

Uncanny Modalities in Post-1970s Scottish Fiction: Realism, Disruption, Tradition

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Abstract

This thesis addresses critical conceptions of Scottish literary development in the twentieth-century which inscribe realism as both the authenticating tradition and necessary *telos* of modern Scottish writing. To this end I identify and explore a Scottish ‘counter-tradition’ of modern uncanny fiction. Drawing critical attention to techniques of modal disruption in the works of a number of post-1970s Scottish writers gives cause to reconsider that realist teleology while positing a range of other continuities and tensions across modern Scottish literary history.

The thesis initially defines the critical context for the project, considering how realism has come to be regarded as a medium of national literary representation. I go on to explore techniques of modal disruption and uncanny in texts by five Scottish writers, contesting ways in which habitual recourse to the realist tradition has obscured important aspects of their work.

Chapter One investigates Ali Smith’s reimagining of ‘the uncanny guest’. While this trope has been employed by earlier Scottish writers, Smith redesigns it as part of a wider interrogation of the hyperreal twenty-first-century. Chapter Two considers two texts by James Robertson, each of which, I argue, invokes uncanny techniques familiar to readers of James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson in a way intended specifically to suggest concepts of national continuity and literary inheritance. Chapter Three argues that James Kelman’s political stance necessitates modal disruption as a means of relating intimate individual experience. Re-envisioning Kelman as a writer of the uncanny makes his central assimilation into the teleology of Scottish realism untenable, complicating the

way his work has been positioned in the Scottish canon. Chapter Four analyses A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad*, delineating a similarity in the processes of repetition which result in both uncanny effects and the phenomenon of tradition, leading to Kennedy's identification of an uncanny dimension in the concept of national tradition itself. Chapter Five considers the work of Alan Warner, in which the uncanny appears as an unsettling sense of significance embedded within the banal everyday, reflecting an existentialism which reaches beyond the national. In this way, I argue that habitual recourse to an inscribed realist tradition tends to obscure the range, complexity and instability of the realist techniques employed by the writers at issue, demonstrating how national continuities can be productively accommodated within wider, pluralistic analytical approaches.

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Introduction

Freedom is *inconceivable*. The word
Betrays the cause – a habit o’ the mind,
Thinkin’ continually in a certain way,
Generation after generation, till it seems
This is Thocht’s fixed, unalterable mode.

Hugh MacDiarmid¹

The uncanny comes into being as a violation of the law of non-contradiction.

Susan Bernstein²

The prominence of the uncanny as a recurring effect in modern Scottish literature has received little sustained critical attention. While writers such as Ali Smith, A.L. Kennedy and Alan Warner employ numerous uncanny techniques to varied effect, a critical emphasis has by contrast positioned realism, and an accompanying teleology of ‘authentic’ representation, as the characteristic tradition of Scottish literature in the twentieth-century. This thesis applies critical pressure to totalising conceptions of a Scottish realist tradition, by drawing attention to and interrogating uncanny effects in the work of a number of post-1970s Scottish writers. The uncanny, through the modal disruption of individual texts and in

¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, ‘Freedom’, in ‘The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea’, *The Modern Scot*, (Summer/Winter 1931) (*Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. by Duncan Glen (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 56-74, (p. 57)).

² Susan Bernstein, ‘It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny’, *MLN*, 118:5 (Dec 2003), 1111-1139 (1113).

its contradictory relation to the concept of tradition, necessitates an approach that accommodates pluralism without rejecting the national. It does so, I will argue, by foregrounding the accidental nature of 'nationalising' traditions. Identifying techniques of uncanny modal disruption within key texts of this period, however, calls into question this Scottish realist teleology, necessitating a sophisticated critical repositioning which accommodates national traditions within wider interpretative schema.

Realism, the *heimlich*, and Scottish Literature: A Critical Context

The uncanny requires a normative mode of realism from which to suggest an unsettling divergence, and the significance of the modern trend of uncanny writing is closely related to the distinctive relation between Scottish writing and realism as a mode. Scottish literature in the twentieth-century can in one respect be seen as a series of reactions to the concept of 'authenticity' in representation, typified by questions of mimetic technique and the value systems underlying choices of subject matter, narrative strategy, and modality. Realism remains a debated issue in Scottish studies where for other literatures it has become naturalised to the point of invisibility. As Kirsty Macdonald summarises,

twentieth-century Scottish writing is generally agreed to have been marked particularly by the rise of realism. The realist mode, in which the appearances of the supernatural are by definition an impossibility, sought more or less unproblematically to reflect the "truths" of Scottish life.³

While realism is a distinct mode intended to represent the world we recognise as it is defined by known laws of reality, the uncanny introduces mimetic uncertainty. While conventional reading practice habitually assumes a mode of consistent, reliable reality in the fictional world, in uncanny texts that mode is scrambled, made doubtful, or otherwise

³ Kirsty Macdonald, 'Against Realism: Contemporary Scottish Literature and the Supernatural', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. by Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh, Edinburgh: University Press, 2007), pp. 328-335 (p. 328).

called into question by elements which seem not to belong within the rules of the mimetic contract, and which often suggest possible fantastic, supernatural or otherworldly explanations or associations. These disturbing elements remain unexplained or unconfirmed, however, so that the initial realist mode is neither definitively abolished nor convincingly reconfigured. Resultantly, these texts 'hover' uncomfortably between modes of readerly assimilation. As I will go on to describe, Scottish literary criticism in the twentieth-century has inscribed a distinctive 'national' relation onto the otherwise conventional realist mode.

As Linda Nochlin asserts, the original aim of realism as an artistic movement in the mid-nineteenth-century 'was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life'.⁴ As that movement developed, Peter Brooks states,

this kind of fiction becomes in the course of the nineteenth century the standard mode of the novels we continue to think of as great, as classics. Once a radical gesture, breaking with tradition, realism becomes so much the expected mode of the novel that even today we tend to think of it as the norm from which other modes – magical realism, science fiction, fantasy, metafiction – are variants or deviants. That is, we eventually come to regard the styles of representing the world pioneered by such as Balzac, Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, George Eliot as standard, what we expected fiction to be.⁵

In countries such as England, France, and Russia, the set of stylistic techniques known as realism became the comfortable, accepted mode for fictional representation; the mode was naturalised, its techniques fading into invisibility as the 'default setting' of literature.

The growth of Kailyard fiction in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Scotland, followed by its subsequent rejection, however, has meant that for Scottish

⁴ Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 13.

⁵ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 3.

literature in this period, rather than becoming the expected or standard literary mode (effectively invisible as a stylistic approach), realism was foregrounded as an issue of contention, connected to questions about the 'authentic' representation of Scottish life. While recent criticism (prominently the work of Andrew Nash) has done much to restore attention to the distinctions between writers like J.M. Barrie, S.R. Crockett and Ian Maclaren, their Kailyard work nevertheless typically depicts a Scotland of idyllic rurality, and their sentimental melodrama and wholesomeness found great popularity with London audiences and expatriates in Canada and America, through novels and serialisations. Yet those often elegiac parochial visions were far removed from the realities of an industrialised Scotland which was the daily experience of an increasing proportion of the population. It is not so much that Kailyard texts lack realist techniques, such as mimetic description, but rather that they came to be seen as lacking the affirmative value of realism as a representation of real Scottish experience, as it is genuinely lived. Francis Russell Hart, for example, notes this shortfall between realist technique and authentic representation in Crockett's novels, in that '[a]t first they impress us with an unsentimental gusto in the realist depiction of milieu; we then see the values of romance and idyll take over'.⁶ Robert Crawford, too, observes this inauthenticity, noting for example that 'too often Kailyard fiction fails because it presents adults to an adult readership as if they were slightly comical children'.⁷ The fictional world depicted by Kailyard writers increasingly seemed an inauthentic, escapist fantasy – a 'rose-covered distortion' as Hart puts it (p. 130). A backlash to this perceived inauthenticity seemed inevitable. As Carla Sassi describes, romance and

⁶ Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel* (John Murray: London, 1978), p. 119.

⁷ Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 514.

“‘[e]scapist’ genres too, like fantasy, were rejected by a generation of [early twentieth-century] intellectuals who, understandably, recognised in realism the only antidote to the (colonial) exoticisation of Scotland’.⁸ George Douglas Brown’s *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901) and John MacDougall Hay’s *Gillespie* (1914) are most often taken as the literary encapsulation of anti-Kailyard sentiment, their focus on bricks-and-mortar detail and everyday drudgery emblematic of the rejection of Kailyard’s twee romanticism. Brown, in particular, is famed for his abhorrence of the sentimentality favoured by ‘the Kailyard writers whose world he sought to explode’ (Crawford, p. 532). As the term ‘Kailyard’ became a term implying the stereotypical and the representationally inauthentic, so an emphatic significance is assigned in Scottish writing to realist representation as a mode which would convey the everyday truth of Scottish life.

While Kailyard writing increasingly came to be seen as representing Scotland through a quaint series of Victorian picture-postcards, however, other literatures had become increasingly nationally-determined. As Pascale Casanova describes,

in the course of the nineteenth century, even in the most powerful literary worlds, which is to say the ones that were most independent of national and political interests, literature came to be redefined in national terms. In England, for example, literature was made the primary vehicle of ‘national self-definition’.⁹

Scotland arrived late to this process, but a similar movement took place from the mid-twentieth-century onwards as critics became intent on identifying traditions which would demonstrate ‘that Scottish culture is distinctive enough to have produced substantial variations in the novel’ (Hart, p. 3), and which would assign the necessary national teleology

⁸ Carla Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters* (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 2005), p. 13.

⁹ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M. B. Debevoise (1999; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 106.

to the development of literature in Scotland. In *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (1978), for example, Hart periodises Scottish fiction by grouping writers within convenient temporally-located 'movements' – 'Gothic Romance and Provincial Manners', 'The Scottish Victorians: In and Out of the Kailyard', etc – each of which identifies a tradition and relates it specifically to Scottish literary development. This categorisation allows Hart in his final chapter to codify 'national' traits which define Scottish literature, such as 'an obsessive relation to an irrecoverable past', 'a concern with everyday life', 'the moral primacy of community' and a 'preoccupation with exile' (pp. 400-2). Cairns Craig's introduction to *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999), meanwhile, regards the Scottish tradition in literature as the expression and repository of the national imagination, a heteroglossic field of expression and counter-expression which carries the way the nation thinks about itself ever forward. 'The novel', as Craig puts it, 'has been one of [the] major modes through which modern societies have shaped the argument about the 'goods' of their tradition and therefore about the very nature of the tradition of which they are a part'.¹⁰ As the field of Scottish studies became established, assimilatory works like that of Hart and Craig have inscribed certain ideas of tradition and trajectory onto Scottish literature in the process of determining or totalising it as a distinct field of study.

In such 'essentially "internalist" account[s] of Scotland'¹¹ and Scottish literature, realism is not regarded as the naturalised default mode as it is in, for example, English literature, but remains prominent as an indicator affirming the 'Scottishness' of texts. As Casanova describes, '[t]he national character of a literature was fixed in terms of a series of

¹⁰ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 23.

¹¹ David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Nation*, 2nd edn (1992; London: Routledge, 2001), p. 145.

traits declared to be peculiar to it' (p. 105). The way in which the origins of this emphasis have been located in the anti-Kailyard moment of Brown and Hay, meanwhile, has often been inscribed onto Scottish literary development as a convenient 'teleology', in keeping with Benedict Anderson's observation that 'the idea of the nation [...] is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history'¹² and 'moving onward through calendrical time' (p. 27). Thus, as Andrew Nash points out:

much discussion of Scottish literature in the twentieth century has been structured around a Kailyard/anti-Kailyard axis. Studies of twentieth-century Scottish literature invariably begin by using Kailyard as a defining context, seeing it as a tradition against which modern writers are reacting.¹³

In the concluding observations of *The Scottish Novel*, for example, Hart notes that '[i]n every phase of the novel's Scottish history can be seen a fidelity to local truth, to the particulars of communal place and time', which he describes as historically situated 'local realism' (p. 406). In 1993 Gavin Wallace describes the way 'novelists in the 1950s and 1960s challenged the Renaissance epic-mythic impulse by means of a deliberate preoccupation with cynical and deterministic urban realism', and how later fiction in the 1970s and 1980s 'led by the Glasgow writers Alasdair Gray and James Kelman, suddenly emerged, indebted to the parameters of working-class urban realism established in the preceding decades, but simultaneously transcending them'.¹⁴ Keith Dixon, similarly, observes that

[s]ince the early seventies there has emerged a multi-faceted body of novels and short stories (but also photography, television plays, poetry and painting) which focuses on the lives and speech, the living conditions and architectural environment,

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. edn (1983; London: Verso, 1991), p. 26.

¹³ Andrew Nash, *Kailyard and Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 15.

¹⁴ Gavin Wallace, 'Introduction', in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, ed. by Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 1-7 (p. 3).

the traditions and forms of socialisation of the working/workless classes of Scotland.¹⁵

Late twentieth-century works such as James Kelman's *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989) and Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) typically centre on the everyday, urban experience of working-class protagonists, a realism emphasising living and working conditions, lifestyle, and community relationships. For some critics, this is evidence that

far from representing a radical new wave of writing in Scotland, the work of Irvine Welsh is [...] the culmination of a general movement in Scottish writing which dates back to the beginning of the century, with *The House with the Green Shutters* of 1901. The tradition [...] which it began continued through writers like McNeillie/Niall, Blake and Gaitens, through Trocchi and Jenkins to Kennaway and Spark. More recently that tradition was intensified in Glasgow and Edinburgh with the work of Kelman and writers like Duncan McLean, Gordon Legge, and James Meek.¹⁶

Scottish writing of this period has often been described in terms of an artistic reawakening. Douglas Gifford deemed it '[t]he Real Scottish Literary Renaissance',¹⁷ and Gavin Wallace 'a new – perhaps even more “real” – Scottish Renaissance' (p. 1). This 'renaissance' is depicted as the ultimate *telos* of twentieth-century Scottish fiction's distinctive and continuous foregrounding of realism as a national tradition which affirms and represents the reality of the nation.

The term 'Scottish literary renaissance', however, defined as it is by rebirth, revival, and recurrence, also suggests the serial nature of the uncanny within the conception of 'homely' tradition itself. The uncanny denies tradition by defamiliarising what habit has taught us to regard as certain, and as I will go on to demonstrate, many of the key writers associated with the post-1970s period, including James Kelman, A.L. Kennedy and Alan

¹⁵ Keith Dixon, 'Writers Into Battle: Political Dissent Among Contemporary Scottish Writers', *Proceedings of the Scottish Workshop of the European Society for the Study of English*, (1994), pp. 161-171.

¹⁶ Douglas Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction since 1945 I: Continuity, Despair and Change', in *Scottish Literature*, ed. by Sarah Dunnigan, Douglas Gifford and Alan MacGillivray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 834-898, (pp. 884-5).

¹⁷ Douglas Gifford, 'At Last - The Real Scottish Literary Renaissance?', *Books in Scotland*, 34, 1990, 1-4, (1).

Warner, often distort and unsettle the realist mode of their texts with uncanny effects and techniques of modal disturbance. This designed uncertainty of mode denies a totalising reading of the texts, problematising their assimilation into the inscribed realist tradition, and resultantly contesting the national trajectory which has been taken to define the 1980s/1990s renaissance as the *telos* in that realist development. At the same time, these uncanny effects can also be regarded as part of a tradition, since similar techniques often appear in earlier works by writers such as James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson. My thesis will demonstrate how these traditions need not be considered oppositional or contradictory. Decentring the essentialist notion of tradition allows for multiple conceptions of realism and realist instability, accommodating the range of techniques employed by these writers without obscuring important elements of their work in the determination to assign them to orderly 'national' configurations. themselves.

Critical Approach: Uncanny/Homely, Tradition/Dis-continuity

At the heart of this thesis is a paradox, which lies in how the uncanny can come to be regarded as a tradition, when by its nature it indicates the suspension of stability and familiarity. Evidently, the uncanny is a factor which can relate modern Scottish writers to one another and with earlier writers who employed similar techniques. Yet if tradition calls to mind the familiar, homely, and defining, the unsettling nature of the uncanny, constantly shifting the ground on which we are walking, would seem antithetical, like spending a comfortable evening at home continuously falling down the stairs. How can such a disruptive state be considered *heimlich*? An explanation, I will go on to argue, lies in the similarity of the mechanisms of repetition which manifest both the uncanny and tradition itself. As Sigmund Freud suggests,

it is only this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable where otherwise we should have spoken only of “chance”.¹⁸

There is a direct correspondence between the way the uncanny occurs through repetition and how tradition recurs through repetition that is naturalised. Tradition is established when the accidental, repeated to the point where a pattern seems immanent, comes to appear essential. In literature, I will argue, this naturalisation can impose limits on interpretation through the habitual adherence to pre-existing analytical processes and inscribed traditions, which risks rendering a text inert by overlooking its particularities. As Eric Hobsbawm states,

insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of ‘invented’ traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.¹⁹

Tradition and the uncanny, then, occur through a remarkably similar process. Yet while the uncanny manifests through conspicuous repetition, causing discomfort by breaking a naturalised pattern, tradition forms through repetition which, naturalised, comfortably fades to invisibility. These processes both leave comparable patterns of influence, one ostensibly *uneimlich*, the other ostensibly *heimlich*, but each process also contains the opposite of that effect. It is not the intention of this thesis to reject tradition outright, then, but to relativize it, reconstituting national traditions as elements within the modal specificities of individual texts.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (1919; London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 219-252, p. 237.

¹⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14, p. 2.

Michael Billig states that a national tradition is often perceived as having 'emerged from the misty dawns of time'²⁰ so that, again, the originary moment is ephemeral, lost; it is the repetition itself that becomes known to us as tradition. Susan Bernstein indicates a similar 'blank space' of origination in her theory of the uncanny:

how can one account for this "uncanny phenomenon" experienced "while" reading? The theoretical voice is itself syncopated and cannot name its own experience without passing through a narrative time loop. The uncanny is already there before it arrives [...]. The particular uncanny phenomenon thus pre-dates and conditions the possibility of discovering a principle or rule of the uncanny [...]. The repetition producing uncanny effects has been carefully laid in to the text in ways which a first reading cannot possibly identify. The uncanny does not repeat a certain X; rather, it emerges in the recognition of repetition, through the connection of disparate and distant moments stretched over the temporal and spatial expanse of the text. When we notice repetition, the uncanny will have occurred; it can have no beginning, for we can never see the first element of a repetitive structure until it has already been repeated. (pp. 1124-5)

When writers deploy uncanny techniques in their work, then, it is only through readerly hindsight that the effects are associated with those of other texts. The effect itself is striking and modally disruptive, while the assimilation of the text into a recognised (e.g. national) grouping with others depends on the apprehension of a repeated pattern. The assignment of the term 'tradition' and the categorising process that follows it therefore constitutes an attempt to make banal and familiar what is stylistically unexpected and disorientating, as if it were inevitable or 'had always been so'. As Eleanor Bell and Scott Hames describe it, for Scottish literature this has often consisted of:

endlessly reading "Scottish texts" as realist artefacts embodying Scottish cultural history, or as imaginative expressions of Scottish psychological accents [...]. The practice of forcing the text to be handmaiden to something provably 'Scottish' outside itself – as "reflective of Scottish origins and experience" (Hart, ix) – has inhibited the critical reception of Scottish writers *as writers*.²¹

²⁰ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 70.

²¹ Eleanor Bell and Scott Hames, 'Editorial: Theory and Scottish Exceptionalism', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 3 (2007) <<http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue3/editorial.htm>> [accessed 9 July 2014].

Bell and Hames go on to cite Liam Connell, who argues that:

Scottish literary criticism has been far too willing to accept the immanence of 'Scottish literature' without conceding it[s] constructedness or charting the processes and motivations behind such construction. This is certainly surprising given how frequently the idea of 'English literature' is identified as construct within such criticism.²²

Since a tradition of the uncanny in Scottish literature is discernable, relating modern writers back to the likes of James Hogg, Robert Louis Stevenson and others, that continuity too might lead back to an obscured and undefinable past, presumably lying somewhere in the murky realms of oral tradition and folk tales. But this is to accept the idea of tradition as an essential aspect of the nation. For Billig, whose work I draw on heavily in relation to texts by James Robertson and A.L. Kennedy in Chapters Two and Four, this is the process of 'banal nationalism', a constructivist reading of tradition employed in the naturalisation of the idea of nations themselves. Billig argues that the project of naturalising (and nationalising) traditions as evidence of a nation's singular history and unified trajectory from the past into the future is a process of cultural hegemony, the construction of pillars which enforce concepts of national coherence. Rather than originary, defining moments, too rigid an adherence to tradition reduces specific eruptions to the banally familiar; yet while a Scottish tradition in the uncanny is evidential, as this thesis will demonstrate, the bedrock of that association resists naturalisation by maintaining a discordant modal ambiguity. Recognising the fundamentally 'accidental' structure shared by both tradition and the uncanny thus destabilises or estranges tradition itself. At the same time it allows for the consideration of a tradition of uncanny Scottish texts.

²² Liam Connell, 'Modes of Marginality: Scottish Literature and the Uses of Postcolonial Theory', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23.1&2 (2003), 41-53, (p. 16).

Implications for Scottish Literary Studies

In a key scene in James Robertson's *Joseph Knight* (2003), Susan Wedderburn stands in the study of her father, a former Jamaican plantation owner now returned to Edinburgh. Studying a long-familiar painting of her father and his brothers on the plantation, Susan gradually becomes aware of a disturbing aspect of the image for the first time:

the sunlight caught the painting above the fireplace in such a way that she suddenly glimpsed a new figure in the gloom. Uncle Sandy's picture. She had looked at it so often that the shock of what she saw now made her gasp, as if she had seen a ghost. There was no one else in the room. She stood as close as she could, peered at the painting straight on, from the left, from the right. The oil gleamed back at her. Behind the oil was a leg, a shoulder, a face. A man.²³

This Freudian 'return' of the painted-out figure of Joseph Knight, her father's former slave, defamiliarises Susan's comfortable, '*heimlich*' conception of her family past, causing her to reassess her family's role in the colonies. The process is unsettling, making doubtful what has long seemed certain and reconstituting Susan's conception of her father, her family history, and her inheritance. At the same time, the uncanny ushers in a new maturity to her outlook, a more accurate and sophisticated vision. Similarly, by uncovering and investigating a tradition in the uncanny in modern Scottish literature where it has otherwise been obscured, this thesis similarly encourages a responsive critical agenda which questions the way tradition and literary inheritance have been inscribed and naturalised in Scottish studies. As well as uncovering significant pathways for analysis which might be missed by defining the text through habitual, traditional referents, my thesis also suggests a re-conceptualisation of the Scottish canon and the way authors have been positioned within it.

²³ James Robertson, *Joseph Knight* (2003; London: Fourth Estate, 2004), p. 22.

At opposing poles of the uncanny tradition I locate Ali Smith and James Robertson. Smith, as I will demonstrate, selects uncanny tropes which are familiar from the work of earlier Scottish writers, setting them to new purposes as agents of modal distortion within the broader schema of her texts. While the affinity of her intrusive uncanny characters with earlier figures in texts by, for example, Muriel Spark, is apparent, the recognition of that Scottish tradition is at the same time shown to be accidental, secondary to the wider political and moral debates that her texts engage with. By contrast, Robertson carefully and intentionally invokes the uncanny in a way which specifically recalls the work of earlier writers, primarily James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson. *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006) treats literary tradition and inheritance almost reverentially, but as a result Robertson's uncanny techniques are already familiar, and their power to unsettle is accordingly subdued.

While critics have frequently defined A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* (1995) in relation to Scottish texts of psychological dualism by, again, Hogg and Stevenson, shedding the habitual recourse to assumed literary 'origins' repositions the novel as a central text in the tradition of modern uncanny Scottish fiction, one which pointedly warns against the way banal nationalism can become a process of estrangement disguised as naturalisation. While I find the effect of Robertson's uncanny to be a furthering of national tradition, Smith and Kennedy display a more complex relation to national literary inheritance; rather than grafting themselves into a tradition in direct relation to earlier writers, they design fictions in which Scottish continuities might be detected and considered, in a way which does not render the overall text in some way nationally representative. James Kelman, famously, is more outspoken still in his rejection of national categories, and identifying and theorising his

approach to the uncanny and modal disruption gives cause to reconsider the way he has been inscribed at the heart of the Scottish tradition in realism. As I discuss in my final chapter, Alan Warner's peculiar existential uncanny channels not a national, but a quasi-religious and indefinable power. Focusing on these works through the lens of the uncanny does not merely produce new readings of texts which were previously thought familiar, their place in the Scottish tradition comfortably established. This critical approach also defamiliarises habitual processes which have been used to interpret Scottish texts, suggesting the need for a reconstitution of criticism as a fluid state which accommodates multiple interpretative angles. In this way, conceptions of the place and role of individual writers within the Scottish canon is also scrambled in what I will argue is a productive way, allowing new canonical arrangements to emerge. Ali Smith, for example, whom critics have often found difficult to 'locate' as either a 'Scottish' or 'British writer', 'female writer' or 'lesbian writer', becomes a central figure of the post-1970s uncanny tradition in Scottish writing, reconstituting familiar uncanny tropes and effects in accordance with her concerns about the postmodern twenty-first-century.

What the uncanny illustrates for the current moment in Scottish studies is that we must be aware of continuities and traditions, but be aware also of their accidental origins. Traditions and national associations between authors are therefore not abolished, but considered in a more refined way as elements within wider textual schema. The traditional 'pillars' of Scottish literature exist, and can be recognised and productively referred to, but are not essential. Scottish literature is not founded upon tradition, and Scottish studies, I will argue, must reacquaint itself with this idea, lest it obscure what is most vital about the texts themselves.

Realism

As a term and an aesthetic, the original definition of literary realism has dissolved into varied permutations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this period, realism has often been reconfigured as a mode of defamiliarisation and instability through its various reworkings by modernist writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, and later by postmodernists such as Paul Auster or Jeanette Winterson. Modernist approaches move away from or reject the idea that fiction can unproblematically represent 'objective' reality, while postmodern literature is typically even more doubtful about the existence of a real world to which language may refer. Different notions of realism have been absorbed into the constitution of a 'national' realist tradition, however, and accordingly, in applying critical pressure to that tradition as a critical concept, the definition of realism offered here is relatively broad. I identify as realist various mimetic techniques which recall the early realism of the nineteenth century, modernist conceptions of realism incorporating issues of subjectivity and perceptual disturbance, and postmodern representation which engages with notions of the hyperreal and the simulacral. Accommodating different aspects of realism in a variety of modern texts allows the thesis to problematize the national tradition of realism on various fronts, highlighting differing forms of modal disturbance each of which destabilise in different ways the critical essentialism which is at issue here.

For the purposes of pragmatism, I refer to realism as a textual mode which initially seems stable and which the reader can see as relating to 'reality', a believable world of 'everyday' settings, events and interactions which obeys the laws of causality, or one which is related through the uncertainty of subjective narration. Elements and techniques which might constitute realism are taken here as being fluid and interchangeable. In this sense, the

realism of a particular text constitutes the 'base' mode at which the reality depicted is initially seen to be unproblematically reported (and which might allow it to be added to the national 'tradition' in realism which I call into question). Often, but not always, that realism is related from a narrative position in close proximity to, or from the perspective of, a third-person narrator. Yet while modernist experimentation with such perspectives has led to an expectation of perceptual inconsistencies, uncertainty and distortion, realist writers also still frequently make use of the earlier conventions of nineteenth-century realism in establishing the realist mode. These conventions might include day-to-day subject matter, a concern with 'ordinary' lives and the commonplace, and a resistance to the ideal or the sentimental. The reality depicted often (though not always) speaks to social contexts and circumstances, and plotting is generally characterised by causality, rather than being structured around dramatic incidents. While, as I have argued, these techniques have become the commonplace 'default setting' in many literatures, in Scottish criticism they have remained visible as markers of national representation. As such, I make some reference to the structuralist Jonathan Culler's theory of the 'mimetic contract'. While no longer a contemporary work, in the context of this thesis Culler's definitions serve to reflect the way Scottish literary criticism has made a national tradition of realist techniques, and his terminology of the realist 'contract' is useful here in defining the way texts establish a modal basis which, as I will go on to demonstrate, the uncanny works to unsettle.

My approach to realism also incorporates, for example, the modernist aesthetic of (possible) psychological disturbance in the work of A.L. Kennedy, and Ali Smith's engagement with a postmodern representation of the world as atomised, lacking the normative 'centre' that earlier realism is taken to refer to, emphasising simulacra and the

hyperreal. In each of these examples, however, the basic modal conceit that the narrative is representative of 'a' reality experienced by individuals adheres. Where that realism portrays the world as experienced through the frequently distorted perceptions of individual characters, the various narrative 'accents' of representation and the distortions or psychological confusion invoked nevertheless constitute a definable realist mode, one which, established in the early stages of a given text, is suggested as the reliable and consistent form of realist representation.

When uncanny effects are invoked, that mode is disturbed in a different way, unsettled by elements which suggest a counter-mode, one which often seems close to emergence before receding again, leaving a suggestion of itself which disturbingly 'tugs' at the realist mode which initially seemed established and consistent. The uncanny as I describe it in this thesis is an intrusive sensation which breaks the realist contract by suggesting elements and associations which do not fit into the cohesion of that mode, whether or not that base mode is one which already entails psychological discrepancies and subjective uncertainty. The uncanny threatens the presumption that reality as depicted is subject to quantifiable, verifiable rules of causation, frequently creating associations, which nonetheless go unconfirmed, with fantasy or supernatural literature, or in the case of Alan Warner, a mythopoetic level that seems at odds with the conventional 'everyday' mode of the texts.

