is the story of the coming of age not just of Roy Strang, but also of Scottish state-of-the-nation literature. Lying half-conscious in a hospital bed, Roy reminisces about his childhood spent partly in South Africa, where he experienced violence on a public as well as a private level as he witnessed the dynamics of apartheid and was sexually assaulted by his uncle. Later he gives a graphic description of the rape that has

---

[5] Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting*, in *The Irvine Welsh Omnibus,* 1-350 (London: Random House, 1997), 84.

[6] Irvine Welsh, *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, in *The Irvine Welsh Omnibus,* 649-920 (London: Random House, 1997), 700.

[7] Robert Morace, "Irvine Welsh: Parochialism, Pornography and Globalisation", in in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene, 227-235 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 228.

weighed on his conscience ever since. Trying desperately to cope with guilt, Strang and Scotland are seen as both victim and aggressor. What emerges from this coalescence of identities – coloniser and colonised, rapist and rape victim - is a clear message: violence breeds more violence. Although the novel is explicitly anti-imperialist – Roy's uncle is described as "an unreconstructed pro-apartheid white supremacist"[8] whose justification of British rule in Africa, that "blacks couldn't organise themselves, couldn't do anything right",[9] is more than a little ironic – instead of bewailing Scotland's own past as a colonised state, it addresses its complicity in the colonisation of Africa. It is pre-devolution in its date but it is post-devolution in its ethos: the rhetoric of blame is replaced by self-examination. It goes beyond the limited framework of a narrow-minded nationalist discourse and recognises the relativity of the subject position, viewing it from a more international perspective, as Roy acknowledges that "Edinburgh had the same politics as Johannesburg: it had the same politics as any city. Only we were on the other side".[10] Welsh's approach is almost subaltern here, recognising that issues of nationality may overshadow the subjection of "other marginalised identity categories, such as gender, sexuality and race".[11] *Marabou Stork Nightmares* deconstructs both traditional colonial

---

[8] Irvine Welsh, *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, 718.

[9] Ibid., 721.

[10] Ibid., 736.

[11] Stefanie Lehner, "Subaltern Scotland: devolution and postcoloniality", in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene, 292-300 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 293. 'Subaltern' is a highly controversial term often used in the context of Postcolonial Studies. Homi Bhabha defines it as "oppressed, minority groups whose presence [is] crucial to the self-definition of the majority group" and who are "also in a position to subvert the authority of those who [have] hegemonic power." See Homi K. Bhabha, "Unsatisfied: notes on vernacular cosmopolitanism", in *Text and Nation: Cross-Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities*, ed. Laura Garcia-Moreno and Peter C. Pfeiffer, 191-207 (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996). For Gayatri Spivak, the key terms are difference and silence: a subaltern group is defined in terms of its difference from the elite and its inability to speak for itself. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

and counter-colonial discourses by exposing the metropolitan city as "the grizzled fag-end of the British Islands" rather than "somewhere distant and exotic",[12] and presenting a completely de-romanticised view of Scotland as the hotbed of crime, sectarianism and having the 'crappest' schools in Europe.[13] Politics is approached with complete scepticism, such as in John Strang's grotesque patriotism: "Ah voted SNP, no thit ah believe in Scottish independence. The Scots built the empire n these daft English cunts couldnae run it withoot us",[14] which is just as pathetic as Uncle Gordon's anti-Thatcherite rants: "Maggie Thatcher. Fucking whore! Fucking treacherous fucking stupid communist fucking whore!".[15]

Debunking the myth of Scotland as the passive victim of colonial subjection does not, however, absolve the coloniser, it only shows the bigger mechanisms at work which inevitably lead to some form of oppression. This is what Fanon refers to as 'inferiorisation', whereby a group of people attempt to 'achieve a sense of superiority' by looking down on another oppressed grouping and scapegoating them.[16] Scotland's participation in the imperialist project, the rape, Roy beating up his weaker brother Bernard, can all be explained in terms of processes similar to Fanon's 'racial distribution of guilt'.[17]

SELF-HARM AND POLITICS

In *Marabou Stork Nightmares* guilt finds an outlet in outwardly directed violence. Drennan takes this one step further by presenting a world where the

---

in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

[12] Irvine Welsh, *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, 743.

[13] Ibid., 732.

[14] Ibid., 781.

[15] Ibid., 738.

[16] Derek Hook, "Fanon and the psychoanalysis of racism", in *Critical Psychology*, ed. Derek Hook, 114-137 (Lansdowne, South Africa: Juta Academic Publishing, 2004), 126.