The Uncanny

It is not the intention of this thesis to argue that Scottish writers are using the uncanny in the same way, to the same effects, or because they share the same sources of inspiration, and as such I refer to a number of definitions of the uncanny in my analyses. Such

definitions are numerous, perhaps because, as Susan Bernstein reminds us, 'the uncanny cannot be properly understood, since it signifies the disruption of the proper and the instability of understanding' (p. 1117). As such I have been relatively selective in my appropriation of theoretical sources, relying on those works which best demonstrate and elucidate key examples of texts which unsettle and often refute the realist teleology and habitual critical practices I have identified. Most central to my work is Sigmund Freud's classic conception of the *unheimlich* (literally 'unhomely'), which describes those moments when the familiar or well-known becomes unfamiliar or estranged, causing an indefinable anxiety. This theory is most obviously applicable, in narrative terms, when a seemingly coherent and consistent realist mode is called into question by disruptive uncanny effects. Freud's essay has been criticized in recent years, notably for its dismissal of female perspective in both his analysis of E.T.A. Hoffman's 'The Sandman' and his broader consideration of the uncanny, as well as his determination to link the effects of the uncanny to castration anxiety, a psychoanalytical impediment which critics including Jane Marie Todd and Helene Cixous have shown to be limited and misleading.²⁴ However, Freud's conception that 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (p. 220) remains pertinent to the way the uncanny in recent Scottish literature suggests an affinity with earlier literature even as the ambiguity of the effect leads to discontinuity and incohesion. I develop Freud's emphasis on repetition here to reflect the striking similarity between the formation of both tradition and uncanny sensation, revealing the 'accidental' nature of both processes in a way which reflects back on and disrupts the way realism – in its developing forms – has been positioned as the authenticating form in

²⁴ See, for example, Jane Marie Todd, 'The Veiled Woman in Freud's "Das Unheimliche"', *Signs*, 11.3 (1986), pp. 519-528, and Helene Cixous, 'Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's Das Unheimliche (The "Uncanny")', *New Literary History*, 7.3 (1976), pp. 525-548 and 619-645.

Scottish literature. Freud's assertion that the familiar and the strange each inhabit the other, or slip towards one another in an unsettling dual movement, becomes freshly productive when deployed through the lens of Michael Billig's theory of banal nationalism and tradition-forming as a process of alienation and estrangement as well as familiarisation. This uncanny model, which I refer to particularly in relation to Smith, Robertson and Kennedy, underpins the goals of the thesis as a whole, revealing how as a tradition, realism contains its opposite, the destabilising seed of the uncanny. When looking back at that anti-Kailyard flashpoint, *The House with the Green Shutters*, for example, the text contains supernatural resonances – visions and 'hauntings', for example – which in an uncanny way destabilise the realist mode of the text which is so often cited as the originary launch pad for realism in the twentieth-century Scottish novel. This is common to many of the texts under consideration here, but has typically been overshadowed by the insistence on realist tradition accounted for above. In addition, investigating the serial or repetitive relation between tradition and the uncanny, again via Billig, also applies critical pressure to notions of a national imagination which critics such as Cairns Craig rely on in their substantiation of a literary tradition.

Tzvetan Todorov's influential work *The Fantastic* (1970), meanwhile, identifies the uncanny as one of two categories stemming from the genre of 'the fantastic', instances wherein a reader or character is momentarily unable to explain a particular event or phenomenon within the laws of their understanding of reality. Where 'new' or idiosyncratic laws of nature or supernatural explanations must be posited to account for the presence of

the fantastic, Todorov situates that event within 'the genre of the marvellous'.²⁵ With effects of the uncanny, however,

events are related which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar. (p. 25)

Todorov's categorical approach clarifies the difference between events or elements which are confirmed as having a supernatural or fantastical explanation, and those which are rationally explained. In defining the uncanny, however, this thesis finds a discrepancy in Todorov's apparently clear-cut categories in that the uncanny, which he equates to 'the supernatural explained' (p. 41), in that the uncanny in fact also accommodates the possibility that there may be another unfathomable factor behind the 'fantastic' moment. Following the uncanny instance, the authority of the laws of reason is cast into doubt. Resultantly, rather than 'last[ing] only as long as a certain hesitation' (p. 41) as Todorov states, the doubtfulness he defines as the fantastic moment is *prolonged* by the uncanny; rather than a distinct genre, the uncanny resists definition, and denies totalising interpretation. The uncanny, then, is not a fully-delineable mode but a sensation which calls into question what had seemed the established realist mode, an effect which negates the possibility of categorisation. Additionally, Todorov is less inclined towards Freud's insistence on recurrence and repetition in bringing about the uncanny, but in several of the texts under investigation in this thesis, the uncanny effect emerges through the recognition of that repetition rather than some singular fantastic moment. Susan Bernstein cogently criticises the way Todorov seeks to separate the critic from the immanent reading moment:

²⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, trans. by Richard Howard (1970; Cleveland, Ohio: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), p. 41.

The decision placing the text safely in the bounds of a genre comes “after” we have finished reading, after we have torn our eyes from the marks on the page, sit back and reflect, and consider the text as a whole. While Todorov attempts to hold these two levels apart in a stable hierarchy, the uncanny inevitably brings about their collapse. [...] Todorov's definite classifications can only post-date an example or case of the uncanny that must occur before the uncanny can be defined. (pp. 1124-5)

Recognising the limitations in these key essays of uncanny theory, this thesis appropriates Freud's insistence on the unsettling force of repetition and the unity and discrepancy of familiarity/estrangement, along with Todorov's theory of the uncanny as a series of instances which cast doubt over the authority of central textual modes, as a theoretical framework which both locates the uncanny within realism and demonstrates ways in which it destabilises realism. Viewed in textual terms, many uncanny effects might be accounted for as an assimilation of ‘fantastic’ elements to ‘realist’ narrative frameworks, heightening awareness of the conventionality of both styles and ‘estranging’ reader expectations, leading to anxiety and irresolution. If, as Jonathan Culler puts it, ‘the basic convention governing the novel is the expectation that readers will, through their contact with the text, be able to recognise a world which it produces or to which it refers’,²⁶ the uncanny can be seen as a disruption of the comfortable certainties of that recognition, or an estrangement from the implicit comprehensibility of that world. The reader is forced, upon the emergence of the uncanny, to consider and choose between contradictory interpretative schema – such as between ‘psychological disturbance’, ‘unreliable narration’ or ‘the supernatural’ – which call into question the possibility of a definitive reading of the text.

In addition to these major figures of uncanny theory, I also turn several times to Bernstein's excellent article ‘It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny’ (2003), in which she elucidates the narrative mechanism of uncanny technique, and analyses the trope of ‘the

²⁶ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 192.

uncanny guest', a single seemingly otherworldly character who 'invades' an otherwise realist narrative, which I locate in texts such as *So I Am Glad* and Ali Smith's *The Accidental* (2006) and *There but for the* (2011). In the case of Smith, I have adapted Bernstein's definition of the uncanny guest so that it corresponds more appropriately to the writer's vision of a chaotic postmodern reality, a contemporary hyperreal of simulacra and the spectacle. Other theorists are referred to where their work most usefully enhances an understanding of specific uncanny effects; of particular note is William James, whose theory of a spiritual, perceptual uncanny in his philosophical/psychoanalytical work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) is particularly valuable in interpreting the mythopoetic dimensions of Alan Warner's texts, as well as those of Ali Smith.

Critical Responses to Modern Scottish Uncanny Writing

While critics have previously noted modal discrepancies in works by writers such as Kennedy, Robertson and Smith, these observations are typically focused on isolated texts. Critics have been slower to pick up on the uncanny as a contemporary and fairly widespread trend amongst Scottish writers. As Kirsty Macdonald states:

Scottish fiction has come to be perceived and portrayed, particularly in the media, as a territory of hyper-masculinity set against a background of city deprivation, and often involving drug or alcohol abuse. [...] [T]he realist mode continues to influence and inform the narratives of the nation, where urban working-class – and often violent – masculinity is an over-familiar literary form of representation.²⁷

This opinion has often overshadowed the (sometimes subtle) presence of uncanny elements within texts which are more readily related to a national literature by their portrayal of solid urban materiality, and their emphasis on mundane everyday life. Macdonald, however, is

²⁷ Kirsty Macdonald, 'Seeing Simultaneously from Above and Below: The Refusal of the "Real" in Late Twentieth-Century Scottish Fiction', in *Re-Visioning Scotland: New Readings of the Cultural Canon*, ed. by Lyndsay Lunan, Kirsty A. Macdonald and Carla Sassi (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 144-153 (p. 145).

one critic who has given the uncanny valuable attention in recent years, though in a way which does not entirely coincide with my thesis. As a case in point, she finds shortcomings in Douglas Gifford's appraisal of *So I Am Glad* in that by '[i]magining a wholly psychological reading, [Gifford's] interpretation fails to satisfy and leaves many questions unanswered'.²⁸ As I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, Gifford explains Kennedy's modal disruption by invoking earlier Scottish works of psychological duality, to the exclusion of the text's consideration, via the uncanny, of the hegemonic nature of banal nationalism. As my reading will demonstrate, *So I Am Glad* in fact does much to combat the habitual recourse to national archetypes and precursors. Macdonald also avoids that practice by instead identifying a modal liminality in the works of a number of modern Scottish writers 'which reaches across the generic territories of realism and the traditional ghost story' ('Against Realism', p. 330). This interstitial mode, Macdonald states, is achieved '[b]y introducing something manifestly "unreal" or supernatural into a realist context' ('Against Realism', p. 329), a technique she notes in works like Andrew Greig's *When They Lay Bare* (1999) and Ali Smith's *Hotel World* (2001). For Macdonald, the uncanny is one of a number of 'anti-realist strategies' ('Against Realism', p. 329) employed by Scottish writers in recent years, though she focuses primarily on 'that which is *blatantly* unreal, even anti-real' ('Personal, Political and Preternatural', p. 96, my emphasis) rather than the uncertain modal disruption that is my focus. She states:

Realist representation is by no means abandoned; rather, each text cultivates realism while mixing in traces of other, allegedly oppositional or irreconcilable modes in order to interrogate representation itself. The given contexts are recognisably familiar, and so are the characters; it is just that some of them happen to be dead or possess supernatural qualities. [...] The supernatural continues to be

²⁸ Kirsty Macdonald, 'Personal, Political and Preternatural: Troy Kennedy Martin's *Edge of Darkness* and A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad*', in *To the Other Shore: Cross-currents in Irish and Scottish Studies*, ed. by Neal Alexander, Shane Murphy and Anne Oakman, (Belfast: Clo Ollscoil na Banriona, 2004), pp. 95-101, (p. 97).

employed in intricate and subtle representational modulations of reality, allowing modes conventionally perceived as escapist and popular to be renegotiated as culturally and politically pertinent. ('Against Realism', p. 355)

In keeping with Todorov's theory, the process Macdonald identifies is based on familiarity with the conventional delineations of genre categorisation. The 'mixing' of modes she describes is a similar process to the 'unsettling' effects incurred by the presence of the uncanny, which plays upon strong associations with the unreal (the supernatural, 'otherworldliness') or hints at unseen or incomprehensible forces lying outwith the boundaries of our own knowledge or emerging from buried pasts. Rather than confirming or denying such suggestions, however, as Nicholas Royle argues 'the uncanny is not simply synonymous with the supernatural [...] but is more accurately *suggestive of* – "associated with" or "seeming" to have a basis in – the supernatural'.²⁹ Macdonald recognises this in her appraisal of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981), a novel which disrupts convention by positioning and thereby framing Books One and Two - the realist sections of the text - between the fantastical events and settings of Books Three and Four (as the table of contents puts it, 'Thaw's story exists within the hull of Lanark's').³⁰ Highlighting the kinship between Todorov's categorisation of the fantastic and Freud's observation that 'an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced' (p. 244), Macdonald notes:

Any sole perspective is a distortion, and the simultaneous inward and outward vision of the novel [*Lanark*] blurs the distinction between imagination and reality. It has a synchronous significance to humanity *and* to one man, existing psychologically, supernaturally and allegorically. ('Seeing Simultaneously', p. 152)

Macdonald's summation that '[a]mbiguity, interrogation and unsatisfied desire, rather than knowledge and resolution, become the motivation for reading' ('Seeing Simultaneously', p.

²⁹ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 10.

³⁰ Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: A Life in 4 Books* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1981), Table of Contents.

153) comes close to describing effects of the uncanny, but her approach tends to treat the uncanny and the classifiably supernatural or fantastical as largely the same phenomena. I would argue, however, that *Lanark*'s division of the real and the fantastic is too clearly delineated to produce an uncanny sensation. Texts like *So I Am Glad* or Kelman's *A Disaffection* (1989) operate on a level of supernaturally suggestive ambiguity more in keeping with the uncanny than does *Lanark*, since they accord with Bernstein's assertion that the uncanny is '[l]ike a ghost, it "is" and "is not"' (p. 1113). In *Lanark* the different categories remain largely separate and inviolate, neatly compartmentalised by Gray's narrative 'hull' structure. While Macdonald treats Kennedy's novel as an amalgam of realism and the definably fantastic, meanwhile, her appraisal of 'the continuous doubt regarding the actuality of the supernatural' ('Seeing Simultaneously', p. 147) indicates the uncanny mode which ultimately defines the text.

Besides Kirsty Macdonald's work, new, unpublished postgraduate research by the likes of Alexandra Campbell (The University of Glasgow), Sarah Murchison (The University of Aberdeen) and Jeanne Schaaf (Paris-Sorbonne University) indicates a growing awareness of the significance of the uncanny in contemporary Scottish fiction. Elsewhere, appreciation of the uncanny in modern Scottish writing has often gained critical traction in relation to Gothic studies. Monica Germanà's *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing: Fiction since 1978* (2010) covers precisely the period that is my own remit here, and does so with due attention to the uncanny as a distinct and defined set of effects and techniques. Her work on Smith and Kennedy, in particular, has been beneficial to my own research. Timothy C. Baker's *Contemporary Scottish Gothic: Mourning, Authenticity, and Tradition* (2014) also considers the relation between current and earlier Scottish writers through Gothic

associations. My own research identifies intersections between Scottish writing and the Gothic, since there are close associations between the unsettling effects conjured by certain uncanny texts and Gothic motifs such as hauntings, doubles, and the diabolic. Indeed, many of these elements are closely associated with the well-established sub-genre of 'Scottish Gothic' which is the focus of Germanà's and Baker's studies. However, my thesis is more concerned with realism as it has been related to a Scottish tradition and the fluctuation of modes brought about by the uncanny, rather than the well-established genre of the Gothic. Freud, of course, was not concerned with the Gothic but with the implications of the uncanny effect itself, and similarly my thesis focusses on drawing attention to the critical implications of this intentional troubling of realism by Scottish writers.

Thesis Overview

In establishing and interrogating the continuity between these texts, I deal with writers for the most part in separate chapters, engaging with different aspects of uncanny theory in relation to the works in question. The first chapter challenges the critical habit of analysing texts through reference to works by earlier writers, focusing on Ali Smith's *The Accidental* and *There but for the*. In these texts I identify and interrogate a connection between Smith's use of the uncanny witch/wanderer trope and similar figures in works by James Hogg and Muriel Spark. Demonstrating how Smith reimagines that trope, deploying it as part of a wider consideration of the state of hyperreal twenty-first-century culture, the chapter also shows how central issues within the text can be lost in criticism which treats them only as the next in line in a recurring tradition. If Smith is the innovator of post-1970s Scottish uncanny, James Robertson positions himself as the inheritor of tradition. Chapter Two considers Robertson's *The Fanatic* (2000) and *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, each of

which, I argue, pays tribute to the type of uncanny sensations familiar to readers of Hogg and Stevenson in a way intended specifically to invoke concepts of national continuity and literary inheritance. My third chapter identifies modal distortion and supernatural resonances in the work of the writer perhaps most closely associated with authentic representation and urban realism in Scottish fiction, James Kelman. Far from being a writer of 'straightforward' representational realism, Kelman's exacting and defined political stance is shown to necessarily incur modal disruption as a means of validating and relating intimate individual experience. While Kelman strongly resists national categories, his work (and in particular some of his essays) indicates often overlooked connections with, again, the uncanny of Hogg and Stevenson. Re-envisaging Kelman as a writer of the uncanny makes his totalising assimilation into the teleology of twentieth-century Scottish realism problematic, destabilising the way in which his work has been positioned in the Scottish canon. Chapter Four demonstrates the way the uncanny reflects and illuminates the constructed nature of tradition via Kennedy's *So I Am Glad*. This key uncanny text exposes the *unheimlich* nature of banal nationalism and totalising visions of nation, reality and the 'homely'. Here, Kennedy explores the interplay between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* in terms of individual psychology, interpersonal relationships and national politics, central concerns of the text which have been overlooked in criticism which positions it as simply another recurrence of the familiar motif of psychological dualism. Finally, Chapter Five moves further away from national debates, exploring the strangeness of Alan Warner's fictional universe. Through William James' theory that uncanny sensations come about through the loss of a central sense of 'presence' which makes the world seem comfortable and homely, the uncanny here is felt as a sense of immanent significance embedded within ostensibly banal scenes and locations, which also reflects an existentialism which reaches far beyond the national. Warner, like

Smith, develops the *unheimlich* into new and freshly unsettling configurations of modal uncertainty.

The texts and writers under closest scrutiny here have been selected for the variety of critical angles they bring to the research. One significant absence is Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1998), a novel which, through a shifting narrative perspective, charts the uncanny disruption which affects a family on the discovery that the deceased father, Joss Moody, has in fact been female all along. Kay's *unheimlich*, in which '[l]oss isn't an absence after all. It is a presence',³¹ hinges on estrangement within intimate, individual perception. I omit an analysis of *Trumpet* since my discussion of various Kelman texts in Chapter Four allows a fuller exploration of the politics of perception in relation to the uncanny. Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory* (1984) also charts the return of a dread knowledge once covered over long ago with disorientating results, and indeed a number of his texts call into question at what level the 'realism' of the writing is to be assimilated. Banks' work is not explored in the thesis in part because the mode of his fiction is often noticeably 'off-kilter' – from the opening line of the *The Crow Road*, for example ('It was the day my grandmother exploded'³²), it is clear that the rules of conventional, mundane realism have been loosened. In such a mode, uncanny effects are less disturbing to readerly assimilation than in the texts I have considered. Several Banks texts, like *Transition* (2009) with its travel between parallel worlds, are out-and-out fantasy, while others, such as *Walking on Glass* (1985), neatly divide the fantastic narrative of Quiss in his bizarre castle from those of Graham Park and Steven Grout which are grounded in an urban realist mode. While in Chapter Three I argue that James Robertson is often very intentionally emulating effects by Hogg or Stevenson,

³¹ Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (London: Picador, 1998), p. 12.

³² Iain Banks, *The Crow Road* (1992; London: Abacus, 2007), p. 1.

reducing the effects of the uncanny to a comfortable sense of familiarity (rendering the *unheimlich heimlich*), I would similarly argue that Banks's texts are so distinctively 'other' or Banksian that a reader is likely to find a familiar comfort in his very unique style of discomfort. Instead, I concentrate in the main on writers whose use of uncanny technique and modal disruption has been under-acknowledged or explained through reference to earlier texts, in order to create new perspectives on their work, and on others whose affinity with the *unheimlich* offer the most breadth and diversity to the thesis' scope. Other contributors to post-70s Scottish uncanny, John Burnside, John Herdman, Brian McCabe, Kevin MacNeil and Emma Tennant, are detailed briefly but I hope not cursorily in Chapter Three through their often direct associations with the work of earlier Scottish writers. These modern texts may benefit from more detailed future study in light of this thesis. While the temptation is to be all-encompassing, an encyclopaedic approach would muddy the central points about realism and tradition that closer scrutiny of selected writers offers. Instead I have chosen diverse writers who I feel best illustrate the major issues which an awareness of the uncanny in post-70s Scottish writing impacts upon. As with any study of this sort, my hope is that the research here will inform potential readings of other texts in the future.

Chapter One

Uncanny Guests and the Spectre of Tradition in Ali Smith's *The Accidental* and *There but for the*

Amber says the weathervane is nothing to do with the way the wind blows. It is to make the supermarket look more old-fashioned, from the past, so that when people go shopping there they feel better about it like they're going somewhere that's something to do with a tradition, somewhere they think they recognize from their pasts even though their pasts almost definitely never had anything like that in them. It is fiendishly clever how it works. It works subliminally.

Ali Smith¹

Carla Sassi has recently described the danger of an 'entrenched polarisation'² in the field of Scottish studies, asking

[s]hould the adjective 'Scottish' function as a centre of gravity, coalescing texts and authors into a consistent design, or should it stand as a mere vestige of a national meaning, ready to be eventually dropped altogether, leaving texts and authors floating free? Each option, in its extreme form, engenders its own specific brand of disciplinary risk – respectively that of isolation and that of dissolution. ('Glocalising Scottish Literature')

Sassi warns of a reductive split in critical approaches: at one extreme, an over-emphasis on origins and the Scottishness of Scottish literature, and at the other, an aggressive anti-essentialism that would reject the very premise of national traditions in literature. In this

¹ Ali Smith, *The Accidental* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 110-11.

² Carla Sassi, 'Glocalising Scottish literature: a call for new strategies of reading', *The Bottle Imp*, Supplement 1 (2014). <<http://asls.arts.gla.ac.uk/SWE/TBI/TBISupp/TBISupp1/Sassi.html>> [accessed 8 July 2014].

chapter I will demonstrate how Ali Smith, through her use of the uncanny, negotiates this 'critical fault-line' (Sassi, p. 1) in a complex and inventive way, contributing to a definable national literary continuity while problematizing straightforward conceptions of Scottish origins and national literary inheritance. Unlike, for example, James Kelman or James Robertson, Smith is perhaps more often referred to as a British novelist than a Scottish one. Monica Germanà and Emily Horton, for example, state that 'Smith's work has gradually positioned itself at the forefront of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century British literary scene'.³ As I will go on to describe, Smith utilises a trope – that of 'the uncanny guest' – with an established tradition in Scottish literature, but does so in such a way that the national associations seem 'accidental' or arbitrary rather than central or essential. Accordingly, I will emphasise the importance for critics in choosing how to consider national traditions when approaching Smith's texts in order to more objectively appreciate the ways in which they engage with the wider concerns and debates of the work. In order to do so, I will first draw attention to the way *The Accidental* may be aligned with earlier Scottish texts by both Muriel Spark and James Hogg. I will argue, however, that Smith invokes these resonances as part of the wider tissue of the text, rather than simply aiming for the strategic reproduction of national tradition. An approach which situates Smith as Spark's 'inheritor' therefore reduces the critical vista to a set of pre-defined and well-worn debates. I will by contrast turn to Smith's concern with twenty-first-century estrangement brought about by the ubiquity of technology and the hyperreal, which might otherwise be submerged in critical preoccupations with national origins and Scottish literary tradition. This further level of uncanny sensation, I will argue, echoes the type of spiritual dislocation which William

³ Monica Germanà and Emily Horton, 'Introduction', *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Monica Germanà and Emily Horton (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 1-8, p. 1.

James detects in his notion of the uncanny as a loss of the sense of 'presence' which makes the world seem natural and *heimlich*. In this reading, Smith's uncanny guests, indefinable characters who disturb the texts' otherwise banal realism, become alternative 'presences' which offer a realigned sense of reality within Smith's chaotic, postmodern fictional worlds.

Domestic Realism and Habituated Estrangement

In both *The Accidental* and *There but for the*, the realist mode of the narrative is problematized by single figures who intrude upon the otherwise mundane existence of other, 'everyday' characters, and to whom, by narrative strategy, suspicions of the uncanny become potently attached. Both of these otherworldly figures answer to Bernstein's notion of 'the uncanny 'guest', which she describes as 'a figure both familiar, as one invited or welcomed in, and an alien invader'.⁴ Smith uses these modal intruders to uncover, in the perceptions of her other characters, an *unheimlich* estrangement from reality, brought about by the banal repetition of their everyday routines and preoccupations – the habituated 'traditions' by which they live their lives. A further, postmodern dimension to their estrangement – brought about by the predominance of simulacra and the spectacle – will be scrutinised in the latter half of the chapter.

The narratives of both *The Accidental* and *There but for the* are divided between the perceptions of four characters. In the former, these characters comprise the Smart family, who are on holiday in Norfolk in order to allow the mother, Eve, to work on the next in her successful series of fictional biographies which imagine continuing lives for individuals who died during the Second World War. The division of the text into three main sections titled 'beginning', 'middle', and 'end', each of which is subdivided into four units depicting the

⁴ Susan Bernstein, 'It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny', *MLN*, 118.5 (2003), 1111-1139, (p. 1117)

experience of each family member in turn, reflects the atomisation of their family unit and the division between their perceptions. The Smarts have become estranged from reality as a result of their individual patterns of habituation. They are also unaware of this alienation, and as such they lack the impetus to actively pursue the restoration of right perception. Eve, who has learned to turn a blind eye to her husband's affairs with his students, and suffering from writer's block, has taken to lying on the floor of the summer house pretending to be writing rather than actually doing any work. 'Every night at six', she observes, 'she came out of the shed, went back to the main house and changed, and ate as if a day's work had been done' (p. 84). Michael, her second husband and a university lecturer in literary studies, has become disengaged from those around him through his own assumption of intellectual superiority; whether cooking for the family or talking to his wife, his mind is engaged elsewhere with academic interests, wordplay and lesson planning. Meanwhile he has grown bored of his regular affairs, but lacks the inclination to end the practice. Eve's children to her first (deceased) husband are similarly estranged. Astrid, 12, bored with reality and finding it difficult to fit in at school, chooses to film continuously on her video camera, finding it safer to copy the world through a lens than to engage with it herself: 'Astrid is taping dawns. There is nothing else to do here. [...] It is dismal' (pp. 7-8). In this way, Smith's novel demonstrates the deadening effect of habituation on the individual and the social; without realising, the Smarts exist in their own habitual bubbles. Their preoccupations occlude one another, negating a sense of shared social reality:

Mm, her mother says not looking at Astrid. [...]

This is how summers used to be, isn't it, before I was born? Astrid says.

Mm, her mother says. [...]

Her mother doesn't notice. She doesn't react at all. (p. 23)

Each of the Smarts is similarly detached from the others. Eve later wonders: '*What was Astrid?*' (p. 90), indicating her inability to comprehend her daughter. Eve's teenage son Magnus is perhaps the most alienated of all following his exposure to deadening internet pornography and his part in an email prank which has led to the suicide of the schoolgirl Catherine Masson. Magnus has divided himself into selves from before and after Masson's death. He looks back on his earlier self as a separate entity he refers to as 'Hologram Boy', a false image made of light, while of his current 'real' self he notes that '[h]e is bad all through. He is like a rotten fruit hanging off a branch. [...] The world with its Tuesdays, holograms, whales, fish, dogs, frogs, snuffling wet-eyed badgers, reels away from him' (p. 39). From his perspective, '[h]e changed himself when he changed her', Magnus observes; '[h]e has changed the way the world is' (p. 41). The Smart family have each lost touch with their sense of reality; for Smith, this uncanny estrangement seems a typical modern malaise. If the novel was once a technology suggesting a shareable space, in which the narrative movement between situations and characters' perceptions generated the impression of a communal social space, Smith's postmodern world, although related via banal domestic realism, lacks the impression of a central, 'shared' reality.

The Uncanny Guest

The uncanny guest slips into the narrative (and the holiday home) covertly. The Smarts' awareness that they have a stranger among them in the form of a young woman named Amber dawns only gradually, once she is already in their midst. As Bernstein states, '[w]hat takes place here is a certain overturning of logical hierarchy. [...] [T]he covert preparation for the uncanny is of course the preamble of the uncanny itself' (p. 1125). Amber's arrival is almost unnoticed; Michael absent-mindedly lets her in assuming she is related to Eve's

research, while Eve ignores her, assuming she is '*something to do with Michael?* She was clearly his latest "student"' (p. 80). Magnus and Astrid also pay no attention to Amber when they are first in her presence, so that the uncanny operates on 'the condition of not-being-revealed which allows for something to creep into view' (Bernstein, p. 1118). Astrid, immediately after having looked directly into the sun, observes:

There is a shape of someone on the sofa by the window. Because of the light from the window behind the person, and because of the flash still filling her own eye with reds and blacks, the face is a blur of light and dark. [...] It will be someone to do with the house, an oik from the village. It will be one of Michael's students. Astrid blinks again and turns her back. She ignores that side of the room. (p. 18)

Thus in an unsettling manner Amber seems to come into focus gradually and indefinitely at the edges of the narrative, and of the Smarts' perceptions, subtly unsteady the reader's grasp of the situation which had initially seemed solidly real. The uncanny guest manifests 'as a problem of the unreliability of vision, the strange crossing from sense perception to the symbolic order, and the emergence of anxiety around the creeping conviction of the subject's incompleteness, lack of wholeness and fallibility' (Bernstein, p. 1112). Since the uncanny depends on repetition, the first time it appears it is undetectable. When it recurs, in this case when the Smarts begin to recognise Amber, realising that they have already been aware of her:

The uncanny walks around the house invisibly, before being known or recognized. It walks to announce itself before being present; its walking interrupts our understanding to show its temporal and spatial distention, the absorption of a content or concept in the narrative spasms that allow the uncanny to come forth, over time, never whole. [...] The uncanny is already there before it arrives. (Bernstein, pp. 1117-24)

In this movement, the mode of the text slides towards uncanny doubtfulness. That sensation is increased by doubt over whether her arrival is as 'accidental' as it seems. While maintaining that her car broke down nearby, she also apologises for being 'late' (p. 64), and

claims '[a]ll night I was driving to get here' (p. 67), as if her arrival was predetermined. She has decided, she says, to 'never live in a place that could be called home again' (p. 101), reflecting her ability, as a wandering guest, to make the homes she visits *unheimlich*.

When Magnus becomes fully aware of Amber's presence, he is standing on the edge of the bath in an attempt to hang himself in the same way Catherine Masson has following the email prank. Smith emphasises descriptive details which enforce the realism of the text as Magnus 'stands on the bath on the rubber grip' and 'loosens the knot until it is big enough. He pushes his head through it. It hangs loose all the way round his neck. Its cuff juts into his ear' (p. 54). As the moment heightens Magnus' awareness of material details, however, he also considers appealing to a realm beyond the material: 'He should say a prayer [...]. He can see the dust on the top of the beam, the places whoever painted it black missed with the brush' (p. 55). At this point Magnus notes that 'someone has come into the bathroom', a figure he perceives as a celestial being:

It is an angel. She stares up at him. [...] She has yellow angelic hair.

It's my fault, he says. Because first I showed them how to. Then they sent it round the list. Then she. I have to. [...]

I understand, the angel says. [...] She is all lit up against the wipe-clean wallpaper. (p. 55)

In light of the uncanny sensation the narrative gathers around Amber through the technical strategy of her 'manifestation' in the text, the possibility that she is some kind of other-worldly entity (divine or otherwise) is pronounced, further unsettling the realist mode. In her seemingly divine presence, contrasted with the banal detail of the bathroom, Magnus immediately confesses his sins. She shifts from a vague background presence to the actant in the narrative: 'Do you need some help? She is saying. When you're ready I can knock myself against you here so you lose your balance' (p. 55). While her words coax him down,

they might just as easily be willing him on or jovially indifferent to the outcome either way. While Amber appears to have manifested at this urgent moment, the text breeds doubt over what manner of creature she is, and whether she is some kind of other-worldly entity. Amber also seems to embody diabolical qualities. Soon after having helped Magnus down from the ledge she takes to sexually educating him in the house's attic and a disused church in the village. Further, when Astrid imagines Amber confronting girls who have bullied her at school, she takes on a demonic aspect, stating 'I am your worst nightmare welcome to hell' (p. 133) before exacting a violent revenge. Amber seems to waver between the angelic and the demonic, and both sides call into question the realism of the narrative. However, perhaps antithetically to her otherworldly aspects, Amber serves to restore an awareness of reality and 'right relations' to the people she engages with, precisely by throwing into relief or de-familiarising the habituations that have distorted their perceptions or atomised their sense of a shared reality.

Michael Smart's habituation, for example, has led to a complacent expectation that he will get what he wants, either professionally or distinctly unprofessionally, in terms of sleeping with his choice of students in return for good grades. The practice, which once made him feel powerful and alive, has become a numbing routine. The arrival of the wild, unfathomable Amber presents a new focus for his desire. Briefly meeting her when she first arrives at the house, Michael leaves for his arranged rendezvous with that semester's student conquest, and reflects:

Ten years ago it had been romantic, inspiring, energizing [...]. Five years ago it had still been good [...]. Now Michael Smart, with twenty-year-old Philippa Knott jerking about, eyes open, on top of him on his office floor, was worried about his spine. (p. 70)

Amber, meanwhile, confounds Michael's habitual assumptions by expressing no interest in him whatsoever:

She had ignored him over supper.

She had ignored him the whole time.

She had sat opposite him as if he wasn't there. He may as well himself have been an empty chair opposite her, a space, an innocent nothing. (pp. 77-78)

He also finds himself unable to fantasise about her. As he comes up with various tired scenarios, even the Amber of his imagination is unresponsive: 'She was looking out of the train window. She was examining her nails. She was examining the ends of her hair. She was reading a book in a language he didn't know' (p. 75). Michael reaches an epiphany, when he is inspired to write by Amber's presence: 'He realized he would never fuck her / He realized he would never have her' (p. 167). In this revelatory moment, Amber acts as a restorative to Michael's sense of himself and the deadening habits he has fallen into. When the Smarts later return to their London home they find the house robbed of its contents, another moment that wipes the slate clean in an intrusive, disruptive, but also restorative way. The burglary seems related to Amber, as Michael realises she knew where they kept the house keys while they were in Norfolk. Further, he loses his job after his affairs are discovered, and at the same time '[h]e hadn't found a girl attractive for months' (p. 263). Michael's life might appear to be in tatters – he becomes a hypochondriac and considers new pastimes he knows he will not take up – yet at the same time Amber ultimately frees him from his deadening patterns of repetition. He becomes a better, more attentive stepfather, where before he had 'generally kept well out of that side of the parenting thing' (p. 59), and is re-engaged creatively, preparing a sonnet sequence for publication. Reality is restored to

Michael in a stark and problematic way, but it brings optimism for the future. By denying his habitual patterns, Amber reintroduces him to reality.

As an otherworldly stranger who has infiltrated the Smarts' home and who gradually casts 'glamours' of various kinds over the family, Amber is much like the seductive witch, fairy or demonic entity of folklore and oral tradition, or Scottish border ballads such as 'The Daemon Lover' or 'Tam Lin'. Monica Germanà, for example, describes Amber as 'a contemporary embodiment of the dangerous woman of many traditional Scottish tales and ballads',⁵ and Smith describes the setup as 'a very very old story, the fable with its roots in biblical, ovidian, fairy-story traditions, of the stranger knocking on the door of the houses to see who is kind'.⁶ As if affirming this interpretation, Amber warns Eve to 'be careful not to let folk over your threshold till you're absolutely sure who they are' (p. 92), echoing a moral that seems taken directly from oral tradition. She also displays certain abilities which might be conventionally explicable but also suggest an uncanny dimension, as when she senses Eve's knee pain without her having mentioned it. She is able to read personal objects belonging to the Smarts, examining a ring belonging to Magnus, for example, and rightly stating that he had a complicated birth. She claims that '[t]his talent is what enabled me to travel three continents on almost no money and always eat a reasonable supper' (p. 180). Eve senses Amber's witch-like qualities, noting that '[s]he was charming' (p. 98) to the extent that 'in a different age she'd have been publicly flayed for it or dragged humiliatingly

⁵ Monica Germanà, "'The Uncanny Can Happen': Desire and Belief in *The Seer*", in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Germanà and Horton, pp. 115-129, (p. 122).

⁶ Ali Smith, interview, *Bookgroup.info*, (2006), <http://www.bookgroup.info/041205/interview.php?id=19>> [accessed 10 March 2014]

through the village and stuck in the stocks' (p. 178). Michael also senses the folkloric nature of Amber's ability to beguile:

He thinks of the pretty young woman and how she fleered and flirted with him and how hard it was for him to deny her [...]. Was fleered a real word? It sounded like a folk-tale word, but it was possible that Michael had made it up to alliterate with flirted. (pp. 270-1)

His indecision regarding the word 'fleered' is redolent of the way the text invokes a folkloric tradition while simultaneously calling it into question. Smith teasingly invites the reading imagination to 'flirt' with the resonances between Amber and the fairy or witch figures of folklore. Yet the fact that Michael may have inadvertently invented the word 'fleered' reflects the way the text's modal indeterminacy casts doubt over the basis of that interpretation.

Reading Towards Tradition

When asked in 2003 whether her work comes from a particular tradition, Smith replies '[a] Scottish one [...] and Scotland being on the edge of something larger is always about being from a different perspective, you're an insider but you're an outsider all the time'.⁷ She has also commented that

[i]t's not conscious [...] but I think it's part of the place where writing goes [...] or comes from. Really it's an inheritance to be born in Scotland which was on the margin of things. On the margins of a larger country and to some extent on the margins of its own history.⁸

⁷ Francis Gapper, 'Author Insights: Ali Smith', *Mslexia*, 18 (2003)

<https://www.mslexia.co.uk/magazine/interviews/interview_18.php> [accessed 10 March 2014]

⁸ Trevor Fountain, 'An Interview with Scottish Author Ali Smith', *Café Babel* (2014)

<<http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/culture/article/an-interview-with-scottish-author-ali-smith.html>> [accessed 10 March 2014]

Here, Smith describes a sense of accidental inheritance at having been born in Scotland, which she defines with reference to her awareness of margins and of the perspectives offered by differing positions. This approach contrasts with, for example, Robert Crawford's recent criticism of the 'inherent conservatism with a small "c"' of Scottish culture and writing, which he sees exemplified in 'a refusal to move to different positions'.⁹ Smith's conception seems free of that sense of restriction, actively encouraging the reader to consider the text from multiple perspectives. The modal fluctuation offered by the uncanny, then, is well suited to Smith's attitude towards Scottishness and literary tradition as flexible, questionable, and porous, and Smith's texts offer fertile ground for Sassi's 'call for new strategies of reading' ('Glocalising Scottish Culture') which are neither dominated by or dismissive of the issue of national literary inheritance. Sassi states:

If a central tension may be identified today, in the academic as well as in the public debate over the disciplinary definition of Scottish literature, this is no doubt between the 'national' and the 'post-national' paradigms [...], not infrequently constructed as antagonistic and mutually exclusive. ('Glocalising Scottish Literature')

In this section, I will pursue the apparent similarities between Amber and other uncanny guests created by earlier Scottish writers, and question the efficacy of critical approaches which would assign national definitions to the text based on those associations. In doing so, I work towards a decentred model of tradition in which an awareness of Scottish resonances can be accommodated as part of a reading which more fully considers Smith's wider concerns with reality in the postmodern world.

⁹ Robert Crawford, unpublished, speaking at 'If Scotland' Conference, The University of Stirling, 23 August 2014.

Pursuing the way Smith invokes a national tradition in the uncanny through the figure of the uncanny guest, James Hogg is an obvious forebear. Hogg, having grown up with first-hand experience of folk tales and Scottish ballads, is an early exponent in transferring tropes from the ballads and oral tradition, including the uncanny intruder, to the medium of the novel. Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, for example, is perhaps the archetypal Scottish novel of modal uncertainty centred around a single uncanny interloper. A more modern link in this potential chain is Muriel Spark, whose childhood absorption of ballad tropes and modes, as well as of Hogg's *Sinner*, come to the fore in texts like *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960) and *Symposium* (1990). Each of these shares an inheritance with Hogg's *Confessions* by way of the border ballads. Smith is well aware of this literary continuity and in her 2009 introduction to Spark's *The Comforters* (1957) highlights the link between Spark and Hogg when describing Spark's character Mrs Hogg as 'the first of Spark's holy devils, whose name, whose selfish pride and whose foulness are surely glittering references to James Hogg's 19th-century Scottish fable of the Calvinist elect, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*'.¹⁰ Indeed, Smith's appropriation of the wandering stranger or witch figure from folklore is reminiscent of Spark's affection for the ballads. As Aileen Christianson puts it:

[Spark] acknowledges her reading of the Ballads at school which 'entered my literary bloodstream, never to depart', their style and themes leaving their imprint on Spark's own: succinct and clear with repetitions, shifts in time, juxtapositions of the supernatural and the everyday, and sudden deaths.¹¹

¹⁰ Ali Smith, 'The Typing Ghost', *The Guardian*, 18 July 2009, in 'guardian.co.uk'

<<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jul/18/the-comforters-muriel-spark>> [accessed 10 March 2014]

¹¹ Aileen Christianson, 'Muriel Spark and Candia McWilliam: Continuities', *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, ed. by Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 95-110 (p. 95).

Smith similarly acknowledges the connection between the ballads and Spark which echoes in her own work: 'It's worth remembering the influence on [Spark's] work of the Scottish border ballad form, in which terrible things are reported with a dispassion that's almost merry' (Smith, 'The Typing Ghost'). In light of these interconnections, there might be a critical temptation, as Sassi describes, to take these similarities as evidence of Smith's position as the inheritor, taking the baton of the Scottish literary tradition in the uncanny from Spark. Amber's 'ancestor' in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* is Dougal Douglas, a Scottish incomer in a London community, who arrives to cause disorder with his seductive and destructive powers.

It should be borne in mind that Spark's conception of her own 'Scottishness' was far from straightforward, however, having left Scotland in 1937, never to return on a permanent basis. As she famously remarked to Frank Kermode:

It was Edinburgh that bred within me the conditions of exiledom; and what have I been doing since then but moving from exile to exile? It has ceased to be a fate, it has become a calling.¹²

Spark was not one to be categorised, and certainly not in national terms, though much has been written (including by Spark herself) about the influence of her Edinburgh background on her writing. As Sylvia Bryce-Wunder notes,

[h]er view of Scotland as part of a globalised cultural consciousness where national and ideological borders are non-existent is in direct keeping with [a] vision of a modern Scottish literary tradition that could transcend national boundaries.¹³

¹² Frank Kermode, 'The House of Fiction: Interviews with Seven English Novelists', *Partisan Review*, 30 (1963), 61-82, (p. 63).

¹³ Sylvia Bryce-Wunder, 'Through Expatriate Eyes: Muriel Spark, Alexander Trocchi, and the Empowerment of Scottish Literature during the 1960s', *The Scottish Sixties: Reading, Rebellion, Revolution?*, ed. by Eleanor Bell and Linda Gunn (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 153-174, (p. 168).

Gerard Carruthers senses this distinction when he counters criticisms levelled at *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* which impose a simple dichotomy in which the Scottish outsider wreaks havoc on English domesticity (and the ballad trope on 1950s kitchen-sink realism), arguing that in fact 'Spark stands ironic and aloof to both'.¹⁴ His statement is pertinent when considering *The Accidental*:

Those critics who wish to see the novel as portraying some essentially different Scottish cultural *mentalité*, knowingly dissecting the English world do not take account of Spark's construction of a plane of critique in the novel (as elsewhere) that is about showing the dissonance and fissures in universal human nature through wielding (and indeed welding) those materials she has most conveniently to hand. (p. 30)

While Carruthers' focus in his article is directed elsewhere, he comes close to defining the type of workable 'alternative' model Sassi calls for, one which allows for a broad analysis of Spark's text whilst also accommodating the presence of a Scottish tradition as an element within it. As he points out, 'Spark certainly comes to have Hogg in her genes, but this is not some set of essentially national genes' (p. 27), noting further that '[i]t is not a question, particularly, of any kind of national cultural inheritance or partisanship on the part of Spark' (p. 30). *The Accidental*, similarly, requires a more sophisticated attitude towards its Scottish connections. As I will go on to demonstrate, the similarities between Spark's and Smith's uncanny guests stem from narrative technique, in the modal uncertainty within which they problematize the realism of the text, rather than the sense that there is something essentially Scottish about the character-type itself.

Smith employs certain techniques in making Amber seem uncanny that are redolent of both Spark and Hogg. The Smarts, for example, find it difficult to pin down Amber's age,

¹⁴ Gerard Carruthers, "'Fully to Savour Her Position': Muriel Spark and Scottish Identity", *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. by David Herman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) pp. 30).

Michael observing her 'lying on her front in the garden examining something, like a girl' (p. 77), while also deciding she is 'maybe thirty, maybe older [...] one of those older women still determinedly being a girl' (p. 64). Eve, confused, describes her as '*the girl* (well, hardly a girl, only about ten years younger than Eve)' (p. 88). Just as her age resists identification, her phrasings also seem displaced in time, Michael noting for example that '[h]e hadn't heard the words hunky-dory for years' (p. 65). Dougal Douglas likewise appears to be from another time, at one point weeping over the loss of his fiancé and noting that '[a] hundred years ago all chaps used to cry regardless' (p. 67). Physically, Dougal Douglas is more obviously 'other' than Amber. In another nod to Hogg, Dougal makes Humphrey Place feel two 'little bumps' on his head, left from when a plastic surgeon 'did an operation and took away the two horns'.¹⁵ The remains of (what may be) Robert Wringhim's corpse exhumed at the end of the *Confessions*, of course, reveals a skull which '[i]f it was particular for any thing, it was for a smooth, almost perfect rotundity, with only a little protruberance above the vent of the ear' (Hogg, p. 206). Further to this, as Carruthers notes:

As a Scottish outsider and someone noticed for his humped back – in the 1960s interpreted as a handicap, rather than in folklore as the mark of the beast – Dougal easily stirs up prejudice. He is sent to traumatise metropolitan modernity with his very deliberated and very Scottish grotesqueness. (p. 28)

While Amber lacks a physical deformity, her unshaven legs and armpits fascinate and disturb Astrid in the same manner, seeming to her like a sign of bestial wildness which hints at the same folkloric origins:

She isn't wearing any makeup. It is weird. Her underarms aren't shaved. There is hair there, quite a lot. Her shins and thighs and the backs of them are also not shaved. It is unbelievable. [...] Less than a foot away from Astrid's face the girl, the woman, whatever, has opened one eye and is looking straight at her. (p. 21)

¹⁵ Muriel Spark, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960; London: Penguin, 1963), pp. 77.

When Astrid notices that Amber is studying her, she is described in monstrous terms, not as a girl or a woman but a startling, one-eyed 'whatever'.

Looking further back to Hogg, the devilish Gil-Martin (like the archetypal, uncanny 'others' of oral tradition) is able to alter his appearance and persona, placing those around him under a persuasive influence. Robert Wringhim spends some time convinced that Gil-Martin is Peter the Great of Russia adopting various guises, disturbed that he possesses 'the chameleon art of changing your appearance'.¹⁶ Dougal employs a similar technique to land a 'human research' position at the firm of Meadows, Meade & Grindley:

Dougal sat like a monkey puzzle tree, only moving his eyes to follow Mr Druce. 'You'll find the world of Industry a tough one,' Mr Druce said.

Dougal changed his shape and became a professor. He leaned one elbow over the back of his chair and reflected kindly upon Mr Druce. [...] Dougal leaned forward and became a television interviewer. (pp. 15-6).

Similarly, Amber infiltrates the Smart family through her own chameleonic abilities. Her wildness and gift for exploration and discovery appeals to the bored Astrid, her empathy and questionable sexual instruction restore Magnus from the brink of suicide, and her seeming disinterest and unattainability seduces Michael as effectively as a balladic 'daemon lover'. When he imagines her 'reading a book in a language he didn't know' (p. 75), the image is reminiscent of Gil-Martin, who Robert Wringhim sees reading what 'seemed a bible [...] but it was in a language of which I was wholly ignorant' (Hogg, p. 103). Further, just as Dougal is possessed of seemingly 'exotic' knowledge (for example describing Merle Coverdale as reminding him of 'an Okapi [...] a rare beast from the Congo' (Peckham, pp. 29-30)), Magnus notes that Amber

¹⁶ James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824; London: Penguin, 2006), p. 103.

knows all kinds of things about most things. There's not much she doesn't know about. He and Amber have had discussions about how light is part particle, part wave-structure, how time is bending [...]. Amber knows about Egyptian, Minoan, Etruscan, Aztec everything. She knows about car electronics, solar radiation, the carbon dioxide cycle, things in philosophy. She is an expert on those wasps which inject other insects with paralysis so that their own grubs can feed off something still alive. She knows about art, books, foreign films (*Accidental*, p. 150).

Her knowledge of parasitoid insects suggests an alien nature behind Amber's infiltration of the family and her repeatedly sleeping with Magnus, a hidden predatory mentality reminiscent of the ostensibly charming Dougal who, speaking to the benign Humphrey, 'gazed at him like a succubus whose mouth is its eyes' (*Peckham*, p. 28). The real drives and motivations of each character remain hidden and sinister, a characteristic which, as in Hogg, traditionally seems to be diabolical, intended to lure individuals either into sin, to hell, or to a folkloric otherworld which sits parallel to our own. There is, then, a potential set of connections here leading back from Amber, through Dougal, Gil-Martin and finally to earlier uncanny strangers in ballads and oral tradition. That connection, however, lies in the techniques Smith employs to make Amber seem uncanny, out of place with the otherwise realist narrative into which she intrudes. A reading determined to locate the Scottishness of the text, or insisting on Smith's national 'origins', might take those similarities as conclusive evidence of the text's place within a national tradition. However, taking this pronouncement as an end in itself obscures the wider issues of the text and the significance of the uncanny guest to those issues. Sassi, for example, identifies what she describes as the

risks in too much insistence on dealing with Scottish literature as a separate field of study [which] have to do with a prescriptive turn that literary criticism may, inadvertently, take, or with the narrow applications that it may lead to. Even earnest attempts to re-define Scottishness may result in the creation of rigid categories and thus in the stifling of literary creativity, if definitions are taken as 'dogmas' rather than 'work in progress', as they should be.¹⁷

¹⁷ Carla Sassi, *Why Scottish Literature Matters* (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 2005), pp. 12-3.

As I will go on to argue, Amber's apparent Scottishness, under closer scrutiny, can be strongly contested.

The Distraction of Origins

In *The Accidental*, Eve Smart can be seen projecting Scottishness onto Amber in a way which echoes the critical approach which insists on origins and concepts of essential Scottishness.

As Eleanor Bell states:

In Scottish literary studies, the question of *origins* has often been simplified, taken for granted by critics, leading to reductive formulations of nationhood, which then assume legitimacy. [...] It is important to resist the urge to continually reduce Scottish literature to questions about Scottishness.¹⁸

Amber's influence on Eve in particular exemplifies how the insistence on prescribing the national runs the risk of limiting critical receptivity to wider societal or postmodern concerns. Dougal Douglas' Scottish origins are taken by the inhabitants of Peckham Rye as the basis of his 'otherness'. By contrast, on close inspection Amber's Scottishness is far from certain. Her accent is difficult to place, Astrid describing it as 'Irish-sounding, or maybe a kind of American' (p. 31), and Michael observing that '[s]he had an accent that sounded foreign. Scandinavian' (p. 65). Yet Eve hears a Scottish voice when Amber speaks, causing her to wonder '*[w]as even her shh a bit Scottish-sounding?*' (p. 93). When Eve prompts her, Amber appears to speak Gaelic, but the narrative omits her responses. While taken in, Eve also describes it as 'Something that sounded like gibberish' (p. 92), so Amber's claim to have been speaking old Gaelic proverbs is made doubtful, just as her insistence that 'I'm a MacDonald. I am directly descended from the MacDonalds of Glencoe' (p. 92) seems pat and questionable. Other stories she tells the Smarts, including one about killing a seven-

¹⁸ Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) pp. 120-1.

year-old girl in her car, prove to be false, and the truth of her origins also become doubtful. 'Amber', also, is named by the Smarts, thanks to them mishearing her real name. This, she says, is actually 'Alhambra', at once the name of the now derelict cinema where she claims to have been conceived, and an Arabic word meaning, among other things, 'Heaven on Earth' (p. 305), which again conflates her grounded, modally realist aspects with celestial otherworldliness. The only character who seems to hear her name correctly is Katrina, the eastern-European cleaner of the Smart's holiday home. This is emblematic of how Amber's characteristics come to be defined by the Smarts themselves, just as Magnus sees her as the redemptive angel he invokes but also like a girl from the pornography he has become fascinated and repulsed by. The uncanny guest is moulded by what the interpreter brings to it, calling into question the truth of what lies behind that projection. Just as Elaine in *Peckham Rye* states to Dougal '[i]f I didn't know you were Scotch I'd swear you were Irish. My mother was Irish' (*Peckham*, p. 63), Eve observes '[y]ou're Scottish, aren't you? I can hear it in your voice. [...] My mother was Scottish' (*Accidental*, p. 91). In a Freudian sense, Eve sees what she is already unconsciously looking for, and Amber's Scottishness as Eve perceives it seems to stem primarily from her own long-standing uncertainties about her Scottish mother, and thereby her own conception of her origins. There is a parallel to be drawn here between Eve's desire to determine an essential 'Scottishness' in herself, and critical drives towards insisting on the question of national origins.

Amber's questionable nationality awakens the latent Scottish connection in Eve, whose Scottish mother died 37 years earlier, when Eve was 15. Eve recalls her mother and her Scottishness as a past she is disconnected from and does not fully understand, but one she associates with a strange, dark energy. Recalling listening to Scottish records –

'terrifying gentle songs' – at her mother's house, Eve states that 'Though the fire gave off a glow there was darkness coiled snakily in the corners of the room' (p. 94) and ponders, '[w]hat was Scotland to Eve?' (p. 93). The figure of the Scottish mother neatly emblematises the question of national origins, and Eve fixates on her Scottishness as 'the source' which, if fully comprehended, will explain her other characteristics, the estrangement she feels from her family, for example, or her ethical confusion over her book series, now that relatives of the dead subjects of her series of fictional biographies or 'autobiotruefictinterviews' (p. 81) have begun to complain about the way she is taking liberties with the real deceased people which her fictions are based on. Eve's own name, by contrast, suggests a lack of forebears, the inability to trace a lineage any further back. Gavin Miller sees the parallel obsession with origins in the field of Scottish studies as 'the attempt to delineate an inner Scottishness which could, in turn, serve to distinguish between true and false Scottishness, between real Scots and pseudo-Scots',¹⁹ neatly depicting the reductive, inward-looking circularity that might accompany such an approach. These objectives, he argues, also apply to some supposedly anti-essentialist approaches, which insist on diversity to the extent that 'plurality becomes the new essence of Scottishness' (p. 158). Just as Freud states that the uncanny draws us back to sources of disturbance from our distant past, however, Amber's effect on Eve is an awakening which leads her to seek an understanding of the Scottishness which she apprehends as an *unheimlich* but essential factor in her own history. Dwelling on the way Amber makes 'a little Scottish snort of a noise through her nose' (p. 93), Eve recalls how she used to produce a similar 'Scottish' noise at age 15, and determines that 'yes, she could still snort, and exactly like that girl in the garden had' (p. 96). The original 'natural'

¹⁹ Gavin Miller, 'Scotland's Authentic Plurality: The New Essentialism in Scottish Studies', *Scottish Literary Review* (Spring/Summer 2009), 157-174 (p. 161).

way Eve used to make the sound is lost, however, and her current attempts to retrieve that element of her past are an act of mimicry. Nevertheless, Eve is thus determined to locate the Scottish within herself, as if this will somehow explain everything.

At the same time, Eve begins to see visions of her mother, always just out of reach and ill-defined. In one dream her mother is standing at the foot of her bed and Eve asks her '[w]here have you been?', to which her mother replies '[l]ook, come on, I can't. I'm dead' (p. 187). While her mother's inability to answer her question suggests the futility of Eve's determination to reconnect with her buried origins, Eve seeks to assign a meaning to these apparitions, to resurrect, define and assimilate her Scottishness. Yet that essence is always elusive. Eve is the first member of the Smart family to sense something wrong with Amber's presence, and forces her to leave. Following this (and the turn of public opinion against her book series) she abandons her writing career and in the final section of the text is travelling America in search of her estranged father (who moved there long ago) and a defined sense of her origins, still seeing visions of her parents along the way. Outwardly, Eve seems to have replicated Amber. She wanders from place to place, knocking on doors and finding places to stay and food to eat through ruses and manipulation, or sleeping in her car: 'The very notion that Eve Smart (44) could be something other than what she seemed was making her heart beat more than anything had [...] for years' (p. 184). Yet her wandering, which has taken her away from her financially-struggling family, also reveals the folly of an obsession with defining nature and origins as if they were an end in themselves or an empirically quantifiable truth. 'Out in the dark on the ridge, silhouetted in the moonlight, were all the selves that could have been', Eve observes:

They had linked their arms and were doing a kinky Scottish dance. [...] They waved at the real Eve like her dead parents had, and kicked their heels and danced as if at any

point in life you could simply have changed your mind and chosen another self (pp. 293-294).

Eve's vision of multiple lives she might have led expresses the 'accidental' nature of origins (as opposed, in an Aristotelian sense, to the 'essential') in a way which encapsulates the complicated relation Smith's texts have with Scottish literature and national inheritance. Smith certainly invokes the uncanny guest trope selectively and deliberately. Yet a Scottish tradition is only one angle from which to approach the text. Gavin Miller describes the critical attitude that maintains 'the essence of something is its inner, hidden nature, upon which the thing's other, accidental or superficial attributes depend' (p. 159). In Smith's text, however, it is Eve's Scottishness which is accidental, her projection of it onto Amber which is misleading, and her impossible struggle towards an understanding of her own national origins which is to the detriment of immediate concerns like the wellbeing of her own family. Origins become a self-centred distraction which leave her increasingly stranded. By the same logic, the critical choice to doggedly pursue the relation between Amber, Dougal Douglas and other characters from Scottish literature as a marker of the text's Scottishness and Smith's place in a national literary lineage draws attention away from Smith's originality as a writer, and from the wider issues her work engages with. At the same time, an anti-essentialist rejection of the national would obscure an evidential connection between Smith's work and that of other Scottish writers. Smith, then, requires that her deliberate engagement with elements of the work of Spark and Hogg be accommodated as part of a third, middle path of critical interrogation, a pluralistic approach which can accommodate the various possibilities suggested by the text without either rejecting or centralising national literary connections.

Reading With and Without Tradition: Smith's Postmodern Uncanny and the Hyperreal

In the second half of the chapter, I will further scrutinise how Smith's use of the uncanny in *The Accidental* and also in *There but for the* demonstrates deeper concerns which are potentially lost or overlooked by over-emphasising the national continuities in these texts. As Germanà and Horton note, Smith's texts typically address 'poststructuralist and postmodernist concerns with spectrality and the hyperreal' and 'display preoccupations with the lack of authenticity and the changing values of an increasingly globalized twenty-first century society' (Germanà and Horton, p. 2). William James describes the uncanny as an estranged sense of being-in-the-world, the loss of

*a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we might call 'something there,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed.*²⁰

In Smith's twenty-first century postmodern West, that sense of presence which makes existence seem real and *heimlich* is lacking, replaced by the hollow gratifications of the spectacle and the hyperreal. As I will demonstrate, the 'reality' she portrays reflects the concerns of theorists such as Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard, and an awareness of these postmodern dimensions suggests a new significance for her uncanny guests. The mysterious Miles Garth, the uncanny intruder in *There but for the*, becomes a kind of surrogate 'presence' that other characters latch on to in their desire to return to the real. Interpreting the modal disruption centred around Miles' and Amber's uncanniness in relation to postmodern theory also demonstrates what can be lost in overemphasising the character's place in a Scottish literary tradition.

²⁰ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902; New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 58.

In *There but for the*, Anna Hardie has seen her sense of being-in-the-world become estranged: 'There were several reasons at that particular time in Anna Hardie's life for her wondering what it meant, herself, to be *there*'.²¹ She has recently left her job in immigration control or as she describes it '*Interim Dispersal Measures*' (p. 57), recording in a shorthand form the experiences of asylum seekers and other displaced immigrants. As she recalls, 'I had to make people not matter so much. That was what my job really was, though ostensibly I was there to *make* people matter' (p. 54). The experiences of her interviewees are at times inexpressible, like that of

the woman who had been a university professor [who] said, *it is like my chest stops and the words will not, just will not*, who had proved unable to finish that sentence and say what it was that words wouldn't do [...]. (This woman was finally judged not credible.) (p. 60)

Having been in charge of condensing the experiences of torture and trauma victims to state-approved reports that cannot accommodate the actual experience of the individual, Anna recalls with a sense of guilt and revulsion being told how effective she was in the role: 'You are really good at this, the area head had told her. You have exactly the right kind of absent presence. Best of all, your reports are 95% word length perfect' (pp. 60-1). Anna has finally left the position, after being promoted, her experience and complicity in the system having left her disillusioned with herself, with the apparent exchange value of turning traumatic individual experience into official documents, and with the ability of language to express the reality of experience. As James puts it, '[t]he world now looks remote, strange, sinister, uncanny' (James, p. 151). Existence is rendered *unheimlich*.