[17] Ibid.

only way of coping with trauma seems to be self-harm. He opens the novel with a quotation from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, which foregrounds the idea of self-torture as one of the major themes of the novel. Whether it is meant as self-punishment for 'being ugly', as in Adam's case, Cat's desperate attempts to draw attention to herself, or the unnamed customer's last link with reality and a happier past, a reminder "that she used to be alive[, s]till bleeding, still breathing",[18] the slashing of one's wrists is as much a part of the characters' daily routine as eating and sleeping. Should this channelling of aggression into self-harm be seen as something more than a 21st-century manifestation of Social Realism? If the perpetuation of violence in *Marabou Stork Nightmares* can be read on two levels, individual and national, what does *Cancer Party*'s obsession with self-harm say about the contemporary Scottish experience? With its overt political dimension, Drennan's novel can be viewed as part of a narrative of the nation, of post-devolution Scotland's struggle to assume responsibility for its problems, its dehumanised consumerist culture and appalling crime rates.[19]

The *Scottish Literary Voice*'s review of *Cancer Party*, printed on the front cover, immediately establishes *Trainspotting* as its conscious intertext, inasmuch as the reader's consciousness is concerned.[20] The novel is set in 1997, after the New Labour takeover and the referendum which resulted in the creation of a semi-autonomous Scottish Parliament in 1998. The face of Tony Blair beaming from the election posters carries the promise of all-round

---

[18] Andrew Raymond Drennan, *Cancer Party* (Glasgow: Cargo Publishing, 2009), 215.
[19] "The University of California claims that Scotland's murder rate now exceeds the United States' and Israel's. The WHO study says that you're three times more likely to meet violent death north of the border than you are in England and Wales" Irvine Welsh, "Scotland's Murderous Heart", www.caledonia.org.uk/murderous.htm (accessed 25 March 2010).
[20] It is clear from Drennan's *Manifesto* that he himself regards Welsh as an important predecessor: "*Lanark* by Alasdair Gray was published before I was born. *Trainspotting* was more than ten years ago. We should be ashamed. What are we waiting for?" Andrew Raymond Drennan, "A Manifesto", www.myspace.com/cancerparty (accessed 8 December 2009).

improvement, 'Because Britain Deserves Better'. A Thatcherite gang of Scottish youths called the Eton Boys, wearing striped suits and bowler hats, carrying canes, proud of their Rachmaninov and 'long live the union' slogan, set out to batter to pieces – at times quite literally – everything the 'New Labour' GOMA kids hold sacred.[21] Selling exam papers with wrong answers to desperate university students, the Eton Boys represent free market capitalism, where everything is allowed. Eton Boy Charlie neatly sums up their manifesto:

> *I'm surprised you didn't see me at the university, Adam. Giving those bloody liberals their stupid exam papers. All wrong unfortunately. For them. Just wait until their results come back. Daddy will not be proud. You see, the time has come to re-establish some natural order around here. At the bottom is you, and at the top is... will... be us.*[22]

Drennan picks up where Welsh left off: the GOMA kid is like the junkie in *Trainspotting*, "published after fourteen years of Conservative government", who in the uncaring Thatcher years "assumed a permanent seat at the bottom of the social ladder in a system which had reinstated the 'deserving poor'".[23]
Political promises notwithstanding, things only get worse. As Adam is battling against loneliness and alcoholism, hope, like Tony Blair's face, is "fading every day", and "the red in the New Labour election poster [is] starting to discolour".[24] In the end the posters are finally taken down, a confirmation of the novel's utter disillusionment with politics:

> *Adam stared at the last sheet; at the wide cancer-curing smile and the Eton Boys' tag beside it. Their wonderful father showing them the way forward. And he was leaving like all the other fathers did. [...] In the*

---

[21] The gang is named after its symbolic gathering place in front of the Gallery of Modern Arts.
[22] Drennan, *Cancer Party*, 156.
[23] Gardiner, *From Trocchi to Trainspotting*, 89.
[24] Drennan, *Cancer Party*, 143.