For James, writing in 1902, the sense of naturalising presence he describes is primarily (though not exclusively) theological. In the age of the hyperreal which Smith

²¹ Ali Smith, *There but for the* (2011; London: Penguin, 2012), p. 5.

depicts, however, this religious sense of presence has been replaced by the predominance of 'the spectacle', the societal state in which 'everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation'.²² Anna considers the need in others for James' sense of a presence which makes existence feel somehow 'correct'. Watching Wimbledon, she speculates:

Maybe there was a new psychosis, Tennis Players' Psychosis (TPP), where you went through life believing that an audience was always watching you, profoundly moved by your every move, reacting round your every reaction, your every momentous moment, with joy / excitement / disappointment / Schadenfreude. Presumably all professional tennis players had something like it, and maybe so to some extent did everybody who still believed in God. (p. 8)

The sense of a 'shared' world is thus under pressure and in danger of erosion in Smith's text. While James' uncanny causes us to wonder '[i]f the natural world is so double-faced and unhomelike, what world, what thing is real?' (James, p. 152), in Guy Debord's definition of the spectacle, the natural world is similarly lost. In its place the spectacle 'is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. [...] The spectacle is also the *permanent* presence of this justification, since it occupies the main part of the time lived outside of modern production' (para. 6). Considering the modern mania to watch and be watched, as opposed to having an awareness of an intangible presence, leads Anna back to assess her own position: 'But would this mean that people who *didn't* have it were somehow less *there* in the world, or at least differently there, because they felt themselves less observed?' (p. 8). This sense of diminished 'there-ness' is compounded by her observation while perched on a wall that she 'could spot, without even trying, three CCTV camera points from where she was sitting' (p. 62). The ubiquitous gaze of the cameras produces a modern and sinister sense of

²² Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), unnumbered p. 2, para. 1. Hereafter references are given as Debord's numbered paragraphs.

continuous observation, an alienating corruption of the sense of presence James identifies: 'How like a brand new, insane sort of narcissism [...] this mad filming of ourselves all the time' (p. 62). The sense of a benevolent presence which makes the condition of being-in-the-world seem *heimlich* is replaced either by the cold observation of security cameras, leading to feelings of self-consciousness and societal division (where the 'watcher' remains distant and unknown), or the shallow need for fans or 'followers' which breeds a self-centred conception of the world. This cathexis, investing mental and emotional energy into the spectacle, the text argues, is a postmodern perversion of the sense James describes as feeling at 'right relations' (p. 152) with the world, and a new form of uncanny estrangement from reality as something shared and communal.

The uncanny guest who enters this world of hollow signifiers, of society obsessed with watching (through the media) and being watched (CCTV), is the mysterious figure of Miles Garth. The first of the four main sections of *There but for the*, titled 'There', begins: 'was once a man who, one night between the main course and the sweet at a dinner party, went upstairs and locked himself in one of the bedrooms of the house of the people who were giving the party' (p. 1). The narrative focus then moves away from the presence of Miles, the dinner guest, to Anna Hardie, who knew him briefly thirty years before: 'Right now the woman, whose name was Anna, was standing outside the locked bedroom door behind which the man, whose name was Miles, theoretically was' (p. 3). As a character, Miles is only intimated, 'theoretically' present, while the realist gaze is blocked by the door. This is reflected in the cover of the hardback edition of the text, which depicts the closed door of the spare room, face on and impenetrable. The narrative shift to Anna's experiences leading up to her approaching the door delays addressing readerly curiosity generated

about the unseen figure of Miles Garth, leaving a peculiar gap in the mimetic contract. The reader is offered no sensory confirmation of Miles' presence, and this denial of the conventional 'representational or mimetic orientation of fiction'²³ confounds the assimilatory expectations of the realist mode; he is a mimetic blind spot that repels the 'gaze' of the reading imagination. We are thus presented with a home that is haunted. Miles is 'ghosted' by Smith's narrative tactics; his phantasmal presence looms over the text in lieu of his non-appearance. Outside the guest room door, nine-year-old Brooke makes a 'knock knock' joke, to which Anna's inevitable response – '[w]ho's there?' (p. 5) – reinforces the haunting motif by repeating Barnardo's question concerning the nature of the ghost in the opening line of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.²⁴ Miles' absent presence is freighted with significance, but a signifier fails to emerge. Anna has been invited out of desperation by Genevieve Lee, the home owner who held the dinner party ten days previously, in the hope that she can encourage him to depart. Yet his presence, for Anna as for the reader, is itself unconfirmed. Just as Franz Kafka insists on not visually depicting the man-beetle in 'The Metamorphosis' (1915), heightening the uncanny sensation surrounding the 'reality' of the narrator's experience and allowing for disturbing excess and speculation, the fact that Miles' presence is only a rumour rather than a confirmed presence in the reality of the text deforms the mimetic certainty of the scene.

Like the reading imagination, Anna finds herself similarly unable to act, frozen in an interstitial hesitation as she stands before the locked door:

She had her arm raised and her hand ready to – to what? Tap? Knock discretely? [...] it was her fist she was standing there holding up, like a 1980 cliché of a

²³ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 193.

²⁴ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden, 2006) I. 1. 1.

revolutionary, ready to, well, nothing quiet. [...] She didn't remember much about him (p. 4).

Just as he presents an absence in the text, Miles is also a gap in her memory, a point of negation, a signifier without a signified. The effect is reinforced as Anna as tries to make contact:

Miles. Are you there?

Silence. [...]

Miles, it's Anna Hardie, Anna said.

(Nothing.)

From Barclays Bank European Grand Tour 1980, she said.

(Silence.) [...]

Miles, I think the Lees would really like you to open the door and leave the room, Anna said.

(Silence.)

I think the Lees would like their house back, she said.

(Nothing.) (p. 26)

Miles is indicated only by the repetition of a lack of sound and movement; a sense of unverified presence or, to use James Kelman's phrase, a 'silence forcing you to listen'.²⁵ When she does attempt to talk to him, trying to substantiate an addressee, Anna finds only an unsettling 'lack' which rebounds to infect her own self-perception:

The woman standing behind Anna sighed. She somehow made a sigh sound cavernous. After it the silence was even louder. Anna cleared her throat.

Miles, she said to the wood of the door. Are you there?

But the bleat of her voice left her somehow less there herself. (pp. 4-5)

Similarly, in an interview Genevieve gives to a gossip magazine about her experience of living with Miles locked in her spare room, she describes how coexisting with his

²⁵ James Kelman, 'Wee Horrors', in *Not Not While the Giro* (1983; London: Vintage, 1999), pp. 174-176, (p. 175).

disconcerting non-presence 'makes you strangely self-aware, strange to yourself' (p. 106). The way in which his negative presence draws the attentions of Anna and Genevieve diminishes their own sense of being present. Miles Garth is made to seem uncanny by the means of his narrative (non)-introduction, and consequently when he does appear in the text, mainly in retrospective episodes related by various other characters, the uncanny sensation adheres to him.

The world Miles inhabits, meanwhile, provides many examples of Smith's concerns with the 'disaffected, apathetic responses generated by the politics and aesthetics of twenty-first-century media' (Germanà and Horton, *Introduction*, p. 4) and the effects of technology and the ubiquity of simulacra and the spectacle on modern perception and our 'right relations' to the real. May, an elderly woman who Miles visits in a care home once a year, assesses the younger generation:

They swallowed it, hook and line. It was all supposed to be about how fast you could get a message to someone or how fast you could get to speak to someone or get the news or do this or that or get whatever it was they all got on it. And at the same time it was like they were all on drugs, cumbersome like cattle, heads down, not seeing where they were going. (p. 221)

Her observations recall Debord's assertion that '[t]he spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the *total occupation* of social life' (para. 42), and this is, as May suggests, to the detriment of a shared, social reality. Meanwhile Caroline, another guest at the Lees' dinner, recalls seeing an electronic billboard advertisement in which the image of a tiger is morphed into a running shoe, arguing that

now that we have such tamed and, I have to say, beautiful images of something like a tiger and we can do exactly what we like with them, well why would we ever again be bothered about the extinction of real tigers? [...] [W]e don't and won't need to see a real tiger ever again now, not now that we've got images like that. (pp. 126-7)

This Baudrillardian sense of the replacement of the real in a world of fully manipulated and reproduced simulacra further displays Smith's sense of the *unheimlich* in Western society. 'The tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which simultaneously impose themselves as the tangible *par excellence*' (para. 36), as Debord puts it, and 'counterfeit life requires a pseudo-justification' (para. 48). In *There but for the*, then, technology and simulacra have replaced a sense of presence instilling a profound 'rightness' in individual conceptions of reality with a hollow awareness of a pseudo-presence. The constant proximity of internet access and the instant gratification it provides creates a sense of 'being' in and of itself which ultimately signifies nothing. Mark ponders the instinctive urge to 'Google' whatever comes to mind:

Sure, there's a certain charm to being able to look up and watch Eartha Kitt singing Old Fashioned Millionaire at three in the morning [...]. But the charm is a kind of deception about a whole new way of feeling lonely, a semblance of plenitude but really a new level of Dante's inferno [...] a great sea of hidden shallows. (p. 159)

Far removed from the real, the experience, as Baudrillard sees it, is a dead one. At the Lees' dinner, Brooke's parents fight a losing battle with other guests in the defence of art, discussing the gruesome but unforgettable photography of Mark's mother. As her father explains, '[o]ur child sees worse things every day on TV [...]. She just needs to type a couple of words into a computer to see things every bit as bad, and, worse, to see them as if she's not really seeing them' (pp. 166-7). Meanwhile Richard, another party guest, describes how he is involved in the design and selling of remote drone weapons for policing and warfare: 'Efficiency is one fantastic thing, but the psychological liberation is a whole other massively important knock-on effect. To kill without actually having to. Hand to hand combat, gone in the wink of an eye' (p. 120). Richard is an agent of what Baudrillard describes as 'war which is unable to be simply war, to be simply about killing, and instead turns itself into a

grotesque infantile reality-show, in a desperate simulacrum of power'.²⁶ Real warfare, in the modern age, gives over to the virtual, remote-controlled conflict, removing military forces from the reality of the carnage.

Miles has been brought along to the party as Mark's plus-one, an unknown quantity to the other guests, an excess (Mark himself barely knows him). The scene takes place in the section of the novel titled 'but', narrated from Mark's perspective. Mark has recently met Miles at a performance of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (another story which, in the character of Hermione, significantly features a central presence/absence), and finds him fascinating in a mysterious way. As a result of Mark's mesmerised interest in him, and his introduction into the text as an unsettling non-presence, Miles becomes

the magnetizer [...] the *mise-en-abyme* whose effect persists regardless of later thematic solutions or demystifications. The uncanny emerges in the capacity of narrative structure to outlive its thematic recuperation. (Bernstein, p. 1134)

Thus, when Mark observes Miles's unusual behaviour, the reading imagination cannot help but attach an unfathomable uncanny significance to his actions at the party:

Mark can't concentrate on it because he has seen Miles do something strange; he has slipped the smaller of the two salt cellars, after using it lightly over his omelette and couscous, down under the table. Nobody else has noticed. (pp. 145-6)

For all that Miles acts in banal rather than other-worldly ways, his place in the mimetic contract has already been marked as uncanny. During the dinner, Miles seems able to read Mark's mind, silently swapping Mark's white wine for another guest's red without anyone noticing. As Bernstein puts it:

The uncanny breaks up language, leaving material remnants, in the presence of the strange, the confusion and exchange between friend and stranger, guest and

²⁶ Jean Baudrillard, 'War Porn', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, trans. by Paul A. Taylor, 2.1 (2005) <http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2_1/taylor.htm> [accessed 13 September 2014]

intruder. Finally, the uncanny of narrative interruption clings to the guest who continues to seem uncanny despite all explanations to the contrary. [The guest] continues to pull with him the conditions of his narrative appearance. [The guest] passes from strangeness to familiarity and back again, showing himself finally to be the uncanny force he was at first *mistaken* to be. (p. 1134)

Thus when Miles eventually withdraws, unnoticed, to seclude himself in the spare room, the act becomes central to the text, loaded with ungraspable uncanny significance.

Miles becomes most engaged at the party when he explains the naming of the ship the Cutty Sark to Brooke, by describing the events of Burns' 'Tam o'Shanter' (1796). Although Anna states that Miles is not Scottish, his knowledge of Burns, which he quotes in accurate Scots, might be pounced on by critics in the pursuit of determining his Scottishness as an uncanny figure. To add further weight to that connection, he can also, like Amber, be likened to Spark's uncanny individuals, particularly since his position as uncanny guest at a soiree for often unlikeable characters is demonstrably similar to that of Margaret Murchie in Spark's *Symposium*. Both texts feature a central dinner party scene, and among the ten adult attendees at each (Smith adds an eleventh, in the figure of nine-year old Brooke) are Miles and Margaret respectively, mysterious strangers brought along by invited guests who by turns beguile and alienate the others. Just as Mark has brought Miles while still relatively unfamiliar with him, in *Symposium* William Damien brings his new wife Margaret (*ne* Murchie), with whom he is only recently acquainted. The similarity between these scenes is striking, and Smith's affinity with Spark is apparent in her knowing dismantling of affluent middle-class mores and mentalities. In Spark's text, Margaret Murchie is designed as the archetypal Scottish 'other', a witch-like character who uses her seemingly unnatural powers to ensnare a rich husband (who is 'enchanted right-away') and who her uncle describes as '[a]n extremely capable girl, very full of ability, power', including the capacity of '[p]rovoking

a murder [...]. Causing someone else to do it'.²⁷ Annabel, an assistant TV producer looking into a series of female deaths which seem somehow connected to Margaret, likens her to that most prominent of Scottish uncanny villains: 'A female Jekyll and Hyde, she thinks. And she wonders, What precisely were the crimes of Hyde? One is never really told' (Spark, *Symposium*, p. 144). Miles' nature is similarly unfathomable; his motives in occupying the guest room similarly hidden. In *Symposium*, several of the dinner party attendees become determined to fathom the nature of Margaret's involvement in the deaths 'in a parodic witch-hunt, aiming to unveil the dark secrets underneath Margaret's virtuous façade'.²⁸ In Smith's text, meanwhile, Anna, Mark, Genevieve and eventually large swathes of the public become fascinated by Miles' hidden nature and his unknown purpose in occupying the Lees' spare room.

In the context of Smith's emphasis on the postmodern nature of contemporary reality, however, a reliance on Scottish literary tradition is insufficient to account for Miles' uncanniness. Debord states that the spectacle privileges vision as the human sense which most 'corresponds to the generalized abstraction of present-day society' (para. 18). When Miles disappears from view and locks himself in the guest room, he confounds the social order of the spectacle, which by its nature 'concentrates all gazing and all consciousness' (Debord, para. 3), by denying the visual. In so doing, he in fact draws maximum attention to himself, or to his absence, and by cutting himself off, takes 'direct possession of every aspect of [his] activity' (Debord, para. 53), an act which opposes the order of the spectacle. Baudrillard, meanwhile, maintains that capitalism and reproduction have eliminated radical

²⁷ Muriel Spark, *Symposium* (1990; London: Virago, 2006), p. 60.

²⁸ Monica Germanà, *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing: Fiction Since 1978* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 79.

difference, but Miles removes himself from that social order, becoming the 'excess' which destabilises its naturalisation. In describing the way the figure of the uncanny guest operates on the textual level, Bernstein takes as her basis Heidegger's understanding of 'being' (*Sein*) and 'nothing' (*Nichts*), by which the idea of 'being' comes to coincide with nothing, since it is not an object in and of itself. By this reading, the reason Miles seems uncanny is that his 'being' is not attached to an objective 'Being' or entity. Miles is theoretically present, like Schrödinger's cat, 'being' in the guest room, but there is no way to assimilate him in the reading imagination. In Bernstein's formulation, 'The relation Heidegger establishes here between *Sein* and *Nichts* [...] resembles the coexistence of the "*heimlich*" and the "*unheimlich*" in Freud's essay' (p. 1116), and resultantly 'this point of confusion and coexistence of opposites can be named without a proper subject position; neither being nor nothing can properly bear the copula "is" (p. 1116). This blueprint of the uncanny proves fruitful when Bernstein applies it to, for example, Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839) ('I tell you that she now stands without the door!'²⁹). However, in Smith's twenty-first-century realism, which represents the contemporary condition of the hyperreal, the model requires adjustment. Baudrillard believes:

*today reality itself is hyperrealist. [...] Today everyday, political, social, historical, economic, etc., reality has already incorporated the hyperrealist dimension of simulation so that we are now living entirely within the 'aesthetic' hallucination of reality. [...] [T]here is no longer any fiction that life can possibly confront, even as its conqueror. Reality has passed completely into the game of reality.*³⁰

²⁹ Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839; New Zealand: The Floating Press, 2011) p. 25.

³⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Sage, 1993), p. 74.

In this conception, the era of capitalism and the hyperreal is haunted by the spectre of what was repressed by its creation, namely the real itself. When we are reminded of the real, it manifests as a disturbing excess. As Andrew Robinson puts it:

Anything which reminds us of the repressed aspects excluded from the subject is experienced as uncanny and threatening. It becomes the 'obscene', which is present in excess over the 'scene' of what is imagined.³¹

Miles, then, is not a Heideggerian *lack*, as Bernstein suggests, but a Baudrillardian *excess*. His description of Tam o'Shanter, the everyday outsider peering in at the diabolical congregation at Alloway Kirk, in this sense seems a comment on his own outsider status at the grotesque, bourgeois dinner party, with the guests dancing demonically to the tune of the hyperreal, exposing their own prejudices about race and sexuality, their wilful ignorance of culture and their support of the arms trade. As I will go on to argue, Miles and Amber embody the residual real which haunts the hyperreal world in which Smith's characters exist, and the modal distortion which surrounds them stems from the fact that they represent a truer 'reality' than the hyperreal dimension that is everyday existence. In order to demonstrate this postmodern augmentation of the uncanny guest device, it is necessary to study the effects Miles and Amber have, as agents of the real, on Smith's everyday characters, who exist in the world of simulacra and spectacle.

As word of Miles' occupation of the guest room spreads, the area behind the Lees' house onto which looks 'the window behind which, presumably, Miles was' (p. 188) becomes filled with people, tents, stalls, merchandise stands and a psychic claiming to be receiving Miles' 'communications'. Genevieve Lee gives interviews to magazines and television and develops her own Miles-themed merchandise. The effect Miles has on these

³¹ Andrew Robinson, 'Jean Baudrillard: The Rise of Capitalism and the Exclusion of Death', *Ceasefire*, 30 March 2012 <http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-baudrillard-2/> [accessed 24 September 2014]

people is debatable. It might be argued that the collective investment of significance in the blank signifier of Miles in fact steers them away from the real, becoming simply another spectacle. Much of the crowd chooses to refer to Miles as 'Milo' after Gen uses a pseudonym for him in a magazine feature; they argue that 'Milo's better, Milo's got something about it, hasn't it? [...] where Miles sounds a bit, well, wet. A bit middle class, you know?' (p. 191). The collective crowds take Miles as a symbol around which they generate new signifieds, a new focal point for their cathexis. Yet in the fact that the Miles they latch on to is a name with no confirmed signifier, it might be inferred that their investment of attention and energy is of no more 'real' value than, for example, watching reality television. In this interpretation they are not so much seeking 'right relations' as William James describes but buying into another fad. Their assumption for a confirming '*perception* of what we might call '*something there*' (James, p. 58) is further misplaced, since Genevieve eventually finds out that Miles has left the house some time ago. The enigmatic presence the crowds have invested in is revealed to be a literal absence, an illusion which Gen intends to spin out by occasionally shaking the window blinds to fool the crowd.

Yet at the same time Miles instils a sense of collective purpose and cohesion in the crowds, who begin working together to provide him with (vegetarian) food packages. In a Baudrillardian sense, then, they disengage from the capitalist emphasis on 'exchange value', which traps people in the assumption that commodities can only be exchanged for other commodities or money, and instead begin a project of 'symbolic exchange' – gifts given without the expectation of a commodity in return. Anna eventually joins the crowds, organising food packages for Miles and at one point telling Mark '[y]ou might think there are a lot of people here now, but last weekend at the one o'clock basket we had a hundred and

fifty waiting to see the hand come out' (p. 188). For Baudrillard, this utopian type of gifting is the only way to resist or subvert the hyperreal, in that '[t]o break the circuit of exchange value, it is necessary to restore exchange itself'.³² Just as Miles, by stepping into the room and out of the order of the hyperreal, produces an 'excess' of reality, this also creates a system of excess commodity which de-familiarises the signifying code of exchange value, overriding the capitalist mechanism which seeks to eliminate 'all that which overflows the schema of equivalence and signification' (*Critique of the Political Economy*, p. 149). In this sense, the uncanny guest becomes a terrorist representing the real; an agent of the force of symbolic exchange, as a means of de-naturalising the order of the hyperreal. Thus in a complicated manner, Smith instils doubtfulness in how genuine the crowd's engagement with Miles is, while at the same time depicting him as an uncanny figure of resistance, the effects of his actions becoming a mechanism towards de-familiarising the spectacle and the hyperreal. In a postmodern society, Miles becomes a new sense of presence, capable of restoring the public's 'right relations' with the world.

Miles' effect on individuals who interact with him personally is more demonstrably restorative. When Anna's trip to the Lees' house reminds her of her teenage memories of Miles, which she had nearly forgotten, she finds they recover her *heimlich* sense of reality. When she looks through his wallet (which he left along with his jacket in the Lee's house before beginning his strange occupation), the familiarity of his signature causes her to recall other absent presences she carries with her:

the little loop on the l in Miles, the slope of the G and the r and the way the t and the h ran together in Garth, she knew him again immediately. Even more, when she saw his handwriting she saw clearly in her head, in the same hand, the address of her

³² Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. by Charles Levin (St Louis, Missouri: Telos Press, 1981), p. 212.

own original home, the home of a total stranger now and as long gone and as ever-present to her as her own dead parents. (p. 63)

While Anna does not blindly invest meaning in Miles's presence in the Lees' room as do the crowds gathered outside, her practicality in organising the delivery of supplies to him give her a sense of purpose, while his memory allows her to recollect elements of her own past which renew her sense of herself:

She wiped her eyes on the sleeve of Miles' jacket, which let her know she'd been crying, which was something she hadn't done for quite some time. This knowledge, in turn, made something deep inside her chest crack open and shell off. (p. 65)

The external verification of her tears becomes the 'realist' descriptive element indicating her internal restoration. Miles' effect is the same as when she first met him as a teenager on the European trip, during which time she had felt an uncanny sense of alienation from herself for the first time: 'She had not known she was this shy. She had not expected, out in the world, to find herself quite so much the wrong kind of person' (p. 35). The trip is her first experience of being 'othered' by her nationality: 'I am the only fucking Scot, the only fucking person from anything like home, on this tour and everybody else is English and they just don't get it' (p. 36). When Miles, already 'one of the popular ones' (p. 37) (not only with the other teenagers but the adults who are running the trip) begins speaking to her at Versailles, he seems in an uncanny way to understand her before even meeting to her, with Anna noting: 'That's the kind of thing only a really good friend of hers would have known to do to get her attention' (p. 37). Miles' presence rights Anna's self-estrangement, allowing her to become part of the group. Casting Smith as Spark's inheritor does not account for the relation between what is uncanny about Miles and Smith's concerns with the postmodern; this is one way in which she is not like Spark. This interpretation cannot emerge from focusing on the similarities between Smith's uncanny guest and those of earlier Scottish

writers; rather, the text demands a more sophisticated response to Smith's modal disruption of the postmodern real.

A more ostensibly 'Scottish' source of uncanny disruption in *There but for the* might centre on the character of Mark, whose mother, Faye, appears to communicate with him from beyond the grave. Like Eve in *The Accidental*, Mark is haunted by his mother, but while the apparitions Eve sees are more obviously dreams and imaginative visions which don't impact on the realist mode in an uncanny way, explaining how Faye's voice relates to the mode of the text is more difficult. Mark's inner monologue is continually interrupted by the voice of his mother, who died when he was thirteen:

How quickly and smoothly, yet how shockingly, when you thought about it, the seasons and years gave way to each other *banal philosophizing for God sake / how long's this sermonizing going to take / you sound like and old vicar on the make* he blocked her by thinking hard of the beautiful image he'd sourced back in the spring for the autumn-winter edition. (p. 91)

Now in his 60s, he describes how '[s]he'd been making her bed in his ear, pouring her lovable poison into it now, for longer than she's actually lived on this earth' (p. 93). Her name also suggests 'fey' ability, an affinity with spirits or the otherworldly. He no longer wonders about the nature of the voice, however, noting her tactics in a banal way: 'Her new attention-getting device was rhyme' (p. 85). Mark has raised the issue with his younger brother – '[t]his is going to sound weird but does she ever "speak" to you in any way?' (p. 90) – but it appears he is the only one with whom she 'communicates'. This strand of the text is reminiscent of the common uncanny motif of competing explanations of psychological disturbance versus supernatural haunting, which is often associated with Scottish literature and of which Hogg's *Justified Sinner* is but one example. Yet the novel sidesteps being defined by that national tradition, since the modal implications of a spectral

otherworld and ghostly presence which might be generated by critically focusing on this national connection are overshadowed by Miles's presence as the uncanny guest, the 'magnetizer' in the text who seems to have intruded from a different mode – the real – to the rest of the world depicted. Mark's indifference to Faye's voice downplays the uncanny questioning it might otherwise elicit, whereas he says of Miles '[y]ou're kind of... amazing' (p. 175). The word 'amazing', which habitual overuse has rendered banal in modern parlance, is restored to its original potency by Miles' effect on him. Similarly, Mark notes that '[t]he way he says the phrase *at the end of the day* somehow makes it not a cliché, makes it mean that days end and that it might matter that they do' (p. 110). In both these minor examples, Miles again de-familiarises language, restoring its original 'real' meaning. Smith thus dabbles with another Scottish literary tradition but presents it as an unproblematic side-issue which for Mark has long-since become *homely*, while Miles, due to the form of his narrative introduction, remains the primary locus of modal disharmony. His similarity to earlier literary uncanny figures, meanwhile, may enhance his otherworldliness if those connections are picked up on, but they are not essential, and if over-emphasised, distract from the richness of Smith's work.

The Accidental and the Hyperreal

If what is uncanny about Miles stems from his unique relation to the real amongst the wasteland of the hyperreal, the augmentation of the uncanny guest to a Baudrillardian interpretation is also applicable to Amber and *The Accidental*. The Smarts' lives are also dominated by technology, simulacra and the spectacle. Their holiday from Islington to the Norfolk holiday home is the stereotypical (repeated) middle-class English retreat to the countryside. The notion of a genuine engagement with rurality results only in a hollow

experience, one which, for Astrid at least, is associated with death. Observing Michael peeling a pear with one of the holiday home's knives, she notes that '[t]he wood of that handle has all the dirty washing-up of all the times it has ever been washed up by the hundreds of dead old people who lived here or holidayed here seeped into it' (p. 18), and later that '[o]ld people have licked the furniture with their dead tongues and ingrained the banister all the way up the stairs with skin flakes off their old hands' (p. 20). Meanwhile, her regular filming of the dawn, her walks around the village, and banal moments around the house reflect the way she is more comfortable when engaged with creating reproduced images rather than interacting with the other members of her family. As Debord states, '[i]n societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*' (para. 1). Magnus is similarly submerged in a deadening world of simulacra as a result of his exposure to pornography, and particularly the computer-created image of Catherine Masson's head on the body of a nude magazine model, which has had a profoundly debilitating effect on his young conception of sexuality, arousing and sickening him simultaneously: 'The girl in the magazine had breasts that were angled as if coming at you out of the picture. There was no escape from them. [...] Her mouth was red, open. Her wet tongue was there, her teeth. Her body was arched so you could see into all her holes' (p. 53-4). Magnus is a victim of what Baudrillard describes as the anti-eroticism of close-up imagery of the supposedly-desired object, revealing that '[a]t the heart of pornography, sexuality threatens to disappear'.³³ Masson's suicide is, for Magnus, inseparable from the symbolic death of sexuality that takes place 'when flesh becomes nothing but flesh, and ceases to be a sign' (*Symbolic Exchange*, p. 180). Each of Eve's books,

³³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, trans. by Chris Turner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 6.

meanwhile, 'take[s] the ordinary life of a living person who died before his or her time in the Second World War and gives him or her a voice – but a voice that tells his or her story as if he or she had lived on' (p. 81). In this sense, her books are haunted by the dead, whom she resurrects in simulacral form. In each of these cases, the Smarts are entrenched in the realm of the spectacle and the hyperreal, involved in the production and consumption of simulacra. Resultantly, part of the Smarts' loss of a shared social space stems from their estrangement from the real, since '[t]he cumulative power of independent artificiality sows everywhere the falsification of social life' (Debord, para. 68). While once realism was taken as a mechanism producing a shareable, social space, Smith's postmodern realism describes the severing of that social connection – thus there is no consensus between each of the Smarts' narratives about the truth of events. Similarly, the ongoing Iraq war is indicated primarily in the Smarts' solipsistic disaffection with the contemporary reality of the conflict. Astrid notes 'it is hard to actually make it matter inside your head' (p. 128), while Eve sees the infamous photos of military prisoners at Abu Ghraib being mistreated by smiling soldiers and notes that 'although these photographs were a signal to the eyes about something really happening, the more she looked at them the less she felt or thought [...]. [T]he less they meant something that had happened to real people' (p. 285). Eve's desire to keep looking at the images estranges the reality of what they depict.

If Miles's behaviour suggests his mysterious connection to the unsimulated real, Amber's uncanniness can be seen to stem from her relation to the simulacral. Before, between and after the main three sections of the Smarts' narratives, are short interstitial sections written from Amber's perspective. While the main narrative depicts a world obsessed with simulacra, Amber's sections are overpoweringly steeped in it, repositioning

the reader within the stuff of the hyperreal itself. The first of these sections describes Amber's conception in a cinema called the Alhambra in 1968, while the second describes how her birth coincided with the explosion in popularity of cinema itself. From this point on Amber's story is related through snippets from films, in quick succession, a bewildering spectacle of motion picture scenes made familiar through their reproduction and repetition, beginning with early cinema – 'The Paris Express arrives. Audiences in the front rows duck their heads! [...] Hundreds of trains arrive in hundreds of stations. Hundreds of workers leave hundreds of factories' (p. 205) – and progressing to its golden age: 'Gone With the Wind [...]. Cinemascope. Widescreen. [...] The Greatest Show on Earth. Ben Hur, again' (p. 209). As this dizzying progression is documented, all sense of Amber (or Alhambra) herself is lost. As a figure of the post-9/11 hyperreal, writers including Ulricke Tancke and Philip Tew³⁴ have compared Amber's invasion of the Smart's world and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. If Amber is some kind of elemental force forged from the simulacral itself, Žižek's assessment of the effect of the image of the World Trade Centre collapse comes close to defining her effects on the Smarts: 'It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality (i.e. the symbolic coordinates which determine what we experience as reality)'.³⁵ Amber, likewise, seems like a simulacral apparition whose eruption leaves the Smarts' conceptions of reality permanently altered.