> *rear view mirror the last sheet of Tony's face came down, and just like that, he was gone, erased from Adam's memory, along with the unquestionable mantra, 'Things can only get better.* [25]

It is important to emphasise here that the political scepticism of *Cancer Party* is universal rather than nationalist. Drennan's critique of nationalism is anything but subtle: "[Adam] had never felt like much of a patriot. How can you, when you don't even feel part of this world? It's just reductionism. Why not go further and feel patriotism for your county, your street, your house, your living room, your head. You don't feel a part of any of those things".[26] Scotland matters and does not matter: the idea, the flag, the Parliament are completely devoid of meaning, the Prime Minister is seen merely as another commodity the new Scotland demands for itself, lumped together with clothes, television shows and Swedish furniture.[27] "We have to look outwards. We have to be more international", writes Drennan in his *Manifesto*, and he accordingly makes Adam debunk what he bluntly calls the 'triumph-of-the-Scottish-spirit shit' in a university lecture on Hugh MacDiarmid, founder of the Scottish National Party. Adam's philosophy, however, is cosmopolitan rather than nihilistic: what matters is people, "trying to survive, tossed out like satellites into space".[28]

The confrontation between tourists and football hooligans exposes nationalism as a subcategory of sectarianism and as bound up with violence.[29] This brings us to an important aspect of contemporary Scottish writing: concern about the disparity between the 'real' and the newly created, tourist-friendly, marketable Scotland.

---

[25] Ibid., 254.
[26] Ibid., 223.
[27] Ibid., 35.
[28] Ibid., 58.
[29] Ibid., 182. The problem is shockingly relevant, as a Google search of 'sectarianism' shows – the second hit is the Wikipedia entry 'Sectarianism *in Glasgow*'.

CONSUMERISM AND THE REBRANDING OF SCOTLAND

The website of the Glasgow City Council proudly announces that Glasgow, once an industrial city, is now "the second largest shopping centre in the UK."[30] In his essay on twenty-first century Glaswegian novellists Alan Bissett argues that

> *[i]n an attempt to recast Glasgow as a shopping, business and tourism magnet the city has been subject to a slick rebranding exercise loudly proclaiming 'the transformation of Glasgow from its inward-looking, post-industrial slump to a confident, outward-looking, economically regenerated destination city' (Glasgow City Council 2005)*[31]

The city's reinvention of itself as 'centre of consumption' rather than production, however, has a price, and scepticism is a ubiquitous feature of literary voices exploring the new identity of Glasgow. The dark side of Edinburgh, 'marketed' since 2005 as a City of Literature, is exposed in detail in Welsh's work, who draws attention to the fact that "murderous violence happens out of view of tourists and the urban-dwelling professional classes; often it's deemed not to occur at all".[32] The oppressive colonising state has been replaced by a new 'other', the all-pervasive consumerism which an economy based on urban tourism inevitably entails. As Bissett observes, "[i]n this climate, even Kelman's invective against the British state and English linguistic hegemony now seems curiously historical".[33] The analogy of commercialisation

---

[30] See http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/Visitors/Shopping/ (accessed 8 December 2009).

[31] Alan Bissett, "The 'New Weegies': the Glasgow novel in the twenty-first century", in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene, 59-67 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 59.

[32] Irvine Welsh, "Scotland's Murderous Heart". Ironically enough, the murders committed in the centre of Edinburgh which constitute the main subject matter of crime writing by mega-popular Scottish authors like Ian Rankin, Christopher Broomyre and Quintin Jardine hardly ever occur in real life.

[33] Bissett, "The 'New Weegies'", 60.

as a colonising force is made explicit in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, where Roy, his imaginary friend and colleague Sandy and their employer have a discussion about whether "sport has colonised capitalism" or "the other way around".[34] *Trainspotting* also addresses the issue of commercial colonisation: Renton might simply dismiss the English as 'wankers' but cannot ignore the serious problem of consumerism.

> *Society invents a spurious convoluted logic tae absorb and change people whae's behaviour is outside its mainstream. Suppose that ah ken aw the pros and cons, know that ah'm gaunnae huv a short life, am ay sound mind etcetera, etcetera, but still want tae use smack? They won't let ye dae it. They won't let ye dae it.because it's seen as a sign ay thir ain failure. The fact that ye jist simply choose tae reject whit they huv tae offer. Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines, choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye've produced. Choose life.*[35]

Renton and Adam rebel against "[t] he apparent inevitability of historical progress" which "tends to assert free-market ideology not only as the best, but as the only option".[36] Drennan's portrayal of Glasgow echoes that of Louise Welsh's novel *The Cutting Room*: "a restless, postmodern panorama of neon light"[37] where free market capitalism thrives, so much so that literally everything is for sale, from antiques to human bodies and lives. The ever-present lights are a constant reminder of the dynamics of commerce pervading urban life:

---

[34] Irvine Welsh, *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, 702.
[35] Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting*, 193.
[36] Lehner, "Subaltern Scotland", 295.
[37] Bissett, "The 'New Weegies'", 61.