Resultantly, when she interacts with each of the Smarts, her own nature remains hidden, while they project on to her their own desires and concerns. Magnus, for example,

³⁴ Philip Tew, 'The Post-Millennial, 9/11 and the Traumatalogical', *The Contemporary British Novel*, 2nd edn (Edition, London: Continuum, 2007) pp. 190-221.

³⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 16.

notes '[s]he is very beautiful, a little rough-looking, like a beautiful used girl off an internet site' (p. 55). In direct relation to his desires, she takes to engaging with him sexually, 'triggering a degree of self-reflection, but at the same time unearthing the disturbing dimensions of his desires and behaviours' (Tancke, p. 83). In this way, Amber turns the Smarts' projected desires back on to them, making them too real to be accommodated. Magnus' assessment that 'Amber = everything he didn't know he imagined possible for himself' (p. 153) underscores the Freudian nature of her responses to his damaging sexual preoccupations, but also the ambiguous effects on him of the acts themselves. Like Miles, the way she invokes reality into the estranged world of the Smarts is through excess, and as Žižek notes, 'erotic fascination turns to disgust at the Real of the bare flesh' (p. 6). Resultantly, after being forced into direct contact with his desires by Amber, Magnus considers a career in the church.

In both novels, the uncanny guests' de-familiarisation of patterns of habituation and the hyperreal restore a sense of social cohesion which was previously lost. Miles' followers become a caring, communal group, while Michael Smart becomes a better stepfather and the social unity between he and his stepchildren is strengthened. This restored sense of community might conceivably form the basis of another nationally-focused interpretation of the texts, via Francis Russell Hart's identification of 'the moral primacy of community'³⁶ as one of the distinctive characteristics which, for him, define the Scottish novel. For the Smarts and the crowds outside Miles' window, the uncanny guest brings people together socially, creating shared spaces. This might be taken as an 'ethical' Scottish trope in accordance with Hart's assessment. Yet framing Smith's use of the uncanny in this way sells

³⁶ Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel* (John Murray: London, 1978), p. 401.

short the complicated issues she raises about the current postmodern society. Eve, for example, is more alienated than ever as a result of her contact with Amber, leaving her family to travel in a quest of self-obsession. The crowds outside Miles' room seem misguided in their fetishism of a false idol as much as they seem reconnected to a sense of community. Smith's work is not consistent with Hart's category in this sense. Reading her work through a national framework in this way ignores and limits the breadth of what Smith has to say about the hyperreal twenty-first-century West and its effects on relationships, families, and society.

Conclusion: Modal Discontinuity and Interpretative Repositioning

As the title of her latest novel, *How to be both* (2014), suggests, Smith's work is comfortable moving between multiple, interstitial perspectives and interpretative possibilities. While her uncanny guests are reminiscent of characters in earlier novels by Scottish writers, then, this connection is accidental rather than essential. The divergent extremes of critical approach in Scottish studies which Sassi identifies might either over-emphasise the national continuity to the detriment of Smith's wider and more substantial concerns, or reject it altogether in an anti-essentialist critique which equally fails to accommodate the breadth of the texts. Smith augments the model of the uncanny intruder to suit her interrogation of twenty-first-century reality, treating tradition as porous, adaptable and chimeric. In this sense, her texts warn against the rigid or habitual adherence to pre-existing templates. Rather, Smith's work demands an attentive and continual repositioning of interpretation, one which accommodates tradition whilst also seeing through and around it. In comparison to the other writers that are the subject of this thesis, Smith's modal disruption operates somewhat differently, since the base 'realist' mode of her texts is in fact the banal hyperreal

everyday in which modern society is immersed. Accordingly, the source of the uncanny manifests from the way her intruder's 'otherworldly' characteristics come from their relation to the now estranged order of the real.

Chapter Two

Precursors and Revenants in the work of James Robertson

It's one of those dust-laden Scottish songs, of which there seems to be an inexhaustible supply, that harks back to old, long-abandoned country ways that people on plastic seats in bars and on sofas in central-heated sitting rooms still somehow seem to relate to. [...] It's also what she loves about the land and its people, the clannishness that stretches and twists back into history, the deep-rootedness of it.

James Robertson¹

In the establishment of a Scottish tradition in the novel, Walter Scott, James Hogg, and Robert Louis Stevenson are the oft-cited novelists who form the foundations. While all three have dealt with the uncanny, the latter two are better known for it; their use of the double, the presence of the fantastic alongside the real, the uncanny as reflection of the psychological, and the supernatural of folk tales is pervasively familiar, even to those who have never read the texts themselves. If these writers cast a long shadow in the development of Scottish fiction, this is nowhere more apparent in modern writing than in the work of James Robertson. Penguin Books saw fit to include the following, telling quotation from Andrew Marr amongst reviews on the inside cover of Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack*: 'It was witty, moving and somehow managed to be entirely contemporary, yet wholly in the tradition of Hogg and Stevenson'.² This assessment is

¹ James Robertson, *And the Land Lay Still* (2010; London: Penguin, 2011), pp. 657-8.

² Andrew Marr, *Herald Books of the Year*, 2006, in James Robertson, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006; London: Penguin, 2007) (inside cover).

representative of the way Robertson has become positioned in the field of contemporary Scottish literature. This chapter will interrogate Robertson's attitude towards these writers, whom he describes as 'this great nineteenth century triumvirate',³ and the determination displayed in his work to think of them not only as influences but as literary forebears or *precursors*. Looking primarily at *The Fanatic* and *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, I will argue that Robertson, through careful emulation of uncanny tropes and techniques as used by Hogg and Stevenson, actively positions his own work as a natural inheritor from these forebears of the Scottish tradition in literature. Yet while Hogg and Stevenson are stylistic innovators who stand out in part because of their unprecedented use of uncanny modal confusion, in so studiously resurrecting their approach, Robertson's own work loses that contemporary power. In analysing Robertson's drive to reanimate the corpses of literary technique, I will refer to Michael Billig's notion that once the imagining of a nation (or in this case a national literature) has hegemonically solidified into a coherent structure, the modern proponents of that tradition simply recreate what has already been established. If Robertson is guilty of this repetition compulsion (which would comprise an uncanny drive in itself in terms of his vision of a national imagination), his conception of lineage and inheritance is, in these texts at least, ultimately self-defeating, negating the possibility of imaginative precedent.

A Scottish Tradition in the Uncanny: Archetypes and Inheritors

In his essay 'Mass-Producing Traditions', Eric Hobsbawm describes the proliferation of monuments to Otto von Bismarck in German cities in the early twentieth century, remarking

³ James Robertson, 'Scott, Hogg, and Stevenson, and their Influence on Scottish Literature', Schools Conference of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, (5 October 2013), <<http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/scotlit/asls/Robertson2013.html>> [accessed 13 December 2013]

that '[t]his accumulation of masonry and statuary suggests [a] choice of national symbol'.⁴

The same process can be observed in the formation of literary traditions, as Casanova describes:

Within the closed environment of the nation, the process of differentiation and essentialization created familiar and analysable cultural distinctions: national peculiarities were insisted upon and cultivated, chiefly through the schools, with the result that references, citations, and allusions to the national literary past became the private property of native speakers. National peculiarities thus acquired a reality of their own, and helped in turn to produce a literature that was consistent with accepted national categories. (*World Republic of Letters*, p. 106)

Robertson is only one among many Scottish writers – though currently the most prominent – treating uncanny works by earlier Scottish writers as a kind of national archive of literary tropes and effects to be drawn on or played with. The effect is two-fold – bolstering an awareness of Scottish literature as a developing tradition with a strong (and ever-present) heritage, and establishing new writers as 'inheritors' in that succession. In order to establish what is different about Robertson, it is worth considering his work in the context of other writers who also draw, in one form or another, from the same repository of 'Scottish literary uncanny'. In novels such as *Ghostwriting* (1996) and *The Sinister Cabaret* (2001), John Herdman displays a similar affinity with those earlier writers. Douglas Gifford notes that 'Herdman is working in the manner of Hogg and Stevenson in his powerful evocation of [...] uncanny psychological bonding',⁵ while Roderick Watson observes that '[t]he fiction of John Herdman is [...] haunted by the myths and puzzles of Scottishness [...] and the ghost of

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 263-307 (p. 276).

⁵ Douglas Gifford, 'Autumn Fiction: Clever Books and Sad People', *Books in Scotland*, 59 (1996), 1-8, (p. 3-4).

Hogg's *Justified Sinner* is never far from his work'.⁶ In *Ghostwriting*, the satanically named Torquil Todd, whose memoir the protagonist is composing, gradually acquires a sinister and devilish malevolence, while the text flirts with doubling and confused identities. 'While Todd is neither Robert Wringhim or Henry Jekyll', Gifford comments, 'he is a descendent of these' ('Autumn Fiction', p. 4). Herdman, notably, has also published a monograph titled *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1990), which considers Scottish writers prominently alongside Russian authors and Edgar Allan Poe. John Burnside more bluntly evokes the folkloric aspects of Burns, Hogg and others in *The Devil's Footprints* (2007), in which the villagers of the small fishing town of Coldhaven awake to find, along with a thick covering of snow, a trail of

neat, inky marks laid down by some cloven-footed thing, some creature that had not only walked on two legs through the streets and wynds from one end of the town to the other, but had also ascended their walls and crossed their high, crowstepped roofs in the pursuit of an undeviating straight path through their sleeping domain.⁷

Other writers invoke specific texts. Emma Tennant's *The Bad Sister* (1978) and *Two Women of London* (1989), for example, are described by Monica Germanà as 'hypertextual transpositions of Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* respectively'.⁸ Tennant's reclamation of the double as an exemplar of modern female identity further endorses these two source texts in particular as fundamental archetypes of Scottish literature. Tennant, along with writers like Brian McCabe, Kevin MacNeil and James Robertson, assume reader familiarity with those key works; whether or not an individual

⁶ Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland: the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edn (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 260-1.

⁷ John Burnside, *The Devil's Footprints* (London: Vintage, 2008), pp. 2-3.

⁸ Monica Germanà, *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 117.

reader has actually read them, the works of these modern writers assume a knowledge of the themes, general premises or atmospherics of their literary 'forebears'. Brian McCabe plays with the doppelganger trope in his 1990 novel *The Other McCoy*, in which Pat McCoy becomes concerned about whether he himself is an impostor after discovering that his friends believe him to have died, and react with horror upon seeing him. On spotting a friend across a bar, Pat waves, but:

Tony McTaggart froze, his pint half-way to his mouth, seeing him but apparently not recognising him. McCoy nodded vigorously and raised his pint, but Tony went on staring at him in horror. McCoy did a little mime-routine, pointing to his swollen eye and grimacing, hoping to bring a smile of recognition to Tony's face. When it didn't, McCoy felt the queasy feeling sweep over him. [...] It was like an illness. Maybe it was an illness. To be somebody, somebody else, somebody not –⁹

While Gifford finds Herdman's stylistic approach to 'capture very clearly [...] the tone of Hogg and Stevenson'¹⁰, McCabe's take on doubling in Edinburgh is played for knowing chuckles more than for either sinister effect, or in order to interrogate issues of identity and the nature of humanity and belief, as in Tennant's modern reworkings (and the original texts themselves). For McCabe and Robertson (in *The Fanatic* and *The Testament* especially), part of the entertainment lies in the familiarity of those tropes rather than their power to disturb. McCoy's friend Grogan notes wryly '[y]our Jekyll and your Hyde get on too well together' (*The Other McCoy*, p. 167). Similarly light of tone, at least initially, is Kevin MacNeil's *A Method Actor's Guide to Jekyll and Hyde* (2010), which, tongue-in-cheek, begins 'I'm in two minds'.¹¹ In MacNeil's text, Robert Lewis takes the lead role(s) in the stage

⁹ Brian McCabe, *The Other McCoy* (1990; London, Penguin, 1991), p. 128.

¹⁰ Douglas Gifford, "'Ghostwriting' Review', *Books in Scotland*, 59 (1996), p. 3).

¹¹ Kevin MacNeil, *A Method Actor's Guide to Jekyll and Hyde* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2010), p. 3.

production of *Jekyll and Hyde*; following a car crash and under pressure from the theatre company he begins to perceive the world differently and becomes more driven, feverish and violent, noting 'I've never been stronger' (*Method Actor*, p. 159). MacNeil's Edinburgh emulates the fog-shrouded London of Stevenson's text (though with more notable city-specific landmarks), the narrator's description of the way 'a dense mist gave the pub's real flame lamps a syrupy, almost mawkish quality' (*Method Actor*, p. 27) using modern fixtures to echo Enfield's description of 'a part of town where there was literally nothing to be seen but lamps' (*Strange Case*, p. 7). In addition to naming his protagonist after the earlier author, MacNeil goes as far as to name the nurse looking after him Nurse Stevenson. The text pulls back from the traditional psychological fracturing of Lewis' personality, however, revealing that since the crash he has been in hospital, sedated and hallucinating, and that much of the previous narrative has taken place in his mind, hence its cartoonish and over-the-top antics. The text is, appropriately, divided, the second narrative being provided by Julie, Robert's girlfriend (who, in his hallucinations, had been his unrequited love Juliette). Having sidestepped an obvious re-tread of *Jekyll and Hyde*'s premise, MacNeil uses Stevenson's text to highlight Lewis' growing interest in Buddhism, as Julie, reading the novel to the unconscious Lewis in hospital, notes how Jekyll's experiments into expunging facets of the personality 'might tie in with the Buddhist stuff he was always banging on about; killing the self, "extinction of the ego" was the phrase' (*Method Actor*, p. 180). MacNeil's text takes the question of identities somewhere unexpected, but each of these writers, as with Robertson, assume a shared knowledge (however vague) of the *Confessions*, the *Strange Case*, or both, with the reader. In *A Method Actor's Guide*, Lewis notes the Whitekirk Head of Drama's tendency for 'remixing the clichés' (*Method Actor*, p. 10), and it's an approach which can be observed in the works of each of these modern Scottish writers –

disrupting the reality of their texts in a way which evokes a very particular type of uncanny sensation, one associated, for them at least, not only with earlier writers, but with writers who are precursors in a chain of national literary inheritance. Yet while many of these works are concerned with turning the well-trodden uncanny aspects of Hogg and Stevenson to new purposes, Robertson's texts stand out not as 'remixes' of the originals but as repetition of them; as if returning to those texts were purpose enough. Harold Bloom describes the anxiety felt by poets when trying to shake off the influence of the earlier poets who have inspired them in order to express something which is not derivative and purely their own: 'what does the anxiety of influence concern but the energy, the force, the will? Are they one's own, or emanations from the other, from the precursor?'.¹² Robertson's work, as I will go on to demonstrate, seems to eschew the kind of anxiety Bloom defines, actively calling to mind texts by Stevenson, Hogg and others as national signifiers in a way which explicitly associates his own work with theirs.

Keeping it Close: *The Fanatic* and a Scottish Uncanny

The uncanny is writ large in *The Fanatic*, Robertson's first published novel, and when the character of Andrew Carlin first appears, walking into Dawson's pub on Edinburgh's Southside, his disturbing aura raises unease. As Hugh Hardie, on the lookout for a potential actor for his ghost tour, gleefully notes, '[h]e has got something, hasn't he? To look at, I mean. That woman over there can't stop checking him out. He's *disturbing* her. Don't you see?'¹³ Hardie's companion Jackie Halkit is also affected, but notes '[h]e's not the ghost to

¹² Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edn (1973; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 52.

¹³ James Robertson, *The Fanatic* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 15.

solve your problems. He's out of *my* past' (*Fanatic*, p. 14). Robertson seems keen to foster an intangible but unsettling air around Carlin, a figure resurfacing unexpectedly from Jackie's past: 'She didn't understand herself; one minute she was disturbed by Carlin, the next she felt he needed protecting. She noticed how he sat: hunched, or coiled' (*Fanatic*, p.17). Carlin, it seems, holds that indefinable something that makes him the perfect candidate to perform as Major Thomas Weir in Hardie's tour. As Hardie explains, he is 'the spitting image' (*Fanatic*, p. 19) and 'an ideal match for Major Weir. They might have been made for each other', (*Fanatic*, p. 21) Hardie claims. As if the intended effect were not clear enough, Hardie points out that 'this is uncanny' (*Fanatic*, p.14). Weir, a seventeenth century Presbyterian minister and presumed occultist, was executed for witchcraft in 1670. For Hardie, who is interested in writing a book on the subject, Weir is a figure whose place in history and in the national imagination should be maintained.

The Fanatic is divided between 1997 and 1645-77, the earlier-set sections following the life of Weir and his follower James Mitchel, who shares the titular role with Carlin as the latter becomes immersed in researching Weir's life. Robertson's meticulous research into the earlier period is apparent, and his drive to preserve historical detail in the text reflects his need to maintain literary techniques in the same way. Carlin, similarly, becomes obsessive in his research into the Major, and as his obsession deepens the text suggests an impending eruption of the past; it seems at points that Mitchel is about to reach out to Carlin in the present. In a manner reminiscent of Hogg's work, notably the character of 'Kilmeny' (1813), Carlin is described as 'the kind of man that might slip between worlds, if such a thing were possible. He inhabited his days like a man in a dream, or like a man in

other people's dreams' (*Fanatic*, p. 22). Carlin seems about to become the locus of an eruption of the past into the present:

It was as if he had been right on the edge of something. It was like the other feeling he sometimes got, an overwhelming sense of being elsewhere, or that he could reach out and touch things that were long gone.

The past. He could stretch out his fingers and feel it, the shape of it. It was like having second sight in reverse. It was like holding an invisible object, both fascinating and disturbing. Or like feeling your way in the dark. [...] The past was like that for Carlin: a hole at the back of his mind through which anything might come (p. 24).

As the novel's section headings, neatly divided into past and present at the start of the text, begin to woozily merge into one ('Edinburgh April 1997/July 1668' (*Fanatic*, p. 127)), Carlin's mental state becomes a tar pit of Freudian repression and guilt, while at the same time he draws closer to Weir's disciple:

Mitchel who was at the centre of everything but central to nothing. Who was like a twig or some other debris caught in a whirlpool. For a moment he was held there and all eyes were on him, to see if he would be thrown to the edge, or sucked down out of sight forever. Carlin had watched, John Lauder had watched, three hundred years and a few yards apart. (*Fanatic*, p. 258)

Recovering from this experience, Carlin 'understood that he had been very sick' (*Fanatic*, p. 248), and notes 'I had the flu. Or something. [...] This was a fuckin nightmare' (*Fanatic*, p. 257). Yet he also recounts details of James Mitchel's trial as if it were a current event. For Robertson, the national past is a haunting presence, only a delirious step away from those who can detect it.

Just as national history is a recurring force in Robertson's work, national literature is also a force which inescapably returns. Thomas Weir, it should be noted, has been cited as a figure of disturbing fascination for Robert Louis Stevenson, and his grotesque double life as

a source of inspiration for the *Jekyll and Hyde* story.¹⁴ Robertson's own examination of Weir in *The Fanatic* resurrects the doubling trope made famous by the earlier writer, as Carlin converses with his reflection in his ornate old mirror (which is itself inherited). Robertson further emphasises the distortion of personality since the mirror has 'a buckle in it that produced a slightly disconcerting wave in the glass. It was a bit like a mirror that hadn't had the courage to go the whole bit and join a travelling show, where it could turn those who looked into it into fully-fledged grotesques' (p. 22). The image of the unhinged character addressing their fragmented self in a reflection is well-worn; indeed, Henry Jekyll has one installed in his room, in which he might study himself, 'for the very purpose of these transformations'.¹⁵ In *The Fanatic*, Carlin is drawn into a trance-like state at the sight of his reflection, carried by the mirror image further into himself:

He watched himself doing it. Very slowly he raised his hand. His forefinger came up, probed towards the finger coming towards it. It was weird to see them closing together. Their prints met, the pressure flattened the pads and he could see the skin turning yellowish as the blood was pushed back. [...] He brought his face in, rested his forehead against his forehead. His eyes in the mirror were that close they looked like one eye. He stared as deep into himself as he could go.

He felt a tremble. He was breathing but he could not hear himself breathe. He wondered vaguely if he was in a dream about himself.

He stood there in the sheet, going deeper in. (p. 222)

While unsteady on the edges of the realist mode to an extent, Robertson avoids the disturbance of a truly uncanny effect by having his mirror (or Carlin, via his reflection) conversing with its 'reflectee' in a modern Scots brogue. The mirror, as a mouthpiece,

¹⁴ Ian Rankin, *Ian Rankin Investigates: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, BBC Radio 4, 16 June 2007, 9.55pm.

¹⁵ Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales of Terror* (1886; London: Penguin, 2002), p. 57.

further acknowledges the doppelganger tradition which both it and the Carlin/Weir connection taps into:

The last thing we need's anither split fuckin personality. We've got mair than enough o them. Fuckin Scottish history and Scottish fuckin literature, that's all there fuckin is, split fuckin personalities. We don't need mair doubles, oor hail fuckin culture's littered wi them. If it's no guid versus evil it's kirk elders versus longhairs, heid versus hert, hieland and Lowland, Glasgow and Edinburgh, drunk men and auld wifies, Protestants and Catholics, engineers and cavaliers, hard men and panto dames, Holy Willies and holy terrors, you name it Scotland's fuckin had it. I mean how long is this gaun tae go on, for God's sake? Are we never gaun tae fuckin sort oorsels oot? I am talkin tae you, by the way. (*Fanatic*, p. 25)

For Robertson's mirror, the doubling effect is purely Scottish in nature, emblematic of both the country's history and its literature to the point of saturation. Carlin, too, makes plain the literary and historical traditions present in the situation, protesting that 'I jist don't like pigeon-holin folk. Ken, an early version o Jekyll and Hyde, earlier than Deacon Brodie even – it's too pat' (*Fanatic*, p. 25). Yet as much as the mirror and Carlin sends up the trope as a hoary and overused old concept, so too does the text substantiate and add itself to that tradition, and it does so on specifically Scottish terms.

Michael Billig points out that 'the imagined nation does not depend upon continual acts of imagination for its existence'.¹⁶ Rather, he argues, a nation becomes established once competing acts of the imagination give over to a dominant form; in other words the national imagination is hegemonised into a single particular model. At this point, Billig argues, 'banal nationalism' takes over – rather than existing through continual or competing acts of imagination, the nation is maintained through re-inscriptions of what has gone before in those formative acts. Robertson's emulation of the techniques used by national

¹⁶ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 70.

predecessors can be considered such an act of hegemony. Turning to Scotland, Kirsty Macdonald describes

a distinct literary tradition, exploiting and evolving the conventional supernatural/psychological interpretational tension evident in Scottish literature since at least as far back as James Hogg's work in fiction, and most famously in Robert Burns' 'Tam o'Shanter'.¹⁷

Yet while writers like Emma Tennant and Kevin MacNeil identify that tradition and use it to interrogate contemporary issues, or adapt it to explore new ideas, in *The Fanatic* the doubling trope appears as if Robertson's deference to his selected literary 'ancestors' were an end in itself. In Billig's reckoning this is not so much an act of creative imagination but of hegemonic repetition.

Robertson returns to the doubling trope in *The Professor of Truth* (2013), albeit with a less obviously gothic slant. The text is divided into two opposed sections titled 'Ice' and 'Fire', the first set in the austerity of Scottish winter, the second in the blaze of Australia's summer bush-fire season. The two sections incorporate various parallel episodes, in which, for example, central character Dr Alan Tealing is forced to sneak past police boundary lines in the pursuit of the knowledge that lies beyond. Like Stevenson's text, the protagonist here is a Doctor, though of literature rather than science, an ostensibly dull and restrained figure much like Henry Jekyll and Mr Utterson in the *Strange Case*. However, after ingesting a certain concoction (this time via a combination of alcohol and food poisoning), the meek Tealing becomes uninhibited and violent, attacking a group of obnoxious art critics with a wine bottle:

¹⁷ Kirsty A. MacDonald, 'Seeing Simultaneously from Above and Below: The Refusal of the "Real" in Late Twentieth-Century Scottish Fiction', *Re-visioning Scotland: New Readings of the Cultural Canon*. ed. by Lyndsay Lunan, Kirsty A. MacDonald and Carla Sassi (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 144-153 (p. 147).

It turned out that I had already drunk all but a last half-glass or so. I didn't remember how or when I'd done that. [...] I considered the possibility that I'd not been so much drunk as out of control, out of character. To have momentarily entertained braining the fat man with the bottle!¹⁸

Similarly, Tealing recalls a state of self-alienation when hearing about the news of the Lockerbie bombing and the death of his wife and child, an event which 'stifled the born-again Alan and left the dead me in his place. It was my dream, but it was about Alan' (*Professor*, p. 80). In these recollections Tealing switches from referring to himself as 'I' to the subject 'he'. Jimmy Bond, the government spook in *And the Land Lay Still* (2010) meanwhile, who changes his name to Peter to avoid '007' jokes, also frequently converses with himself as a result of his alcoholism, at one point conversing with his former 'Jimmy' persona in a mirror. The doubling trope is less blatant in these later novels than *The Fanatic*, but in the way Billig describes, each resuscitates the same device to reflect the psychological conditions of their Scottish protagonists.

In Scottish literature as Robertson conceives it, the double is the accepted national trope in representing unstable psychological states, and in employing it with reverence, he positions himself as the 'inheritor'. Roderick Watson considers Robertson in his conception of the double in contemporary literature:

The division, however, is no more than a formal device, for we never really throw off the ghosts and the books of the past, and their traces are more than evident in the work of many modern Scottish authors. Thus James Robertson's novel *The Fanatic* is haunted by Hogg's *Confessions* – nor is he the only contemporary writer to be so visited. (Watson, p. 1)

For Watson, there is a kind of haunting taking place within Scotland's literature, within the 'national imagination' itself, and Robertson has, to some degree, concurred. The writers'

¹⁸ James Robertson, *The Professor of Truth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2013), pp. 190-1.

own comments suggest a conception of a reified national imagination in which certain national signifiers inevitably recur:

I'm aware of that literary tradition, and I think Hogg's book is a seminal piece of Scotland's literature, and that Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, which revisits much of the same territory, is a masterpiece – but I don't consciously or slavishly try to imitate them, I think I'm just drawn to the same themes and ideas that interested those writers.¹⁹

In saying there is no 'conscious' effort to recall Hogg or Stevenson suggests some 'unconscious' process in the literary imagination, 'drawing' these elements back to the fore. Such a process would be uncanny indeed, but the way such techniques appear somehow 'archetypally Scottish' is perhaps a more a sign of intentional selectivity than Robertson's statement concedes. It must be borne in mind that it is of course Robertson himself who is consciously selecting which texts are recalled. When Hobsbawm describes a 'choice of national symbols' he foregrounds the selectivity of the process; similarly, Cairns Craig states that 'Any version of a tradition is, of course, in part a retrospective construction, an organisation of the past from the point of view of the present'.²⁰ Rather than the supernatural/psychological paradigm coming forth unbidden from within an intangible national consciousness (and therefore being some kind of diagnosable symptom of Scottishness), writers like Robertson contribute to the construction of a literary tradition by drawing selectively on the work of a very few distinct literary predecessors. Gillian Hughes sees another purpose to the familiarity of the trope in *The Fanatic*, however:

¹⁹ James Robertson, 'Interview with James Robertson', *Scotgeog.com*, (2006), <<http://scotgeog.com/interview.php>> [accessed 02 January 2014]

²⁰ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 35.

Many novels of the past twenty years have been influenced by Hogg's *Confessions*, usually modernising the plot (Emma Tennant's *The Bad Sister* is a good example), but Robertson, more originally, uses his reader's awareness of *Confessions* to create a teasing aura of menace around his protagonist which is in the end a joke and an illusion. Carlin is viewed with fear by the empty-headed Jackie Halkit, terrifies the tourists with his Major Weir persona, and as a loner who talks to mirrors seems to be set up by the author as a demented killer along the lines of Robert Wringhim. He studies a book which appears never to have existed under the guidance of a mysteriously disappearing librarian, and falls into a delirium (which may be influenza or something more physically sinister) in the course of which he attacks his talking mirror. However, the reader's expectations of the *Confessions* plot are never in fact fulfilled, and Carlin dissolves into something like a rather thoughtful and innocent Scottish Everyman.²¹

By Hughes' reckoning, the uncanny strategies employed in *The Fanatic* set the familiarity of those earlier works to a new purpose in leading the reader astray, setting up certain expectations only to undo them. Carlin, as she points out, loses the uncanny aura which surrounds his first appearance as if he has recovered from an illness. Yet rather than an unsettling of the central mode of the text (as in traditional works of the uncanny), *The Fanatic* suffers from a confusion of centrality. Carlin at first appears an uncanny secondary character, but becomes the main protagonist with his otherworldliness dispelled; Weir seems about to emerge from the depths of the national psyche but rather it appears Carlin has been ill and obsessed; MacDonald, the mysterious librarian who helps Carlin before disappearing without trace seems to have stepped from a hammy 1970s Hammer Horror film rather than a modern novel, or indeed from the nineteenth century texts Robertson is dabbling with. The mirror/Carlin's decrying of the doubling cliché in history and literature sits awkwardly with the sections which employ the device to unsettle. For the uncanny to function, as it does in Hogg's novel, the text must have a well-established realist mode at which fantastic possibility can tug, but *The Fanatic* rather presents a modal confusion which

²¹ Gillian Hughes, 'The Fanatic', *Studies in Hogg and His World*, 11 (2000), pp. 132-133, p. 133.

lacks the grounding centrality that allows the uncanny aesthetic to emerge, as it does in works like Hogg's *Confessions* and 'Strange Letter of a Lunatic' (1830), or Stevenson's *Strange Case* and 'Thrawn Janet' (1887).

Raising the Dead: Tradition and Hegemony

You may think I'm someone who believes in ghosts and fairies, but I'm not. I believe in the dead. I believe in history.

James Robertson, *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, p. 230

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom asks plaintively 'how can they [poets] receive the deepest pleasure, the ecstasy of priority, of self-begetting, of an assured autonomy, if their way to the True Subject and their own True Selves lies through the precursor's subject and his self?' (Bloom, p. 116). If the mirror's polemic against the over-use of the double in Scotland's history and literature is intended as a sardonic means of distancing *The Fanatic* from the literary influences the text clearly sets out to attach itself to, there is no such dissenting voice in *The Testament of Gideon Mack*. While, for Bloom, the 'strong poet' engages in acts of 'swerving' the works of their precursors – being influenced to identify what their antecedent's poetry was not in order to create what might have been or what can now be. 'Each poem', Bloom writes, 'is an evasion not only of another poem, but also of itself, which is to say that every poem is a misinterpretation of what it might have been' (Bloom, p. 120). *The Testament*, meanwhile, as Doug Johnstone notes, is 'a subtle, modern reworking of two Scottish classics: Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*'.²² Like Hogg's text,

²² Doug Johnstone, 'Scots guard: James Robertson has dedicated himself to preserving the native culture and language north of the border', *The Independent*, 8 August 2010, in 'independent.co.uk',

Gideon Mack is constructed around a supposedly 'found' manuscript, prepared by a fictitious editor who also adds an introduction and conclusion. The editor's name, Patrick Walker, is likely a nod to another of Hogg's doubles, Alexander Walker of 'Strange Letter of a Lunatic' (1830). A final section, consisting of investigative journalist Harry Caithness' accounts of meeting and interviewing several of the characters in the main manuscript, after the events described by that document have supposedly taken place, serves a similar function to the final section of *Confessions*, by casting doubt and raising further speculation on the nature of the events of 'the testament' itself. The bogus website www.scotgeog.co.uk, purportedly a site dedicated to Gideon Mack and his story as if they were real events, though in fact created by Robertson and his colleague Roland Tanner (who also appears in the novel), adds a modern dimension to Hogg's blending of 'found documents' and conflicting narratives. Johnstone fails to mention other notable (but less well-known) Scottish literary predecessors; the trope of the minister haunted by supernatural forces is familiar from, for example, the experiences of the Reverends Murdoch Soulis and Adam Yestreen in Stevenson's 'Thrawn Janet' and J.M. Barrie's *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* (1932) respectively. Mack, a minister who does not believe in God, meets the devil after falling through a deadly gorge in the local hillside known as the black jaws, the geography of which makes rescue impossible, and from where no one is known to have survived. The body of water below recalls Major Weir's description in *The Fanatic* of a river flowing to hell in which Irish Confederates are being drowned, but Robertson's knowing playfulness is in evidence here too, as Mack is preceded down the chasm by a panicking rabbit much like the protagonist in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).

<<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/scots-guard-james-robertson-has-dedicated-himself-to-preserving-the-native-culture-and-language-north-of-the-border-2043248.html>>
[accessed 9 October 2013]

The rabbit ends up skewered on the devil's spit, while Mack, like Hogg's Robert Wringhim, becomes similarly ensnared by Auld Cloodie (and perhaps, like the rabbit, also physically penetrated, though Mack denies this). Before this meeting, however, other uncanny aspects within the text indicate that Mack is somehow 'touched' by preternatural forces, or fated to experience the otherworldly, and it is worth noting some of these to provide a broad picture of the uncanny elements at play here which hark back to Robertson's familiar precursors.

Robert Wringhim is raised by a member of the kirk as one of the elect, and Mack is similarly brought up by his father, a strict Church of Scotland minister, without the weight of predestination but with the expectation that he will join the church. Mack loses his faith, however, in an out-of-body experience during an argument in the school playground, feeling 'that I was above, outside what was going on, Gideon and Buzz were preparing to fight and I was their witness – but there was no second Buzz floating there with me [...]. It was just me outside of Gideon, and I suddenly knew where all this was leading, even if Gideon didn't'.²³ Returning to his body and startling the pupils by swearing and questioning the existence of God, Gideon realises 'I couldn't drag myself back. In that moment I stopped believing in God' (*Gideon Mack*, p. 85). Further to the self-estrangement of the experience, from this point on Gideon leads what he refers to as a double life, keeping his atheistic views hidden from his parents, later from his friends and, ultimately, from his whole community in Monimaskit after becoming a minister himself (a career choice the perversity of which appeals to him). 'I'd already grasped the rudiments of self-preservation at primary school', Mack recounts, 'by becoming something of a chameleon between classroom, playground and home' (*Gideon Mack*, p. 81), echoing Wringhim's observation of Gil-Martin's uncanny

²³ James Robertson, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006; London: Penguin, 2007), p. 85.

abilities: 'you have the chameleon art of changing your appearance'.²⁴ Gideon notes that 'I continued to lead a double or even triple life for most of my teens. It suited me to do so' (*Gideon Mack*, p. 86), but this fragmentary existence is damaging in a deeper sense. When going to vote in the 1979 devolution referendum, Mack 'panicked for a second, before putting one X on the paper in the "yes" box and the other in the "no" box, thus invalidating my vote. Then I fled from the booth' (*Gideon Mack*, p. 123). In his professional and personal life, by continually second-guessing, putting on fronts, and learning 'when to speak formal English, when to switch to a broader Scots, which was what most of the other children spoke, when to show intelligence and enthusiasm in lessons and when to stay quiet' (*Gideon Mack*, p. 81), the truth of Gideon Mack is obscured even to himself; his development is retarded by his own strategic acts of 'doubling'. Even his marriage to Jenny is somehow false, since in truth he more intensely desired her friend Elsie.

Mack is not coerced into murder as is Wringhim, but his gradual self-estrangement follows a similar pattern. Before the devil appears it seems he has already fallen under the force of an external influence, and there is a sense throughout the text that the minister has had little real choice about any aspect of his life. Observing his friends John and Elsie becoming romantically involved at a party, a strange figure offers Gideon advice:

I turned to him. He was tall, thin, hollow-cheeked and with a moustache that trailed down either side of his mouth. He could have stepped out of a Western.

'She's spoken for. Nae chance there. Better going for the other lassie.'

'Eh?' I said. 'What the hell's it got to do with you?'

'I'm just making an observation. If it was me, like. I'd hae the dark-haired lassie. Otherwise I might end up without either of them.' [...]

²⁴ James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (London: Longman, 1824; London: Penguin, 2006), p. 103.

I said nothing, knowing that he was right. He drank the dregs from his can and left the room. I never saw him again. Sometimes I wonder if I imagined him. (*Gideon Mack*, pp. 110-1)

If this oddly out-of-place figure is in some way connected with the devil Gideon meets later in the text, he is not the constantly harassing 'companion' who so insidiously steers Robert Wringhim into murder and vice in Hogg's novel. Yet a sense of that influence pervades the novel, affecting Gideon even as he and Jenny kiss for the first time: 'Wonderful though it was, even as it was happening a voice in my head was telling me that it was not what I really wanted but it was the best I could hope for. The voice was that of the moustachioed man at the party and it spoke with great conviction. I did not challenge it' (*Gideon Mack*, p. 110). Mack's powerlessness in the face of the stranger's influence, the sense of inevitability the stranger brings to his life, and the ensuing feeling of inescapable fate surrounding his eventual contact with the devil beneath the Black Jaws, recalls Wringhim's observation of Gil-Martin:

he cast himself in my way, so that I could not well avoid him; and, more than that, I felt a sort of invisible power that drew me towards him, something like the force of enchantment, which I could not resist. (*Justified Sinner*, p. 96)

By describing the effect as 'something like' an enchantment, Hogg renders it inexplicable and therefore uncanny rather than definably marvellous; Robertson's text similarly avoids an out-and-out mode of fantasy by retaining that same sense of indecision about whether the events described are truly fantastical or only seem that way. Mack's sense that he is acting outwith his own volition grows as he often loses control of his left arm: 'I felt that it wasn't happening to *my* arm but to somebody else's. [...] The arm came down on top of me, heavy and triumphant, as if it had defeated me in a wrestling bout' (*Gideon Mack*, pp. 57-8). By the time of writing his account, the sense of bodily estrangement has grown until '[t]he arm is like some sleeping animal, separate and distinct from the rest of me. My right leg too;

it doesn't quite belong to me anymore. I do not altogether trust either of these limbs, but I have picked up the pen with the hand of my left arm, and it is writing again' (*Gideon Mack*, p.38). The uncanny elements of the text – the pervasive sense of forces influencing Mack's life, his bodily and spiritual alienation from himself, his seemingly inevitable meeting with the devil and his altered behaviour thereafter – all seem obliquely connected to the appearance of an apparently ancient standing stone in Keldo Woods, a stone not recorded or mapped despite extensive surveys of such stones in the area. The standing stone is the perfect symbol of Robertson's uncanny, being both the archetypal realist object and symbolic of something of ancestral but unfathomable national significance, as Robertson describes it, 'these stones inform the landscape but we don't know where they came from or what they mean. [...] I find that fascinating'.²⁵ The writer is drawn to these stones as symbolic monuments despite the loss of their original meaning, just as he is drawn to hold up the texts of his chosen national precursors as monoliths to be paid homage to, though in doing so, as Billig points out, the power of the precursor is lost in the hegemony of repetition. In *Gideon Mack*, the stone's inexplicable appearance and the fact that no one else has set eyes on it link it further to the type of traditional oral tales of the kind Hogg and Scott were well acquainted with, of objects and places existing in a supernatural otherworld as well as our own.

In *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, Robertson makes explicit the connection not only to earlier Scottish writers but to Hogg's *Confessions* in particular. As he states:

The structure of *The Testament of Gideon Mack* - an editor's prologue, the narrative of the protagonist, and an editor's epilogue - is modelled on Hogg's masterpiece, and

²⁵ James Robertson, 'Interview', *The Scotsman*, 25 July 2010 <<http://www.scotsman.com/news/interview-james-robertson-author-1-477284>> [accessed 9 October 2013]

there are echoes of that book throughout, even the odd phrase lifted directly from it, but I didn't want to be enslaved by another text. I do think the *Confessions* is a wonderful book, which, no matter how often you read it, never reveals itself in full, and always throws up new doubts and confusion. That is certainly an influence, but so are other Scottish classics, such as Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, and Barrie's *Farewell Miss Julie Logan*.²⁶

Although Mack notes that the devil's 'voice was soft and neutral and had no obvious accent – as if he had lost whatever mark of his origins it might once have had' (*Gideon Mack*, p. 274), the literary origins of the figure are clear, and Robertson goes as far as to give his devil the same name, though Mack omits (or is perhaps unaware of) the hyphenation Hogg uses: "I have many names", he said. "But in this instance the letters stand for Gil Martin" (*Gideon Mack*, p. 355). This entity, of course, shares its initials not only with Mack but with the mysterious George Mylne Foundation bursary which funds him through his Divinity studies, and which seems tailored in its exacting criteria to apply only to Mack himself. Further, Mack's Gil Martin recalls the same incident centuries earlier of its time disguised as a minister in Auchtermuchty which Hogg's Gil-Martin also describes (*Gideon Mack*, p. 283; *Justified Sinner*, p.164-5). Robertson's text further plays with the reader's foreknowledge of the earlier novel by referring to it directly, in a footnote from the fictional 'editor' of the *Testament*, Patrick Walker, who notes '[m]y informant Dr Hugh Haliburton tells me that this is the very name given by James Hogg to the mysterious, devil-like figure that haunts the anti-hero of his novel' (*Gideon Mack*, p. 355). Of course, Robertson is on one level at least writing an entertainment: 'I like to read fiction that challenges, informs and engages me, but I also want to be entertained enough to keep wanting to turn the pages. As a writer I try to bear that in mind' (Robertson, 'Scotgeog' interview). But his work is also very purposefully

²⁶ James Robertson, 'Interview with James Robertson: The Testament of Gideon Mack', *Books from Scotland* [2006] <http://www.booksfromscotland.com/Authors/James-Robertson/Gideon-Mack-Interview> [accessed 22 January 2014]

identifying what it regards as a national *precursor* rather than simply a literary influence. In a lecture of 2013, Robertson himself probed some of the connections between his own texts and those earlier writers. The lecture, titled 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll, Mr Hogg and the Reverend Gideon Mack', takes the form of a metafictional novella, emulating the chapter sequence and titles of Stevenson's *Strange Case*. In the novella, Patrick Walker and Harry Caithness, the editor and reporter who supposedly find and publish Mack's Testament, connect Hogg and Stevenson's texts, with Walker noting that the latter

consciously or otherwise referred to the themes of the Hogg book. Indeed, one critic describes the *Confessions* as the single most important literary precursor of RLS's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, especially in the way it deals with doubles, split personalities and madness. Furthermore, Stevenson was clearly well aware both of the guilty and shameful feelings that Scottish Calvinism could induce in individuals, and of the dangers into which one could be led by too zealous a belief in the doctrine of predestination.²⁷

The lecture further connects the two via a letter of Stevenson's in which the later author notes:

the book since I read it [...] has always haunted and puzzled me [...]. the book is without doubt a real work of imagination, ponderated and achieved. [...] I never read a book that went the same road with the *Sinner*. It is odd, though I may have heard the story told me when a child, but it is odd that somewhat a similar idea exercised me for some time, and the *Sinner* damped it out; though perhaps unconsciously it came again in a new form.²⁸

Robertson is having fun making these connections here, but the lecture makes clear his conception of the works of Hogg and Stevenson as antecedents in a chain of continuity which centres on the uncanny, on the fluctuation between modes which problematizes

²⁷ James Robertson, 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll, Mr Hogg, and The Reverend Gideon Mack', Lecture (Stirling: The University of Stirling, 20 November 2013).

²⁸ Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994-1995), VIII (1995), 125-6.

resolution. Harold Bloom describes the lineage of poetic influence in 'Wordsworth and Keats, Browning and Yeats, Whitman and Stevens, for in each case the earlier figure is both a precursor and a sharer in a common precursor: respectively Milton, Shelley, Emerson' (Bloom, p.123). The same relation can be seen in Robertson and the earlier figure of Stevenson, while both share Hogg as a common precursor. Yet Robertson displays none of the anxiety Bloom describes the later 'strong poets' as having over the debt they owe to earlier writers; rather, the opposite appears to be true. Rather, as his lecture describes it, 'there seems to be an almost natural progression in these ideas of split or multiple personalities, from the sinner to Dr Jekyll, and forward from Jekyll to postmodernity. I wonder what Gideon Mack would have made of it' ('Dr Jekyll, Mr Hogg'). Robertson's adoption of uncanny techniques from earlier writers, all from Scotland, again recalls Hobsbawm's theory of the 'invented tradition', which he defines as 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past'.²⁹ As much as Robertson treats *Gideon Mack* as homage to those earlier works, its place in this supposed continuity is also clear – the writer defines a lineage which his own work both inherits and extends. In his lecture, Robertson states:

On one thing all three, Robertson, Walker and Caithness, could agree before they parted, and that was that there were many similarities between Hogg's work and Stevenson's, but that the intervening years and different social circumstances of the two writers, not to mention the quite different settings of their novels, also distinguished them. Nor should they be seen only in a Scottish context. European literature in the 19th century and since was full of doubles, madness, fanaticism, self-delusion, encounters with devil figures and so on. All that this proved was that

²⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14, (p. 1).

Scottish literature was at once different, and the same as other literatures, further evidence of the Jekyll and Hyde division everywhere in life. ('Dr Jekyll, Mr Hogg')

Robertson has it both ways here – while recognising that the types of effects, tropes and techniques he is dealing with have been prominent in literature beyond Scottish boundaries, he also makes plain that he considers this a Scottish chain of inheritance: 'Maybe the Scots are no different from other people', he writes, 'but it does seem somehow that many of us live close to, sometimes over, an edge or boundary between the banal and the bizarre' (Robertson, 'Scotgeog' interview). For Robertson the uncanny connection is on one level explicitly national – he is building on an existing, and Scottish, literary tradition. That tradition, as Robertson's work seems to see it, reflects to varying degrees Hobsbawm's 'overlapping types' of invented tradition: 'those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups' (hence the recalling of certain Scottish writers associated with the uncanny but the omission of others, such as Margaret Oliphant), those 'establishing or legitimizing institutions' (in other words verifying Scottish Literature as a coherent, living tradition, something Robertson argues for ('Scott, Hogg, Stevenson')), and 'the inculcation of [...] value systems and conventions of behaviour' (Hobsbawm, p. 9), in this case the restatement of certain literary tropes and techniques as the indicator of continuous tradition and the embodiment of national literary 'accents'.

It might be argued, however, that Robertson's treatment of the uncanny as a nationally inherited trope fails to provoke a truly uncanny sensation. Hinging as it does on a knowledge of pre-established (and canonically Scottish) effects, the familiarity inherent in Mack's encounters with the devil, or the talking mirror/reflection of *The Fanatic*, is more likely to raise a knowing smile of recognition than to engage the reader in a disturbing sense of uncertainty about the mode of the text. Freud specifies that the uncanny is a 'class of the

frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (p. 220), yet Robertson's reification of past texts is comfortably familiar rather than revelatory, entertaining rather than a class of the frightening. So faithful is his return to effects which were once uncanny that the tropes now stabilise rather than de-stabilise the reader's sense of what is the 'reality' of the textual world – the tradition itself becomes the overriding mode.

While the approach taken by Hogg, Stevenson and to a lesser extent Scott was both innovative but grounded in the belief systems of the recent past, Robertson's uncanny is about the recovery of literary relics which, when so reverently held up in modern texts, lack the unsettling power they once possessed. Robertson's texts acknowledge the fact that the nation has become markedly less credulous; in *The Fanatic*, MacDonald notes that Jean Weir 'was accused of witchcraft but claimed that the real sorcerer was him, not her. People took that very seriously in 1670 – they believed in the immortality of the soul, that life on earth was just a prelude, an overture to eternity' (*Fanatic*, p.53). In *Gideon Mack*, similarly, the Devil discusses Robert Kirk, real life author of *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (1933):

In his day superstition and religion still walked side by side. People believed that there was a land under the earth, where the fairies lived. Not the flittery things like Tinker Bell in *Peter Pan*, he said, betraying a literary knowledge I hadn't expected, 'but dwarfish, devilish, thieving folk who could do you great harm [...].' We know it was all nonsense, but things were different then. (*Gideon Mack*, p. 90)

As the text acknowledges, much of the reason these earlier uncanny effects are to some extent 'deactivated' when relocated to a modern context is down to the passage of time. One reason they are so effective in Hogg, for example, is that '[h]e stands at a door that opens back into an older, superstitious and fantastical oral culture and forward into a

working-class literature steeped in realism and averse to pretension' (Robertson, 'Scott, Hogg, and Stevenson'). As Robertson notes, Hogg's beliefs were of his time, and a changing time at that; for he and his readership, superstitious belief was already becoming outmoded but existed within living memory, while religious convictions still allowed that the devil was at large in the material world ('Dr Jekyll, Mr Hogg'). Coleman Parsons describes this well when he states that in Hogg's work,

While the supernatural is being tied to reality by naturalness and humour, its weirdness is preserved by a subtle indeterminateness. This is often true when Hogg is embodying profound feeling or working within the restraints of living tradition.³⁰

Scott's treatment of the supernatural, meanwhile, stems from a delight in the romance of those earlier beliefs, but never to the extent that it overtakes his own rational conception of reality. Thus, in *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), for example, David Brown observes that

Both "romance" and "rationalist" modes are used here to convey the truth of human experience of historical change, as Scott understood it: it is therefore no paradox that Scott's most "Romantic" novel should also turn out to be his greatest essay in historical realism.³¹

As Brown further notes, 'Scott's purpose in introducing the supernatural into *Guy Mannering* may have been similar to that which he later claimed was Horace Walpole's in *The Castle of Otranto*' (Brown, p. 31), going on to quote Scott on Walpole:

to draw such a picture of domestic life and manners, during the feudal times, as might actually have existed, and to paint it chequered and agitated by the action of supernatural machinery, such as the superstition of the period received as a matter of devout credulity.³²

³⁰ Coleman O. Parsons, *Witchcraft & Demonology in Scott's Fiction* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), p. 296.

³¹ David Brown, *Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 150.

³² Walter Scott, 'Walpole' in *Lives of the Novelists*, 2 vols (Paris: A and W Galignani, 1825), II, p.135. Qtd in Brown, *Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination*, (p. 31).

Indeed, Walpole's own comments are insightful in appraising why Robertson's approach in emulating the uncanny of the past fails to convey a similar effect in the present. Maria M. Tatar notes that on publication of *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, '[t]o protect himself against the charge of possessing too febrile an imagination, he pointed out that the events recounted in the work were set in remote times'.³³ As Walpole states in the preface to the first edition, postulating that the novel is a 'found' document from an earlier time:

Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances. That was not the case when our author wrote; much less when the story itself is supposed to have happened. Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages that an author would not be faithful to the manners of the times, who should omit all mention of them.³⁴

Assuming the guise of translator to the 'found text' that comprises the novel, Walpole takes a similar position to the fictional editors of the *Confessions* and the *Testament*, but states clearly that the fantasy elements of the text reflect the genuinely held beliefs of the time in which it was purportedly written (in the case of *Otranto*, 1094-1243, during the crusades). By bolting the pre-existing uncanny templates of earlier writers onto his own texts in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the desired effect of uncanny disturbance is eliminated; a reader is likely to recognise the template as belonging to an earlier period (and an earlier mode of belief), whether or not they know its precise origins. While the uncanny depends on the fluctuation between irreconcilable modes, Robertsons' approach is a single, comfortably coherent mode in itself. Once a text such as *The Fanatic* or *Gideon Mack* is identified as a work of 'classic Scottish uncanny in the vein of Hogg and Stevenson',

³³ Maria M. Tatar, 'The House of Fiction: Towards a Definition of the Uncanny', *Comparative Literature*, 33.2 (1981), 167-82, (p. 173).

³⁴ Horace Walpole, 'Preface to the First Edition', *The Castle of Otranto* (1764; London: The Folio Society, 1976), pp. 28-31 (p. 29).

assimilation is no longer required. The habitual drive to locate the realist level of the text is eliminated; sensations of fear, confusion or puzzlement are replaced by a familiarity with the pre-existing template, which becomes our baseline expectation rather than a disturbance of such. Only those versed to some extent in the Scottish literary canon can recognise and affirm this, however. In these cases, the uncertainty exists for the purposes of the story, but lacks the power to truly disturb assimilation, as it does, for example, in Ali Smith's work, where the contrary modes refuse to be reconciled not only for the characters but for the reading process itself, appearing as they do so unexpectedly, tugging at the edges of the realist aesthetic.

If the mode of Robertson's uncanny is in fact consistent and therefore antithetical to the original effects he is reifying, it is also inert in the process of constituting a link in the chain of national tradition. Robertson himself identifies the reasons for this: 'there were many similarities between Hogg's work and Stevenson's, but [...] the intervening years and different social circumstances of the two writers, not to mention the quite different settings of their novels, also distinguished them' ('Dr Jekyll, Mr Hogg'). Robertson's uncanny tactics in *The Fanatic* and *Gideon Mack* are more an act of necromancy than of resurrection; the approach and atmospherics faithfully re-inscribed, but their overall effect rendered comfortable, familiar, dulled. The entertainment of the novels stems from that familiarity, and in taking this approach Robertson strengthens a particular view of Scotland's literary imagination. Michael Billig's analysis can be equally applied to the landscape of the literary imagination when he discusses imagined communities by comparing mediaeval and contemporary maps:

Not only are European mediaeval maps less precise; not only do they tend to depict Jerusalem at the centre of things; not only do they typically indicate an incomplete

world, with distant lands shading off into nothingness; but there is also a further difference. Mediaeval maps represent a world unobsessed with boundaries. [...] General areas are indicated for kingdoms and empires, without the compulsion to represent the precise place where one kingdom ends and another starts. The modern map of nations is quite different in this respect. It depicts a completed world, divided up by precisely drawn boundaries. This is the sort of map which is familiar to 'us'. (Billig, p. 20)

If the literary imagination is the expression of communities bound by nationhood, Scottish literature, as it is conceptualised in texts such as *The Fanatic* and *Gideon Mack*, appears 'precisely drawn', and the uncanny, as used by Scott, Hogg and Stevenson, is a clearly delineated feature of that cartography. As such, Robertson's uncanny lacks the mystery or imprecision of its earlier conception. Billig's analysis can again be applied to Robertson's conception of Scottish tradition as a series of strategic 're-inscriptions':

In essentials, the theory of nationhood stipulates that a people, place and state should be bound in unity. The nationalist-as-poet is a familiar figure in the early stages of movements to establish new nations [...]. The mystic bond between people and place is a much repeated theme in their writings. Once nations are established, and nationalism becomes banal, the poets are typically replaced by prosaic politicians, and the epic ballads by government reports. The imagined community ceases to be reproduced by acts of the imagination. In established nations, the imagination becomes inhabited, and, thereby, inhibited. In this sense, the term 'imagined community' may be misleading. The community and its place are not so much imagined, but their absence becomes unimaginable. Even though the imagination may become banally habitual, nevertheless, the mysticism which posits the special people in its special place does not disappear. (Billig, p.77)

Robertson describes Scott, Hogg and Stevenson, as 'this great nineteenth century triumvirate' ('Scott, Hogg, and Stevenson'), a seemingly inescapable force in the Scottish literary imagination. However, a conception of national literary tradition premised on continuity requires a heroic lineage of this kind, such that the authority of the precursor appears preordained and unquestionable:

Because countries are materially established in this world, the mysticism of this vision appears as a natural, worldly fact of national life. Much can be daily forgotten,

as nations appear as inevitable entities, their histories of bitter hegemonic struggle hidden behind the cleanliness of grammatical symmetry. (Billig, p.78)

Similarly, Robertson describes the connection between Hogg's *Sinner* and Stevenson's *Strange Case* as 'an almost natural progression' ('Dr Jekyll, Mr Hogg'), giving a sense of teleology to Scottish literature which naturalises that pattern of recurring tropes and effects. Thus, once 'national' literary tropes become established, they are also perceived to be inevitable, eternal, reaching forward to the future and stretching back to the past; as Sir John Wedderburn states in Robertson's novel *Joseph Knight*, 'nothing that was not safely in the rusted, misty half-dream that was Scotland's past, nothing dangerous to the mind[s]'.³⁵

Conclusion: Inheriting the Unhomely

The strong poet peers in the mirror of his fallen precursor and beholds neither the precursor nor himself but a Gnostic double, the dark otherness or antithesis that both he and the precursor longed to be, yet feared to become.

Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 147.

Robertson's emulation of his chosen precursors should not be considered prosaic, nor is his work diminished by this appraisal. Robertson's conception of history, for example, has much to say about changing attitudes towards religion and the contemporary relevance of Scotland's Calvinist past:

the deep-seated pulse of our Calvinist inheritance throbs all the way through our literature, right down to contemporary writing. We may think all that auld-time religion is irrelevant, but I suspect it still has the power to make even the most avowedly rational of us examine our conscience.³⁶

³⁵ James Robertson, *Joseph Knight* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 5.

³⁶ James Robertson, 'Judge Not Lest Ye Be Judged?', *The Bottle Imp*, 3 (2008)

<<http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/SWE/TBI/TBIIssue3/JudgeNot.html>> [accessed 24 January 2014]

Whether or not a reader buys into the concept of imaginative inheritance on a national scale, Robertson's texts invite the consideration of belief, modernity and the relationship between past and present, and texts like *Gideon Mack* chart, for example, the evolution of cultural attitudes towards religion over the last century. Yet in terms of the modern propensity amongst Scottish writers to employ modal disruption via the uncanny, Robertson stands apart as the most defensive of those effects as they appeared in an earlier time, in a way which ironically deactivates the potency of those very effects. Adding himself to the lineage of tradition in this way to some extent sabotages his own ability for precedent. In a 2013 lecture Robertson perhaps surprisingly cited Hugh MacDiarmid as one of his biggest literary influences, but went on to conclude:

I am not even going to list the contemporary Scottish writers who acknowledge Stevenson and Hogg as influences upon their own work. There are too many. [...] [I]t was necessary the best part of a century ago for MacDiarmid to do his work [...] to assail the unassailable figures like Scott and Stevenson – and especially Burns – so that we could see them afresh and see beyond them to a whole Scottish literature. It was necessary for him to shout 'Not Burns – Dunbar!' and 'Not Traditions – Precedents!' In the aftermath, as the smoke clears, Scott, Hogg and Stevenson are still standing. ('Scott, Hogg, and Stevenson')

Monolithically, indomitably, for Robertson the trinity of the 'big three' remain, their prior influence inescapable and essential. However, while writers like Kelman and Ali Smith find new forms and applications of the uncanny in contemporary writing, and others, like MacNeil and Tennant, employ and develop old tropes to new effect, Robertson repeats a hegemonic conventionality which does not move the literary imagination forward, but reinforces the authenticating trappings of the past. As an agenda this is antithetical to precedent; and in *The Fanatic* and *Gideon Mack* the national tradition is already completed, to be repeated in perpetuity.

Chapter Three

Dark Recesses: The Uncanny Realms of James Kelman

Mr James utters his mind with a becoming fervour on the sanctity of truth to the novelist; on a more careful examination truth will seem a word of very debateable propriety.

Robert Louis Stevenson¹

The destruction of himself meant the destruction of the world anyway because with him not there his world wouldn't be either.

James Kelman²

James Kelman's fiction is frequently synonymous with 'realism' in literary criticism: it is defined as 'social realism', 'urban realism', even 'realism fucking realism'.³ Yet despite the prevalence of this opinion, critics are often quick to qualify those defining terms. H. Gustav Klaus describes Kelman as 'an 'experimental writer' who is simultaneously a realist',⁴ Simon Baker detects a 'reimagining' of urban realism in Kelman's fiction,⁵ while Gavin Wallace sees

¹ Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', in *Essays and Poems*, ed. by Claire Harman (1884; London: Everyman, 1992), pp. 179-188 (p. 181).

² James Kelman, 'Pictures', in *The Burn* (London: Minerva, 1992), pp. 1-14 (p. 1).

³ Alan Freeman, 'Realism Fucking Realism', *Cencrastus*, 57 (1997), 6-7 (p. 7).

⁴ H. Gustav Klaus, *James Kelman* (Devon: Northcote House, 2004), p. 8.

⁵ Simon Baker, 'Wee Stories with a Working-Class Theme: The Reimagining of Urban Realism in the Fiction of James Kelman' in *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. by Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 235-250.