> *We slipped through a fluorescent white tunnel, then climbed high over the city on the curving expressway; the River Clyde oil-black and still beneath us, a backdrop to the reflected lights of the city; the white squares of late-night office work; traffic signals drifting red, amber, green, necklaces of car headlamps halting then moving in their sway; the Renfrew Ferry illuminated at its permanent mooring; scarlet neon sign of the Daily Record offices suspended in the dark sky to our right.*[38]

Louise Welsh's critique of 'Thatcher's white-collar revolution',[39] which has also produced Renton the estate agent and Strang the computer programmer, and her insistence on the sharp contrast between the false optimism of the neon lights of the city's shopping centres and the soulless, lonely and depressing lives of its inhabitants recur in *Cancer Party*, where "Scotland appears to be looking for light – no matter how artificial – in all the wrong places".[40] Adam's 'friends' regularly get together under the netting of fairy lights surrounding the museum, "a desperate attempt to fake a starry sky" in a city where "[t]he real ones [are] obscured by the thousands of streetlights beaming up thoughtlessly to the night sky".[41] The artificial lights become emblematic of the cheap solutions available to people in these 'dark times': recreational drugs, alcohol, parties and vandalism, anything that makes them forget, none of which work in the long run. Outraged at their hypocrisy and empty sparkle, Adam tears down the Christmas street decorations in a climactic scene towards the end of the book. Although it brings him relief and can be interpreted as a victory over his almost Hamletian reluctance to take action, it is yet another act of vandalism, and as such its redeeming power is highly questionable. The problem of Adam's passivity is highlighted in the chapter where a group of young people torture a

---

[38] Louise Welsh, *The Cutting Room* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002), 98-99.
[39] Bissett, "The 'New Weegies'", 60.
[40] Drennan, *Cancer Party*, back cover.
[41] Ibid., 117.

stray dog to death and he just stands by and watches, which leaves him with a deep sense of failure and guilt - "[d]efeat, defeat. And he had done nothing. This he knew".[42] Even when a colleague of his decides to quit his job at the DIY shop 'Fix It' and tells the customers through the tannoy to 'fuck off home', he just keeps dreaming about "screaming around the aisles, raging at the lack of compassion, the denial of humanity in favour of value for money [...] and everyone would listen. Boy, they would listen!"[43] People do not listen, of course, as he does none of it. The only thing that might make up for Adam's cowardice is the fact that the narration lapses into the first person from time to time, as if it was Adam who is telling the story, which of course means that he *is* speaking out, and there *are* people – the readers – listening. The idea of Scotland as a place of isolation where people will not listen to each other is another link between *Cancer Party* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares,* the latter featuring a main character who is forced to listen to others *and* 'forces' the reader to listen to an account they probably do not want to hear. *Cancer Party* is full of such characters: Adam and Cat, who are "like everyone else, and typically Scottish: fatherless",[44] Nicola, whose mother only cares about TV shows and food and whose step-father only cares about prescriptions, Arthur, who, like Bernard in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, keeps trying to shove his poetry in the face of unwilling audiences, all inhabit a world where, in Louise Welsh's words, "[p]eople talk, talk, talking to a distant party while the world marche[s] by."[45]

THE GREAT SCOTTISH PLAY

> *"You look like shit," Cat assured me. "Is that a Joy Division T-shirt? I love how their singer tries to sound really miserable."*
> *"Well, he did end up hanging himself –"*

---

[42] Ibid., 192.
[43] Ibid., 220.
[44] Ibid., 18.
[45] Louise Welsh, *The Cutting Room*, 65.

> *"Hanging yourself? Slash your wrists for fuck's sake – now that's fucking hardcore. None of this hanging yourself bollocks."*
> *Only Cat could embrace the public spectacle of self destruction via razorus bladus. Slashing had become the way forward for suicide in the soundbite generation. What do you do when killing yourself isn't good enough?*[46]

In many ways *Cancer Party* undoubtedly fits in with the literary tradition that systematically portrays Scotland as a failed country. However, much as it has in common with other contemporary state-of-the-nation novels, it can also be seen as challenging the very strand it feeds off. Adam's 'theatrically depressed clientele' who consider mental illnesses and self-harm fashionable stand as a metaphor for Scotland revelling in its own misery and self-pity. The figure of self-appointed 'celeb' Cat, writing a column for an English magazine, trying to attract a reading audience by posing as a promiscuous, suicidal drug addict regularly indulging in self-harm, is an implicit critique of both the reader who is perversely hungry for such graphic depictions of misery, and the writer who is more than willing to satisfy this hunger. Drennan's writing is anything but cosy, but at the same time it questions the raison d'être of the tendency of some contemporary Scottish fiction to depict Scotland as a 'fucked up' country. Facts cannot be questioned – Cat *is* a promiscuous, suicidal drug addict, and Scotland *is* "the most violent country in the developed world"[47]; the problem is with the way they seem to *use* their identity to fish for sympathy, which is seen as a characteristically Scottish phenomenon: "In London no one kills themselves. They just overdose."[48] The novel undermines its own legitimacy when Cat tells Adam that she is writing a story called *Cancer Party* about a boy called Adam, as it immediately alerts us to the possibility that we might be reading just another of Cat's made-up magazine stories, that the whole poignant narrative

---

[46] Drennan, *Cancer Party*, 17.
[47] According to a United Nations report. See Irvine Welsh, "Scotland's Murderous Heart".
[48] Drennan, *Cancer Party*, 160.

might be just a prank. When merciless naturalism has been exhausted, the abrasive discourse permeated by self-pity or self-blame must come to an end, and other modes of writing about Scotland must be found.

Concern about the commercialisation of Scotland (and the rest of the world) as the primary threat to identity and a dedication to continuous self-examination are characteristic of both Welsh and Drennan's work. *Cancer Party* is a good example of "'overtly political' voices" lingering "in the cultural sphere",[49] although its emphasis is on the soul-destroying effects of consumerism rather than political rhetoric. It lacks the clear-cut causality of *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, where everything can be traced back to a series of 'unfortunate' events in the past, like the sexual assault of young Roy and the dog attack. The difference between Welsh's overt sermonising and Drennan's dark and more or less static picture of Scotland is that the latter offers no easy solutions or obvious message, and the seemingly positive note it ends on is unconvincing. The 'Scottish Play' Adam is trapped in, as said in the suicide note from his lecturer – yet another father figure who 'leaves' –, is all about gratuitous theatricality that makes the depiction of violence, especially self-harm, seem almost passé. What Welsh and Drennan have in common is the recognition that Scottish fiction has to move beyond nationalism and that facing its own problems of fear and self-loathing, the fact that the only person Roy Strang hates may turn out to be Roy Strang, should take priority over the quest for futher political independence. The now supposedly "forward-looking country with its own parliament, making decisions like grown-ups do",[50] still has plenty to worry and write about. *Trainspotting*, *Marabou Stork Nightmares* and *Cancer Party* all share with Kelman's *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free* and Kennedy's *Paradise* what Lehner calls "the commitment to exposing the continuing injustices perpetrated by society's faith in a capitalist utopia."[51]

---

[49] Lehner, "Subaltern Scotland", 295.

[50] Welsh, "Scotland's Murderous Heart".

[51] Lehner "Subaltern Scotland", 300.

REFERENCES

BBC Writing Scotland. www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/arts/writingscotland/ [accessed 8 December 2009].

Bhabha, Homi K. "Unsatisfied: notes on vernacular cosmopolitanism." In *Text and Nation: Cross-Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities*, edited by Laura Garcia-Moreno and Peter C. Pfeiffer, 191-207. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996.

Bissett, Alan. "The 'New Weegies': the Glasgow novel in the twenty-first century." In *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, edited by Berthold Schoene, 59-67. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Drennan, Andrew Raymond. *Cancer Party*. Glasgow: Cargo Publishing, 2009.

_____. "A Manifesto." www.myspace.com/cancerparty [accessed 8 December 2009].

Gardiner, Michael. *From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Hook, Derek. "Fanon and the psychoanalysis of racism." In *Critical Psychology*, edited by Derek Hook, 114-137. Lansdowne, South Africa: Juta Academic Publishing, 2004.

Lehner, Stefanie. "Subaltern Scotland: devolution and postcoloniality." In *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, edited by Berthold Schoene, 292-300. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Morace, Robert. "Irvine Welsh: Parochialism, Pornography and Globalisation." In *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, edited by Berthold Schoene, 227-235. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Plain, Gill. "Concepts of corruption: crime fiction and the Scottish 'state'." In *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, edited by Berthold Schoene, 132-140. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Strachan, Zoë. “Is that a Scot or am Ah wrang?” In *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, edited by Berthold Schoene, 51-56. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Welsh, Irvine. *Trainspotting*. In *The Irvine Welsh Omnibus,* 1-350. London: Random House, 1997.

_____. *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. In *The Irvine Welsh Omnibus,* 649-920. London: Random House, 1997.

_____. “Scotland’s murderous heart.” www.caledonia.org.uk/murderous.htm [accessed 25 March 2010].

Welsh, Louise. *The Cutting Room*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002.