Kelman's work as being 'indebted to the parameters of working-class urban realism established in the preceding decades, but simultaneously transcending them'.⁶ Wallace positions Kelman as a central figure within a movement of Scottish writing, emerging from the late 1970s, in which

[w]hat had come to be felt as the stultifying restriction of a defeatist realism was redefined and redeemed by awareness of movements within a wider experimental context, such as the French *nouveau roman* or postmodernism and metafiction. (p. 3)

These typical descriptions imply that while Kelman can be considered a realist writer, his take on what might constitute 'realism' in some way develops or operates outwith the commonly held parameters of the term. Wallace's statement is further reflective of something of a concealed bias in Scottish literary criticism; Kelman is at the vanguard of a Scottish movement which has 'redefined' the realism *of the nation*. It is possible to detect in Wallace's appraisal the idea that there is a developing, national tradition in realism which Kelman has joined and advanced. Yet the writer's stated influences are, for the most part, far removed from Scotland, and much of his work operates beyond a gritty urban materiality. Closer inspection reveals fictional realities imbued with immaterial forces of unreal-seeming or even supernatural resonance. Moving against the common acceptance of realism as the defining mode of Kelman's fiction, in this chapter I will argue that, for Kelman, the very notion of the 'real' or 'realism' is both subjective and political. I will demonstrate how, in order to depict realities in a way which corresponds to his existential outlook, Kelman moves away from traditional techniques of realism, in ways which both depend upon and manipulate reader familiarity with those techniques. In so doing, I will look closely

⁶ Gavin Wallace, 'Introduction', in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, ed. by Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 1-7 (p. 3).

at the gaps which exist within Kelman's work as a result of his very particular philosophical framework. By 'gaps' I refer to those discrepancies that arise when differing perceptions of reality fail to correspond or synchronise, and the uncanny effects this disharmony can have on both character (psychologically) and reader (problematizing the mimetic contract and the process of *vraisemblance*). Appraising how these gaps unsettle and challenge the mimetic contract between reader and text, I will argue that these resonances with the fantastic emerge as an inevitable effect of Kelman's particular take on subjective realism. As I will go on to show, refiguring Kelman as a writer of uncanny literature might, ironically, align the author with a different, more disparate national lineage of uncanny fiction.

The uncanny requires a realist mode to destabilise, and Kelman certainly employs well-trodden realist techniques to substantiate a convincingly solid fictional world of objects, inhabitants, settings, and sensory information. The opening of 'Joe laughed', a story from the collection *The Good Times* (1998), with its emphatic focus on materiality and urban realism, exemplifies the strain of contemporary Scottish writing in which Kelman is a central figure. The story opens with a sustained description of a derelict dockland area which immediately grounds the text in solid materiality. The narrative describes a landscape of disused buildings ('most of them shells but some boarded up'⁷), a scrapyard stacked with cars, and a large patch of wasteground where people gather to play football, despite the fact that 'there was concrete patches so ye had to avoid tackling too heavy else ye were gony damage yer knees bad, then if ye landed on metal or boulders, broken glass; even just if the concrete was rutted' (p. 1). Jonathan Culler describes these kind of narrative details as 'descriptive residue', stating that '[e]lements of this kind confirm the mimetic contract and

⁷ James Kelman, 'Joe laughed', in *The Good Times* (London, Vintage, 1999), pp. 1-9 (p. 3).

assure the reader that he can interpret the text as about a real world'.⁸ The accumulation of detail regarding surroundings and texture is very much a 'classic' realist approach to building a solid fictional world, comparable to, for example, Emile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) with its lengthy and detailed opening description of the *Passae du Pont-Neuf*, its flagstones and grime, its odour and quality of light. Kelman's realism has a political agenda, however, as Cairns Craig (quoting Kelman) points out:

For Kelman most literature is an evasion of reality, either because it is located in a social environment irrelevant to most people – 'Ninety per cent of the literature in Great Britain concerns people who never have to worry about money at all. We always seem to be watching or reading about emotional crises among folk who live in a world of great fortune both in matters of money and luck' – or because it operates in genres deliberately designed to deny reality: 'if reality had a part to play in genre fiction then it would stop being genre fiction'.⁹

'Joe laughed' thus also establishes an impression of urban decay, highlighting the effects of post-industrial decline on local communities.

The main character and two friends, Joe and Perce, enter an old disused factory on the docklands. Irritated by his friends' juvenility, the narrator leaves them on the ground level and ascends to the second floor on an open, iron staircase. Further into the factory he finds a room inexplicably swept clean in stark contrast to the 'bricks and cardboard and rusty auld nails' (p. 3) strewn throughout the building, and indeed to the decaying landscape outside. Ascending one more floor, he finds himself in an attic area, also neatly swept clear, with a stack of old newspapers against one wall, 'yellowing on the top but white inside' (p. 4). The moment is interrupted suddenly, however:

⁸ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 193.

⁹ Cairns Craig, 'Resisting Arrest: James Kelman', in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, ed. by Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 99-114 (p. 100).

I tore the page out and put it in my left pocket. I heard somebody whistle loud and it left an echo, it was nay Joe.

At the far end of the space was another door and it opened into a wee room with a desk and a chair lying on its side. (p. 4)

In this moment, the nature of 'Joe laughed' becomes modally ambiguous.

The sound might be variously attributed to a vagrant, since the narrator earlier detected a smell of faeces in the room, one of the security guards who are rumoured to patrol the factory, ('[s]ecurity was supposed to be there guarding it but Perce said sometimes they just stuck up the notices to con ye' (p. 4)), or perhaps a bird, since he soon after notes, unconnectedly, that they nest in the guttering of these buildings. Yet since the narrative unnervingly moves on without dwelling on the occurrence, the resulting uncertainty also suggests resonances with the ghost story – the disruption of a place long left untouched invoking something unnatural in response. The room already has a strange atmosphere since it is swept clean, in contrast to the majority of the gutted factory. The whistle pierces the silence just as the narrator disturbs the room's long-untouched contents, tearing out and pocketing the newspaper page. The echo left by the whistle thus evokes a haunting supernatural effect.

The whistle, like an invitation, draws the teenager's attention to the adjoining room. Here, other items seemingly refuse to be disturbed, returning to the state they were left in. The teenager twice picks up a three-legged chair, only for it to fall to the floor again each time. He then investigates an empty, broken safe, but finds '[w]hen I slammed the door it clunked home but then creaked open and went to where it had been afore, its hinges wereny working right' (p. 5). The responses of the chair and the safe door are perfectly natural, but following the unsettling whistle they also contribute to a possible 'haunted'

interpretation. That reading goes unconfirmed, however, and therefore becomes one stratum in a network of possible interpretations, all of which are available to the reader simultaneously.

The modal indefinability of the uncanny imposes an interpretative impasse which reflects the teenager's increasing sense of inertia as he approaches an adulthood which offers no opportunity for progression. In the past he might once have aspired to hold a position in an office like the one he stands in, but now he has illicit access only to the eerie, decomposing spaces of the post-industrial era. He is keen to climb onto the roof for a view of his surroundings, but the window is stiffly resistant and he is unable to find a safe way to climb out, while his view is blocked by the expanse of the roof below. Struggling against an immanent sense of his 'fixed' position in life, he resolves to no longer play football or climb the guttering on buildings, despite his talent for and enjoyment of the activities. The whistle effectively 'calls time', like a referee, on the narrator's future, and he responds by curtailing those activities he associates with his childish past, in an attempt at self-definition and a bid to 'grow up'. The building itself seems to exist in a more spectral dimension to the environment outside, and the teenager is similarly severed from his previous mode of existence: 'I could hear a couple of boys shouting. It sounded far away, like the pitch was right away over the other side of the docks' (p. 6). By the end of the story, he has yet to leave the factory, and remains unnamed in the text, a haunting presence caught in a liminal state, or a kind of inanimate 'afterlife', like the building around him. Beginning in a conventional realist mode, 'Joe laughed' moves to a position of uncanny ambiguity and modal uncertainty which illustrates the inner-experience of the subject. The text demonstrates that for Kelman, realism is not simply a case of mimetic veracity and set

stylistic conventions. To interpret Kelman's uncanny, one must also understand his attitude towards realism.

A Clash of Perception: Subjective Realism

In discussions of his work, Kelman often identifies an appreciation of the ordinary or everyday as a fundamental goal of his (and indeed of any significant) writing.¹⁰ In his essay on the South African writer Alex La Guma, for example, Kelman emphasises the significance of realism as a matter of social priority:

Realism is the term used to describe the 'detailing of day-to-day experience' and most writers who advocate social change are realists. [...] Nothing is more crucial nor as potentially subversive as a genuine appreciation of how the lives of ordinary people are lived from moment to moment.¹¹

It is with reference to concepts and terms like 'ordinary' and 'everyday life' that realism, for Kelman, becomes a debatable and politically charged term. The writer insists on the importance of representing the 'ordinary' as a subjective and varied concept:

Ordinary people. In the African Horn the children of ordinary people are eating insects to stay alive. It is a fact of existence so alien to other people that it cannot be admitted; there is an element lacking, a sort of structural base that does not allow us *to be* with folk for whom starvation is death and not simply a concept. To face such a fact in literary terms seems to be possible only in the work of a writer prepared to encounter the minutiae of day-to-day existence. ('La Guma', p. 100)

¹⁰ See Duncan McLean, 'James Kelman Interviewed', *Edinburgh Review*, 71 (1985), 64–80, and Kirsty McNeill, 'Interview with James Kelman', *Chapman*, 57 (1989), 1–9.

¹¹ James Kelman, 'Alex La Guma (1925-1985)', in *"And the Judges Said...": Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002), pp. 95-102 (p. 100).

Mary M. McGlynn recognises that the meticulous technical care Kelman displays when depicting reality in his texts is inseparable from his primary aim of representing lived experience:

In many of his theoretical pronouncements, Kelman calls for a more realist fiction, but his novels reveal a nuanced awareness of the oxymoron regularly overlooked in that term. Kelman makes us aware that although we have come to accept certain modes as “more realistic” than others, any act of writing involves so many conventions that the claim of approximating reality may be misdirected. [...] With Kelman’s reworkings of a stream of consciousness and his disavowals of a single, verifiable truth, he operates on the level of realism as a goal, rather than a style.¹²

The writer aims for a realism of *subjective* truth – a legitimising of individual experience, perception and imagination. To use Heidegger’s terminology, Kelman’s uncanny is designed to allow the appreciation of the ‘being-in-the-world’ of individual characters through an intimacy with their day-to-day experience. For Kelman, realism is the project of representing and respecting unique, individual existence, which may often seem unreal depending on the subjectivity of the reader. As such, a straightforward definition of his work as ‘Scottish urban realism’ overlooks the doubtfulness of reality as experienced by his characters.

Kelman, then, approaches the staples of realist writing with a determined, unconventional sense of priority. This is ably demonstrated by the opening passage of *How late it was, how late* (1994), during which Sammy Samuels gradually regains consciousness. Here, the familiar realist emphasis on sensory description seen in ‘Joe laughed’ is initially withheld, and when introduced appears doubtful and distorted, before finally being abolished altogether. The narrative initially focuses on Sammy’s sensation of vaguely-

¹² Mary M. McGlynn, *New Narratives of Class in New Irish and Scottish Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), p. 35.

specified enclosure ('[y]e wake in a corner and stay there'¹³), then his longing for physical oblivion: 'hoping yer body will disappear' (p. 1). In a way this opening is as laboriously detailed as that of *Thérèse Raquin*, but prioritises sensation and unfettered thought over material detail, thereby holding the reader in close proximity to Sammy's 'inner-world' – the stuff of consciousness itself. As Sammy moves from undefined sensation to increasing lucidity, the physical world is only initially invoked through his awareness of his own body: 'his back was sore; stiff, and the heart pounding. He shivered and hunched up his shoulders, shut his eyes, rubbed into the corners with his fingertips; seeing all kinds of spots and lights' (p. 1). He then finally notes his surroundings, 'auld rusty palings, with pointed spikes, some missing or broke off', and 'a wee bed of grassy weeds' (p. 1). Despite the sparseness of sensory description, habitual reading practice needs only a few details to identify a 'real' world, presumably connected to a wider setting of streets and buildings. Yet as soon as the realist technique is invoked it becomes doubtful, as Sammy becomes aware of the presence of others, who initially appear in '[t]errible brightness [...] like they were godly figures', before he intuits 'they might have been tourists; strangers to the city' (p. 2). Sammy finally convinces himself that

they werenay tourists, no this time anyway they were sodgers, fucking bastards, ye could smell it; even without the uniforms. A mile away. Sammy knew them, ye can aye tell, their eyes; if ye know these eyes then you aye see them, these kinds of eyes, they stay with ye. (p. 3)

While visual information is perhaps the most prominent tactic of realist style, here Kelman uses that device to confound the acceptance of a determinate world, unsettling the habitual reading process and breeding uncanny disorientation. At the same time, Kelman presents Sammy's perceptions as irrefutable, genuine experience; the contradictory nature of this

¹³ James Kelman, *How late it was, how late* (1994; London: Minerva, 1995), p. 1.

arrangement is key to understanding what 'realism' means in Kelman's work, and forms a catalyst to the uncanny uncertainties I will go on to explore.

Positing Realities

While the narrative focuses on Sammy's perceptions, the reader remains aware of the world around him and the other presences – the police and passers-by – whose internal existences are denied to them by the narrative. Having woken in strange surroundings with no recollection of how he arrived or why he is wearing unfamiliar shoes, Sammy's determination to get away is hampered by an increasing sensation of being watched, which may or may not be paranoiac. A proliferation of eyes staring is emphasised, not only those of the 'sodgers' but other passers-by, 'no watching but fucking staring, staring right into Sammy' (p. 3). As Laurence Nicoll demonstrates, Sammy's behaviour here can be interpreted with reference to Sartre's theory of 'the look',¹⁴ that process by which an individual becomes aware of another's objectifying gaze, and resultantly begins defining themselves and acting in response to that other's impression. Thus:

As subjects, when another looks at us we become, for them, objects, and so arises that sense of being 'fixed' to which Sammy [later] refers. A look simultaneously conveys and denies our subjectivity. *How late* charts, then, an attempt to evade the look, to evade objectification and to resist solidification.¹⁵

In *How late* as in other texts, Kelman's approach to subjective realism illuminates an arrangement of various 'gaps' or perceptive blind spots that separate individual subjects. There may be much overlap in individual impressions of the same situation, for example,

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (1943; London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁵ Laurence Nicoll, 'Kelman and the Existentialists', *The Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*, ed. by Scott Hames (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 121-130 (pp. 126-127).

but never full synchronicity, indicating a web of discrepancies, discontinuity, and incohesion. When Sammy comes into contact with other characters and experiences 'the look', he is sensing the gap between his experience of reality and the perceptions of others as a process of uncanny estrangement, a pronounced uncertainty over the reality of the situation he has found himself in: 'How come they were all fucking looking at him?' (p. 3). Registering the stark discrepancy between his addled perceptions and those of the people around him is to see the world through both familiar and unfamiliar lenses at once, producing a sensation of unsettling disorientation.

Among the differing perceptions which Sammy becomes attuned to in his state of disorientation and panic is the *collective* perception of the police, as a force of state authority: 'these sodgers man if ye're no a fucking millionaire or else talk with the right voice, they don't give a fuck' (p. 4). The police represent the 'unified' perception of the systems of state, a vision of the world which must impose itself as 'natural' in order to maintain control, and which Kelman argues 'debase[s] and dehumanise[s] individual existence, forcing people into 'the scheme of things', not allowing them the freedom to live as whole beings'.¹⁶ For Kelman, the maintenance of inherently elitist state authority is dependent upon a dogma derived from Western empiricism and Locke's 'rejection of innate forms of knowledge' by which '[n]othing would be admitted as true unless it was seen to be true'.¹⁷ In its insistence on verification through evidence and 'expert' opinion, for Kelman Anglo-American power structures purposefully avoid '[t]he problem of knowledge and how

¹⁶ James Kelman, "'And the judges said'", in *"And the Judges Said...": Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002), pp. 37-56 (p. 39).

¹⁷ James Kelman, 'A Reading from the Work of Noam Chomsky and the Scottish Tradition in the Philosophy of Common Sense', in *"And the Judges Said...": Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002), pp. 140-186 (p. 170).

¹⁸ Susan Bernstein, 'It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny', *MLN*, 118.5 (2003), 1111-1139, (p. 1122).

to connect reason with experience, thought with extension (mind with body), essence with existence' ('A Reading', p. 169). As such Sammy's 'disruptive' presence is at odds with the 'empirical' reality of authority; as he ponders, 'where what ye are, that it's part of another type of whole' (p. 2) and that 'ye could see they didnay like it; them in their civvy clobber man they didnay like it' (p. 4). On edge and feeling at the mercy of that oppressive 'vision', Sammy responds violently, attacking the police officers. This defiant grasping towards self-determination is effectively Sammy's attempt to span the uncanny perceptual 'gap' with decisive action, in order to determine or crystallise a single version of reality from which he can progress. Sammy's attack is an eruption of modal disharmony which must be quelled by the police since '[t]he uncanny happening, as for Heidegger, disrupts the narrative of the empirical'.¹⁸ Ultimately, the police maintain the hierarchy of empirical reality in the eyes of the public, chasing Sammy down, beating and finally arresting him. Yet, as Bernstein states, '[t]he uncanny comes into being as a violation of the law of non-contradiction' (Bernstein, p. 1113). Sammy's act alters the 'frame' of his existence from this point on; it is as if once the modal gap has been transgressed, reality for the individual is irreparably altered in ways which give rise to an encroaching sense of the uncanny.

The Darker Recesses: Distortion, Recursion, and Scottish Connections

Shortly after being arrested Sammy loses his sight, and his blindness further estranges the world around him. The cause of Sammy's sight loss remains mysterious – it may or may not be related to the beating he receives from the police, or an after-effect of his forgotten weekend. In this sense Kelman sows seeds of doubt as to cause and effect, questioning who or what is to blame, whilst aligning reader sympathy with Sammy as the victim. Yet the

cause itself remains mysterious, and thereafter the veracity of the fictional world becomes less tangible, more dream-like in its uncertainty. Police officers become a disorientating array of disembodied voices, moving around Sammy during interrogation; sounds (during Sammy's medical examination, from neighbouring flats, and from passers-by in the street) are rendered indefinable, menacing and strange. City geography becomes unfamiliar, changeable and labyrinthine. Sammy finds that even his awareness of streets with which he is well acquainted is now compromised: 'he got to the wall and patacaked; it was a corner, he went round it and the wall was still there where it should have been a window, the chemist shop window. [...] [H]e had took a wrong turning' (p. 129). While this may be rationally explained by sightloss and Sammy's history of anxiety and panic, a tone of unreal-seeming ambiguity pervades his experience. Certain phrasings carry curious connotations of shifting states, recalling the morphing figures in the opening scene: 'it was nay a real corner – street, it was nay a real street, a real junction' (p. 48). The dramatic change in weather may not seem uncharacteristic of Glasgow: 'christ sake like he got jailed in the spring and let out in the middle of winter. It was warm when they took him in! That was what he remembered anyway' (p. 34). Yet the sense of unease persists when he returns to his flat. The milk is sour, and the bread has gone hard: while hardly remarkable phenomena, they accentuate a queasy sense of transformation. The flat is unusually tidy, and there is no loose change lying on the mantelpiece where Sammy lets it accumulate. Furthermore, 'he felt the bed and it was made. Now that was unusual in itself' (p. 59). Like the city, the home has also become unhomely, estranged from Sammy's previously-held conception of it. The same can be said for the mimetic contract: the unreliable nature of Sammy's interpretations, the ghostly sense of observation and pursuit, and the shifting states of his environment add to a pervasive sense of 'otherworldliness' in which the initially solid-seeming correlation

between the world of the text and that of the reader is stretched and distorted, familiar, but unfamiliar.

As Sammy's sense that he is under surveillance grows, so too do the gaps in his credulity. When struggling his way around Glasgow, Sammy detects someone following or walking alongside him, often indicated by an accompanying 'muttering' (see, for example, pp. 88, 121, 180). This ill-defined sound, bereft of a visual correlative, becomes by turns unnerving, sinister, and threatening. An eerie sense of menace gathers while Sammy is out walking: 'Somebody was walking beside him. He stopped suddenly. Nothing. He carried on. The somebody went with him' (p. 254). This impression persists when he returns home,

into the building, pushing through the glass door. It swung shut then seemed to check and open again like somebody had caught it and nipped in behind him. [...] He was thinking stupid things [...] cause ye couldnay see ye started hearing things. Then yer fucking imagination got to work.

He was cold too and that was funny; how the fuck was he cold? [...] it was just how folk could be in the house and how would ye know, ye wouldnay. (pp. 131-2)

Sammy's impression of being doggedly followed or observed invokes the sensation of haunting familiar from more generic or fantastic works, an impression that seems irreconcilable with the established tone of material realism in the text. Gradually, the concrete solidity of Sammy's world begins to deteriorate and distort: 'So he stopped again; again suddenly. The somebody stopped beside him. Sammy sniffed. He was gony say something but at the same time he didnay, cause there would be nay cunt there' (p. 254). Unlike Sammy's vision, the reader's visual imagination is not fully impaired, but attempts to visualise the scene with any concretion are frustrated by the deficit of sensory information, and the apparent uncertainty of the detail provided. The initial impression of the text as representative of a real world in keeping with the reader's own is problematized and blurred, and Kelman's text refuses to clarify a 'correct' interpretation of the uncanny

sensations it creates. The reading experience, therefore, reflects Sammy's own perceptual uncertainty as the 'haunting' effect emerges and recedes.

In this way, Sammy's blindness challenges another pillar of realist technique, the reliance upon sensory information. Visual detail is considered of prime importance by, for example, Henry James, in the creation of literature which 'in very truth competes with life; it is here that he [the writer] competes with his brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle'.¹⁹ In a letter relating his thoughts on Robert Louis Stevenson's travelogue *The South Seas* (1890) to the author, for example, James notes:

I *did* make one restriction – I missed the *visible* in them – I mean as regards people, things, objects, faces, bodies, costumes, features, gestures, manners, the introductory, the *personal* painter-touch. It struck me that you either didn't feel – through some accident – your responsibility on this article quite enough; or, on some theory of your own, had declined it. No theory is kind to us that cheats us of seeing.²⁰

Two years later James voiced a similar reservation regarding Stevenson's novel *Catriona* (1893):

The one thing I miss in the book is the note of *visibility* – it subjects my visual sense, my *seeing* imagination, to an almost painful underfeeding. The *hearing* imagination, as it were, is nourished like an alderman, and the loud audibility seems a slight the more on the baffled lust of the eyes [...]. I utter a pleading moan when you, e.g., transport your characters, toward the end, in a line or two from Leyden to Dunkirk without the glint of a hint of all the ambient picture of the 18th century road. However, stick to your own system of evocation so long as what you positively achieve is so big.²¹

James seems perplexed that a writer of Stevenson's capabilities should choose to starve the visual senses of the reader as part of his 'system of evocation'. Stevenson, however, is

¹⁹ Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction'. (1844; New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 3-23, p. 12.

²⁰ Henry James to Robert Louis Stevenson, 12 January 1891, in *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism*, ed. by Janet Adam Smith (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948), p. 198.

²¹ Henry James to Robert Louis Stevenson, 21 October 1893, in *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Smith, p. 239.

steadfast in his response on the subject of *Catriona* in which he acknowledges

the subtlety and truth of your remark on the starving of the visual sense in that book. 'Tis true, and unless I make the greater effort – and am, as a step to that, convinced of its necessity – it will be far more true I fear in the future. I *hear* people talking, and I *feel* them acting, and that seems to me to be fiction. My two aims may be described as –

1st. War to the adjective.

2nd. Death to the optic nerve.²²

Stevenson's reduction of visual information as a chosen technique is reminiscent of Kelman's, but while Stevenson's decision is primarily aesthetic, Kelman's restrictions stem also from his ideological position, prioritising experience and the inner-life of his characters. While the 'painful underfeeding' that Henry James complains of is related strictly to his own reading experience, in *How late* the reader suffers the same effects by proxy; it is the character whose senses are starved. This type of sensory deprivation is not uncommon in Kelman's work, as I will go on to demonstrate, and at all times it serves to activate reference points for character or reader from outwith the traditional realist mode.

Moving further from a definable 'real' world to one more abstract, other elements in the text seem to encourage 'otherworldly' interpretation. Sammy is seen to 'sniff' regularly throughout the text, often when he feels threatened, senses trickery or when his grasp of a situation is slipping. Sammy's sniffing is not just a habit, but something he uses defensively as a restorative to perception. It is also indicative of what Sammy himself refers to as a 'sixth sense':

How do ye know it's through the night? It's nothing to do with being blind. Just for anybody. In fact it's easy, cause not only is it as quiet as the grave but ye've a sixth sense tells ye. These things get a bit creepy. [...] [Y]e've usually been wakened by some weird thing jangling the nerve-ends. One of these strange dreams ye get; no quite a nightmare but close. So it takes a sixth sense. And immediately when ye wake

²² Robert Louis Stevenson to Henry James, December 1893, in *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Smith, p. 241.

ye're alert as fuck and reaching for the nearest weapon to defend yerself against the bastard. Whoever it is. (p. 62)

Sammy recollects seeing a blind man on television and how 'it was like he had developed some kind of different sense-organ all the gether', but reasons that in that instance 'it was congenital. So it maybe wasnay possible for the likes of Sammy' (p. 101). His conception of a sixth sense is something different. Rather than a notion of blindness leading to a heightening of the remaining senses, this process is internalised and instinctive. In his cell after first being arrested, Sammy notes 'there was a screw watching. Ye could tell' (p. 7), and similarly notes that 'ye can smell' (p. 3) police officers even in plainclothes. Later, taking a bath at home, this instinctive sense kicks in again:

Sammy's bottle went.

For no reason.

Just that sudden feeling man right in the gut, right in the fucking pit. He raised his head to listen. Then gripped the sides of the bath and pulled himself up out the water. [...] He breathed in through his nose (p. 156).

Moving to the kitchen quietly and obtaining a knife, Sammy goes to listen at the front door, only to discover that at least two police officers are already present in the flat. While on this occasion the threat Sammy senses proves to be very much of the 'real world', the uncanny sensation comes from the accuracy of his 'sixth sense'. Thus in this scene, through uncanny means, Sammy's individual perceptions are given credence over a hierarchical, empirical vision of the world which depends on verification through expert opinion. The text here does not confirm a 'supernatural' interpretation as such, but legitimises inner-sensation and instinctive knowledge, opposing what Kelman describes as Locke's empirical 'rejection of innate forms of knowledge' by which '[n]othing would be admitted as true unless it was seen to be true' ('A Reading', p. 170). In a sense, Kelman has it both ways, denying the possibility of definitive perception, whilst his protagonist's senses, however uncanny, are

proved (in this scene at least) irrefutably accurate – in itself an intrinsically irreconcilable proposition.

The way in which Kelman represents Sammy's growing sense that he is under observation from encircling malicious forces is reminiscent of Robert Wringhim's flight from unnatural assailants which may or may not stem from his own feverish delusions, in James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Just as Sammy is interrogated by the police for details he cannot recall following his 'lost weekend', so Wringhim is 'assailed with accusations of deeds of which I was wholly ignorant'.²³ Hogg's nineteenth-century text is more explicit in its implications that Wringhim's pursuer may be of supernatural or demonic origin (though at all times this remains in doubt). However, Sammy's apprehension of the unseen threats around him in *How late* also flirt with ideas more often found in works of the fantastic than in 'the post-1970s tradition of Scottish urban realism which Kelman has helped to advance'.²⁴ Sammy refers to his pursuers in the legal system as 'spooks' (p. 126) and speculates whether the presence he detects walking beside him might be a 'guardian angel' (p. 330) guiding him back to familiar ground, or a 'goodie ghost that got him out of trouble [...]. [Y]e don't mind these goodie ghosts man it's just these evil bastards dogging yer footsteps all the time, they're the ones ye have to avoid' (p. 326). Carl MacDougall's suggestion that '[a]t the heart of Hogg's writing is a quest for identity, the idea that nothing is fixed, that we can inhabit contradictions and that they can inhabit us'²⁵ might equally apply to Sammy's desire for autonomy or freedom of perception, and his fear of being crushed by contradictory, 'authoritative' versions of reality. Hogg achieves this

²³ James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824; London: Penguin, 2006), p. 160.

²⁴ Daniel Lea and Berthold Schoene, *Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-war and Contemporary British Literature: 3* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2003), p. 84.

²⁵ Carl MacDougall, *Writing Scotland: How Scotland's Writing Shaped the Nation* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2004), p. 86.

effect through repetition of the same story through the contradictory accounts of the 'editor' and Wringhim himself, as well as the further inclusion of a seemingly contentious eyewitness account. The subjectivity of 'reality' within the text is further exemplified through an appearance by the author himself. For Kelman, the way Hogg posits differing 'levels' of reality is in line with the existential literary tradition which he also observes in Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925):

Franz Kafka did not create art within the reality inhabited by his fictional characters. The narrative of this novel serves two primary functions; it provides reality as perceived by Joseph K. and gives us a glimpse of the reality in which he exists; we are given a glimpse of the reality of his society, unfiltered through his perception.²⁶

The reader of Kafka's work, Kelman argues, is able to observe these different levels simultaneously while remaining most directly attuned to Joseph K.'s perceptions in particular. Likewise, the reader of *How late*, as with much of Kelman's fiction, is in a position where they may appreciate Sammy's perceptions and responses intimately, while also remaining aware, or building their own independent impression of, the reality Sammy occupies. The discrepancies between 'realities' is a tangible force throughout the text, while at all stages, Sammy's perceptions retain primacy. The national connection between Hogg and Kelman which might be taken to inscribe their work to a singular national tradition is arbitrary, while it is the European existential tradition to which Kelman relates this uncanny technique.

As well as presenting conflicting accounts of the same events, operating on various levels of textual reality, the uncanny sensations produced in Hogg's text relate to Wringhim's descent into paranoia, delusion and dark, recursive thought. As Wringhim finds

²⁶ James Kelman, 'A Look at Franz Kafka's Three Novels', in *"And the Judges Said...": Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002), pp. 265-334 (p. 298).

his Calvinist conception of reality distorted, and later unravelled at the hands of the devilish Gil-Martin, he, like Sammy, desires nothing but 'to abscond and fly from my native place, in order to free myself of this tormenting' (Hogg, p. 169). In *Wringhim*, Hogg's text indicates a dark, haunted mental condition which Kelman himself acknowledges, albeit with careful ambiguity: 'Many of Hogg's stories are full of ghosts and demons and strange psychological musings. My country's always been okay for that kind of stuff... strange psychological musings... the darker recesses... etc., etc.'²⁷ The 'darker recesses' of the mind which Kelman detects in Hogg's work are a psychological abyss into which his own characters frequently descend, a haunted condition that is often associated specifically with blackness and impenetrability.

Sammy's creative imagination is also disposed to the fantastic; he dwells on the potential benefits of a magic carpet (p. 48) and, when incarcerated, imagines 'himself floating right up and out a window [...]. [S]lipping right out, drifting up, passing telegraph-wires, up past the roofs of the buildings, all the stars glittering, the city below' (p. 29). His situation during the novel rarely allows for this kind of weightless escapism, however. More often, the entrapment he experiences within the empirically-dictated (or state-sanctioned) conception of 'how things are' negates the possibility of free, creative perception. That inability to fully comprehend the circumstances in which he finds himself leads to the ambiguous state of inertia, negativity and dark speculation that Kelman admires in Hogg's work. Imprisoned after attacking the police officers, Sammy thinks

back to a time when he was reading all kinds of things, weird things, black magic stuff and crazy religious experiences and the writing started to get thick, each letter just filled out till there was nay space between it and the next yin: no doubt coincidental but at the same time man he was fucking strung out with other sort of stuff so he

²⁷ James Kelman, 'When I Was That Age Did Art Exist?', in *"And the Judges Said...": Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002), pp. 415-446 (p. 442).

took it extremely personal, extremely personal man ye know what I'm talking about.
(p. 10)

This impression of impending darkness is one Sammy habitually returns to in the depths of recursive thought: 'It was black, things seemed black. It was usual, it was usual' (p. 6). The enclosure of police observation and his entrapment in the legal and benefits systems find Sammy increasingly conscious of a sensation of immanent inertia and negativity: 'He had fucking reached it now man the fucking dregs man the pits, that fucking black fucking limboland, purgatory; that's what it was like, purgatory, where all ye can do is think' (p. 172). When he apprehends his powerlessness in the face of the gap between reality as he sees it and the way he himself is seen by the systems of state, the possibility of progression is negated and blackness descends.

In an unsettling way, this liminal condition is not unfamiliar to Sammy. His perceptive state and recursive mental condition is symbolised by his blindness, a connection which is made to seem more uncanny in the way that both the mental and sensory conditions seem strangely familiar to him, as if repeating something he can no longer remember. Initially noting 'he had gone blind but the black had stopped him appreciating the fact' (p. 10), Sammy reflects when testing out his eyes that 'at the back of his brain he had this funny sort of recollection, like what was happening was something he had known for a while, he just hadnay registered the fact, as if it was some kind of bad dream running side-by-side with his life' (p. 100). It is with an uncanny sense of familiarity that Sammy perceives this darkness looming within his perceptions – the recurrence of something known of old, yet unidentifiable, both familiar and unfamiliar at once, or as Freud puts it, 'something which

ought to have been kept concealed but which nevertheless has come to light'.²⁸ The sensation is similar to Sammy's notion that he recognised the police in the opening scene ('he even fuck he thought he knew them personally from somewhere, fuck knows' (p. 3)). Yet however familiar that uncanny 'darkness' seems, it remains an abyss he cannot interpret, leading only to a liminal position. Unable to reach a state of clarity, Sammy resorts to 'learned' or familiar reference points of the fantastic or supernatural, while similar, seemingly incongruous associations are conjured in the mode of the text.

In Kelman's work, uncanny sensation frequently stems in this way from the unsettling eruption of something from the past, long thought forgotten or covered over. In *Mo said she was quirky* (2013), for example, Helen catches a glimpse of someone resembling her older brother, who left home years before, cutting off contact with the family. As she obsesses over the possible sighting, she notes that '[f]amilies dont finish. You run away but they catch you up. Families are ghosts. Presences'.²⁹ Yet as much as his haunting memory energises her, reminding her of happy memories, it also brings unease, since his disappearance has contributed to her deep distrust of men. The discrepancy between the sensitive boy she remembers and her recent sight of him also causes disturbance, as she recalls 'that look in his eye, it was wild. Why was he staring at her? It was horrible. He didnt know her. If he had it would have been different, he wouldnt have seemed so murderous and dangerous' (p. 24). The uncanny breeds in Helen a sensation of indefinable fear, which is again associated with blackness: 'It was almost like claustrophobic. Or no, what was it? Some other phobic. A phobia. [...] [A]ll the coal breaking through and smothering you, like the worst dream imaginable' (p. 220-1). In *Translated Accounts* (2001),

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (1919; London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 219-252, p. 241.

²⁹ James Kelman, *Mo said she was Quirky* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 7.

meanwhile, the premise of the narrative itself is uncanny, a series of fragmented, inaccurately translated documents by 'three, four or more anonymous individuals of a people whose identity is not available'.³⁰ The text itself is an unsettling return of the repressed, detailing atrocities and resistance in an unidentified country which appears to be under military occupation. As a result of apparent computer file corruption, poor translation and other, possibly intentionally manipulative interference, the exact 'reality' of the events related are obscured and distorted. Yet even at its most uninterpretable points, the trauma of the oppressed voices emerges like a haunting scream. In the account 'A Pumpkin Story', for example, the narrator recalls watching a young man being shot repeatedly by military officials after having tried to stop their beating another man. The rendering and translation of the account loses the emotion of the speaker, but the trauma of the event seeps through, an underlying modal disturbance to the 'officialised' document. The narrator asks 'What is memory' (p. 113); in *Translated Accounts* it is a succession of uncanny voices which return, despite efforts to render them sterile or unintelligible, bringing with them moments of unease and horror.

In each of these instances, Kelman renders *vraisemblance* – that process of 'textual intersubjectivity which assimilates and naturalizes the work' (Culler, p.140) – problematic and illusive, and the mimetic contract uncertain. Typically when a reader's assumption of the realist mode is found to be inaccurate, Culler argues, 'we are forced to place the action in another and fantastic world (which is itself, of course, a way of providing a context which makes the text intelligible by making it *vraisemblable*)' (p. 141). *How late*, as with other Kelman texts, problematizes that process, since the arrangement of possible interpretations

³⁰ James Kelman, 'Preface', in *Translated Accounts* (2001; Edinburgh: Polygon, 2009), (n. pag.).

and perceptive fluctuations mean that a definitive textual mode is never clearly established. As Culler indicates, however, the reading instinct is to continue searching for 'a process of naturalisation [whereby] what seemed difficult or strange is made natural (a blur so natural as to pass unnoticed) by locating a proper level of *vraisemblance*' (p. 152), and this unfulfilled habitual process positions a reading of *How late* indefinitely between modes. Defining Kelman as a realist, then, falls short, as it fails to engage with the particularities of what realism means in his texts. Rather, when Kelman does (however guardedly) link himself to other Scottish writers such as Hogg it is on uncanny, not realist terms. If Kelman's work bears associations with other Scottish writers, it is a more disparate continuity of figures such as Hogg and Stevenson, whose work often problematizes the mimetic contract, confounding a knowable reality through the sensations and associations of the uncanny.

Sensory Deprivation and Bodily Alienation

Sammy's response to the uncanny sensations which are encroaching on his existence is attempted isolation, to escape the gap by getting 'out of sight' (p. 374) of the police and state systems with which he has become embroiled; to minimise his being-with-others and in so doing reduce his contact with the perceptive gap which threatens to engulf him. Sensory deprivation within the day-to-day environment of other Kelman characters can open gateways to similar 'darker recesses', but they deal with the experience in different ways. In 'Wee Horrors', for example, the narrator contemplates having to pass through a dunny close in a tenement backcourt, in search of his children: 'I've always hated dunnies – pitchblack and that smell of charred rubbish, the broken glass, these things your shoes nudge against. Terrible. Then if you're in one and pause a moment there's this silence

forcing you to listen'.³¹ Rather than a sensory disorder like Sammy's blindness, here the narrator must enter a physical space within his everyday environment where access to visual and audial information is nullified. While there is, presumably, nothing to fear, this perceptual negation instinctively triggers feelings of apprehension and ill-defined horror. Before entering the close the narrator is 'not too worried' (p. 175), but following his descent into the dark dunny his sense of unfathomable dread stays with him, colouring the rest of the story with an indefinably unsettling atmosphere. When he locates his children in a derelict flat or shop known locally as 'Greegor's', which 'should've got knocked down months ago' (p. 175), the narrator is anxious and easily startled by sounds, including '[a] kind of sizzling – making you think of a piece of fucking silverside in the oven, these crackling noises when the juice spurts out. Jesus christ' (p. 176). The scene which greets him in Greegor's, a circle of children near a fire built on the floor of the room, over which two inarticulate 'wineys' (p. 176) are cooking lumps of raw meat on a crude spit, horrifies him further. After the sensory void of the dunny, Culler's 'descriptive residue' is restored in excess, as the narrator observes the ritual-like circle of children, the primal sight of raw meat cooked over an open fire, and the wordless derelict man 'still smiling, then beginning to make movements as if he wanted to demonstrate how it all worked. He was pointing out a row of raw lumps on the mantelpiece and then reaching for a knife with a thin blade' (p. 176). These visuals are imbued with a sense horror, a primal savagery uncovered in modern society which seems to recall for the narrator 'something familiar and old-established in the mind' (Freud, p. 241). At this point the formerly measured, thoughtful narrator can only react instinctively: 'jesus christ right enough. I grabbed for my pair, yelling at the rest of the weans to get up that effing stair at once' (p. 176). This final sentence is full of action, a

³¹ James Kelman, 'Wee Horrors', in *Not Not While The Giro* (1983; London: Vintage, 1999), pp. 174-176, (p. 175).

survival instinct, uncannily activated at the sight of the speechless, gesturing man by the fire with the knife, a gothic eruption of mankind's primordial instincts. The narrator's reaction demonstrates Freud's notion 'that everything which now strikes us as 'uncanny' fulfils the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them back to expression' (pp. 240-241), and perhaps it is a vaguer apprehension of those primal instincts which seems to inform Kelman's characters when they speculate on the uncanny in their own lives.

While the narrator of 'Wee horrors' is eventually possessed by a kind of frantic primevalism by the uncanny sensations he experiences, more often Kelman's characters sense the uncanny less forcefully – they become aware of the 'gaps' as an impression of foreboding, dread or paranoia rather than a sudden shock. Kelman's texts avoid the sensationalism of more generic 'fantastic' works, or works which employ the uncanny purely for disturbing effects, since, for all the fantastic and supernatural associations it conjures, it does so as part of a snapshot of ongoing, day-to-day existence. Laurence Nicoll usefully describes it as 'fantastic realism' (Nicoll, p. 21). 'A Nightboilerman's Notes' (1985) is another text which contrasts a detailed physical environment with a mental impression of dark, indefinable horror. The narrative, related in first person by the titular workman, is festooned with precise material detail and sensory description; he describes 'the buckled rattle of the bogey wheels', and how 'the coalmountains pile some thirty yards from the embankment.'³² Surfaces, textures and geography are described with tangible concretion, and sounds are stark and isolated since '[d]ue to the natural configuration of the warehouse and factory buildings there is never any wind here (a very very slight breeze, but only occasionally) and

³² James Kelman, 'A Nightboilerman's Notes', in *Lean Tales* (1985; London: Abacus, 1987), pp. 91-100, (p. 91).

the canal is still, its water black' (pp. 91-2). The Nightboilerman evidently takes great pride knowing his working environment intimately, yet there is one element of his surroundings which remains unfathomable, in the silent darkness of the basement: 'these black holes, they are cavities and short tunnels. I found them of interest because they had never been seen into since the factory's original construction. I still find the idea quite interesting' (p. 99). The impenetrable darkness of these man-made holes exerts a strange pull on the Nightboilerman. Early in his time at the factory he would

step past them and pretend they were not there, or if they were, that I was not particularly bothered by them. This was daft and I knew it was daft but I was just working out a method of conquering myself. At that time I was having to actually force myself to enter the basement. I would say inwardly; these black holes, they are ordinary black holes, ordinary in the sense that they are man-made, they exist only because of the way the walls have been designed. (p. 94)

The holes form a perceptive gap in the Nightboilerman's experience, to which he seems to react instinctively: 'I sat by them not bothering. Then one night after sitting a while I suddenly was down and peering in and I couldn't see anything, nothing at all. I struck a match and the light scarcely penetrated' (p. 99). The holes have an estranging effect on the Nightboilerman, who finds himself staring into them seemingly without realising he has moved to do so. The perceptive gap here has a hypnotic effect, opening his mind up to indescribable, black horrors.

I had to force myself to sit down beside them, facing away from them, not able to see them without turning my head. I would sit like that for ages, thinking of horrible things, but not being aware of it till later, sometimes much later, when walking home. One morning the Dayboilerman found me. It was a terrible shock for him. The sound of his boots on the steps of the ladder had reached me but could scarcely correspond to anything I knew so that I wasn't really aware of it beyond my thoughts. (p. 95)

The nature of the Nightboilerman's thoughts is left to the reader's imaginative speculation, since, as Kelman describes it,

There is a point where thought itself, as you say, it's not even to do with transcribing. The inner musing of a human being is composed of more than language. Language will also be a part of it, but there's other things – whether that's images or sounds, very loose associations. So it is difficult, but ultimately as a writer you only have language to work in, so how do you use language to convey other forms of thought that are not just linguistically based?³³

These thought processes which reduce the Nightboilerman to a trance-like state are all the more unsettling since they go undefined, and that descriptive 'gap' in the text adds to the reader's own sense of the uncanny, encouraging speculation based on a few vague impressions ('horrible things'). The Nightboilerman, however, considers himself to have risen above the sensations which once disturbed him. As he reasons, 'my imagination was to blame. [...] I was just working out a way of conquering myself' (p. 94). In priding himself on mastering his work and workplace, the Nightboilerman demonstrates what Samuel Weber identifies as a typical response to the uncanny:

This desire to penetrate, discover and ultimately to conserve the integrity of perception: perceiver and perceived, the wholeness of the body, the power of vision – all this implies a *denial* (*Verneinung* is the Freudian term) of that almost-nothing which can hardly be seen, a denial that in turn involves a certain structure of narration, in which this denial repeats and articulates itself.³⁴

Just as Sammy at times tries to talk himself into overcoming perceptive paralysis with decisive action, so the Nightboilerman will enter the basement keeping the light switched off, and

walk 3 or 4 (5 at the most) paces until that feeling of narrowness has me stock still and trying to reflect on a variety of matters [...]. And I continue standing there, thinking of different things, then slowly but surely I notice I am moving back the way,

³³ Rosemary Goring, 'James Kelman: The SRB Interview', *Scottish Review of Books* 8.3 (2012) <<http://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/index.php/back-issues/volume-8-2012/volume-eight-issue-three/491-james-kelman-the-srb-interview2>> [accessed 20 August 2012]

³⁴ Samuel Weber, 'The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment', *MLN* 88.6 (1973), 1101-1133, (p. 1133).

sensing the approach of that strange feeling of being buried in cotton wool and I am turning to reach for the switches calmly, not panicking at all. (p. 96)

Like the narrator in 'Wee Horrors', the Nightboilerman seems to move instinctively, in an almost disembodied way, away from the impenetrable darkness and the sensation of horror that it evokes. While Sammy's attempts to marry decisive action with self-determination frequently end in anxiety, uncertainty, or recursive thought, the Nightboilerman, entering the same environment nightly, resolves to reach a point where he accepts the gap in his perceptions: 'I just had to stick it out and conquer myself. I had to succeed and I did succeed. It taught me a lot about myself and has given me confidence' (p. 99). In his desire to retain perceptive control over his environment, the Nightboilerman has denied the power of the black holes to distort and disturb. In doing so, he sets himself above his co-workers, feeling 'smug, as if I've reached a higher level' (pp. 99-100). Recalling the occasion when he was found sitting by the holes in a trance-like state by a shocked Dayboilerman, 'it made me realize he had never managed to conquer himself. He must have been really nervous, terrified of what he *might* find' (p. 95). The Nightboilerman believes himself to have reached a kind of superior autonomy, working alone, attuned to his environment, self-sufficient, and seemingly (barring a near-silent cigarette break shared with the 'Nightoutsideman') eschewing the problem of being-with-others.

Unlike Sammy, who refers to himself as 'ye', 'you' or 'he' throughout, exemplifying his own objectification, the Nightboilerman always refers to himself confidently and with a sense of self-contained 'one-ness' as 'I' or 'me'. Yet from the more objective vantage point of the reader, he displays signs of perceptual disturbance similar to the trope of 'doubling' as a psychological condition. In 'conquering' himself, the Nightboilerman has passed through a process of self-estrangement or bodily alienation which at times has similarities

with an out-of-body experience. While the image of an isolated individual who prefers to 'work naked' apart from his boots (p. 97) amongst the sepulchral shapes of the 'boilerbodies' might seem strange enough, the Nightboilerman observes:

I can be standing watching myself from way over beyond the bunker, seeing my head sink from view, vanishing, wondering if I cracked it against the edge of the metal plate on the floor but no, always I just avoid that by the briefest margin possible, glullp. gone. (p. 94)

This sort of bodily alienation is experienced by several of Kelman's protagonists. The idea is more unsettling for Sammy than for the Nightboilerman:

They had beat him. It was nay his body. His fucking body man it was nay his fucking body. It was nay his body.

He gave a kind of shudder then groped his way to the window. (*How late*, p. 75)

While the Nightboilerman embraces his new state of perception as if it were a necessary adjustment, Sammy resists that sensation of self-alienation:

Maybe it was nay him they lifted! Maybe it was some other cunt! Maybe it was nay him, him here

Jesus Christ that was a mental thing to think, he had to watch it, really, he had to watch it, the auld bloody thingwy, the brainbox. (p. 34)

Both characters resist the uncanny sensation of being 'fixed', but in accepting their situation or struggling against it, both ultimately have their existences defined by their social circumstances. The difference is that the Nightboilerman expresses a proud satisfaction in his achievement, while Sammy continues to struggle.

The young protagonist of *Kieron Smith, Boy* (2009), is also at times unnerved by the sensation that his body is not his own. At one point when Kieron's mother calls him by his

name, he finds 'It sounded funny', and wonders '[m]aybe I was another boy'.³⁵ He feels a more intense form of self-alienation when staring at his reflection, noting 'how yer eyes just looked back at ye. It was funny how they done it. Yer own eyes. Even like somebody else's, it was like that' (p. 148). It is notable that at one point he associates this bodily alienation with Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886): 'my face could be a Doctor Jekyll and yer eyes oh whose eyes are they, evilly glinting, evilly and yer face altogether, whose face is it?' (p. 297). While Stevenson's text is a common cultural reference, Kelman again makes a connection here between his own textual effects and a Scottish writer known for works bordering on the fantastic, uncanny or supernatural. Patrick Doyle has similar sensations of self-estrangement as, over the course of *A Disaffection*, he finds his grip on perception slipping. At times he finds himself staring at his reflection in shop windows and mirrors, 'seeing the face and the body and the rest of it. He was looking at a bloke who had difficulty in seeing himself'.³⁶ Preoccupied with interiorities, Pat compares himself to Dostoevsky's famous 'doubled' character, Golyadkin (in *The Double* (1846)), who 'felt and distinctly understood that they were taking him for something different, and not looking at him in the proper light at all'.³⁷ Golyadkin's summation that '[h]is position at that instant was like that of a man standing at the edge of a fearful precipice' (*The Double*, p. 37) is echoed in Pat's thoughts: 'it really was what you call going to the brink. Right to the very edge. Bending slightly to see over and into it; the precipice' (*A Disaffection*, p. 48). Pat's acute awareness of the unfathomability of others means he also feels uncannily alienated from those he wishes to be close to, like his fellow teacher Alison Houston: 'Her face had differing expressions. You could cup her face in your hands and stare

³⁵ James Kelman, *Kieron Smith, Boy* (2008; London: Penguin, 2009), p. 41.

³⁶ James Kelman, *A Disaffection* (1989; London: Picador, 1990), p. 164.

³⁷ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Double* (1846; New York: Dover, 1997), p. 120.

into her eyes. You didn't know what she was thinking though' (p. 238). One of the many acute 'gaps' Pat struggles with is the inescapable knowledge that every individual has an unknowable inner-being, a fact that politically he believes must be upheld and respected, even as it renders communication and contact with others problematic, even harrowing.

Just as his awareness of others as unique entities problematizes the possibility of certainties and progression, so too does Pat's inner-dialogue become many-voiced or legion:

Fine, hullo. I am pleased to meet ye. I truly am. I am a likeable personality. If you are not a likeable personality why then, we may converse. Hullo back. I am your alter ego. [...] When your personality splits I am the back end. I am the ugly bit, the counterforce. [...] Thus we have us two and the ugly one. Then as well you get this other yin, me; I creep in, I creep in and edge closer and closer till I'm so much a part of the company you didn't notice my absence earlier, that a gap had existed, that it has now been filled. (p. 210)

As with the uncanny itself, closer investigation of this arrangement of mental 'voices' leads only to uncertainty and instability as they merge, overlap and entangle. Indeed, Kelman's mingling of narrative voice(s) and free indirect discourse in many of his works often achieves a similar unnerving indefinability when placed under scrutiny. While divided in his perceptions of the world around him and the nature of his relationships with others, the conversational tone of Pat's inner dialogue and the somewhat sinister nature of some of the voices show that even his sense of himself is compromised. As Craig states, 'his thought processes constantly play between alternatives whose multiple possibilities can never be brought to a conclusion, a "oneness"'.³⁸ What he seeks is 'warmth, value, bodily and mental together and a oneness' (p. 226), while his belief in self-mastery and awareness of the unknowability of others renders this an impossibility. Whilst arguing with his older brother,

³⁸ Cairns Craig, 'Kelman's Glasgow Sentence', in *The Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman* ed. by Scott Hames (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 75-85 (p. 82).

an internal voice urges 'let us all be together. Let us all be at one' (p. 305), referring as much to his compound interiority as to his family.

Pat's gradual breakdown (which, typically for Kelman, never reaches a full dramatic breaking point) is conveyed in vividly uncanny terms, reflecting his own sense of the uncanny 'gap' as a zone of contradictory perceptions. He is unable to reconcile his position as a relatively well-paid secondary school teacher with his working class upbringing. He considers his education and financial status to have driven a wedge not only between himself and his family, but also within himself – he is '[a] guy who is all too aware of the malevolent nature of his influence. He is a tool of a dictatorship government. A fellow who receives a greater than average wage for the business of fencing in the children of the suppressed poor' (p. 67). The gap he detects but is unable to fathom between himself and Alison is further symptomatic of his insecurities over relationships and sexuality. Unlike a character such as Sammy, who is constantly battling and 'up against it', Patrick's Monday-to-Friday job and financial security allow him the time, solitude and relative comfort to dwell for long periods on the nature of the 'precipice' itself. Perhaps commensurate to that, his mental deterioration has enough solitary leisure time to take distinct, phantasmal form – of Kelman's protagonists, Pat's darker recesses take perhaps the most definably supernatural manifestations. Locking his bathroom door when he knows he is alone in his flat, Pat speculates on

[t]hat outlandish image he kept getting of something like a crowd of masked stormtroopers, shadowy dark figures, who rode slowly ben from the kitchen; muffled conversations were in progress, desultory, matter-of-fact; they were just travelling on their way maybe and he was observing from a different dimension [...]. And not evil though definitely spectral. (p. 107)

Similarly, on another occasion, waking in the early hours he is terrified to discover that

[a] crowd of evil phantoms had sprung into existence in the room. Each space he looked to contained someone and they had lives of their own, these phantoms, and they were evil and wearing a dishevelled type of waistcoat with these sort of ankle-length cloth boots like sixteenth-century peasants, or maybe fur yins they were and not cloth, with straps of twine tied round the top uppers to keep them from falling off.

They were actually there and had big sort of staves or hoes and they just were hovering and when he shifted onto his side and stared onto the recess wall with the blankets firmly at his chin there came a couple moving towards him from the rear and he knew exactly where they were. (p. 121)

Notably, part of Pat's fear in this vision stems from his seeming proximity to a proliferation of self-contained existences, each of which 'had lives of their own' (p. 121). This terrifying sense of multiple subjectivities leads Pat to reason that 'since it is not only a nightmare but here and now, something that is occurring at this moment, while I am awake, it is not a nightmare but a living experience, reality; and a reality of which I am the central part, a central part' (p. 121). The instant, habitual shift from being 'the' central part of the vision to 'a' part (one among others) is characteristic of the way Pat constantly repositions his own perception so as to remind himself of the legitimacy and proximity of other perceptions, other existences. As he tells himself, 'an individual human being was a uniqueness, that individual human beings were as unique as each other; a race of specifics in non-specific terms' (pp. 95-6). Part of Pat's existential crisis stems from his position as a teacher, promoting a single, 'empirical' vision of the world to classes of unique individuals who are still young enough to form their own perceptions. More than once Pat relates his condition to Dickens's Ebenezer Scrooge, a character who, after experiencing various spectral hauntings which may or may not be related to his mental condition, has his own perceptions of existence irrevocably altered: 'he saw himself as Ebenezer Scrooge with death impending' (p. 93). Later in the novel Pat perceives that 'A whole crowd of ghosts had entered his classroom. And yet this period was supposed to have been spare' (p. 201). Pat perceives

‘the smiling faces’ and notes ‘I am cracking up’ (p. 201), before being violently sick; thereafter it seems he is alone again. Like Scrooge, Pat blames these visions on what he has consumed: ‘I’ll blame it on the cloves anyway’ (pp. 202-3), he says, and later considers that ‘it might have been a bad pint’ p. (204).³⁹ Yet when the ghosts appear, Pat immediately individualises the ‘group’: ‘What was their identity. Do ghosts need an identity. Need an identity always be a prerequisite’ (p. 201). Pat is debilitated, and his sense of reality estranged, by his awareness of the need to recognise the self-determination of others, and his constant repositioning of his own perceptions in relation to that decentralised outlook.

Pat finds a means of temporarily dispelling his disturbed thought patterns by playing on pipes he discovers behind an art centre. They remind Pat by turns of ‘English saxophones of a bygone era’ (p. 1) and ‘the kind of thing an electrician uses to rewire a house’ (pp. 153-4), but the origin and intended purpose of the pipes remains mysterious. Pat approaches playing the pipes with reverential exactitude, seeking ‘a form of purity in the act itself’ (*D*, p.56), and the process and sounds absorb him, alleviating his distresses: ‘eyelids shut, no frown etched into the forehead and no smile. No nothing’ (p. 90). Like the Nightboilerman (‘glullp, gone’), Pat is ‘removed’ from himself and acts without thought: ‘It took a wee while to reach beyond the moment because reflection not being possible and it being something he had to take absolutely for granted [...]. [A]nd then he was standing, now across to the window’ (p. 90). Although Pat imagines performing on the pipes in public, he cannot share his experience. Demonstrating the sounds to Alison fails to bridge the gap between them,

³⁹ As Scrooge attempts to explain explanation the manifestation of Marley’s ghost: ‘You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There’s more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!’ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings* (1843; London: Penguin, 2003), p. 45.

and although there are two pipes, Pat never broaches the possibility of playing both in unison; his temporary means of relief remains one of isolation.

Seeking the Spectral: *Kieron Smith, Boy*

The fictional world of *A Disaffection* is perhaps the most conspicuously uncanny of Kelman's novels, permeated by spectral apparitions and mysterious objects with fantastical properties. In contrast with the visions of Doyle the teacher, schoolboy Kieron Smith longs for supernatural forces as means of escape from the day-to-day uncanny alienation he experiences. The novel depicts Kieron's life as a boy in late primary and early secondary school, and it is a formative awareness of his subjective position not only as part of a working-class family but moreover as a child which determines the uncanny sensations stemming from his own perceptual uncertainties. The nature of the adult world, which decrees where Kieron must live, how he should speak, where he can go and how he is expected to behave, operates as a shadowy and unfathomable force of restriction and societal 'fixing'. Kieron's sense of the world around him is decentred at a young age when, as he states, 'I did not know we were moving to a new house and then we were so that was us' (p. 86). Kieron's language, too, is the subject of regulation and criticism, both by corrective school teachers and his mother. Kieron's mother is determined her children will speak 'properly' – for appearances as well as to help them through school and beyond. As Simon Kövesi puts it, 'Kieron's mother has swallowed wholesale the ideology that anglicised pronunciations are best, while Glaswegian is to be avoided. She, and a host of other adults, will force-feed Kieron this ideology too, even if it undermines his sense of self-worth, or

bruises his fledgling identity'.⁴⁰ Similarly, Kieron develops an acute sense of injustice regarding his status as the younger sibling: 'If it was an argument it would come to me. [...] It was me was the baddie, even if it was him' (p. 204). The perceptive 'blindness' in Kieron's existence, then, stems specifically from his juvenile societal position. For a child, Kelman suggests, the adult world is always uncanny – dictated by unknown rules and subject to unforeseen change. Self-determination appears impossible due to what Kövesi describes as 'the complex hierarchies that confine us all in our childhood' (para. 5). Kieron's narrative is riddled with the word 'if', reflecting the uncertainty of perception in childhood. Like a formative Sammy, who seems to live 'expecting a blow at any time' (*How late*, p. 180), Kieron becomes habitually preoccupied with the unsettling notion that something is coming 'to get ye'. While initially this sensation of something terrible impending is related, repeatedly, to typical imaginative childhood referents (sprites, Dracula, Indians, goblins, evil sorcerers), the phrase comes to signify the foreboding Kieron feels on a daily basis, and the fact that as a child he is oblivious to where the next blow or injustice will come from. The workings of the adult world which can control him without warning acquires the same shadowy, malevolent power as the 'wicked man who had an axe' (p. 89) or 'phantom strangler' (p. 85) figures who appear in his shared childhood stories and in threats from his brother. Similarly, Kieron often instinctively turns to an 'unearthly' explanation when coming to terms with the darker episodes in his life. When his beloved granda is dying in hospital, Kieron becomes afraid to visit him, imagining that 'it would be another thing and laughing out at ye if it was creepy, if it was an evil spirit, granda was away and it took his body and then his mouth opened and his eyes too, just a wee bit. What if it opened wide

⁴⁰ Simon Kövesi, 'Kieron Smith, *Boy* by James Kelman', *The Independent* (April 2008), <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/kieron-smith-boy-by-james-kelman-814968.html>> [accessed 26 November 2012]

and it jumped out to get ye?’ (p. 260). His relationship to the adult world, and the otherworldly forces which engage his imagination, gradually become aligned, affecting Kieron’s perception of the world and the way he understands his own subjectivity. When Kieron ponders the abilities of vampires, for example, his thoughts reflect the unseen and sinister nature of the controlling influences in his life: ‘Even if ye could see but did not see them, they could still be there, if they were invisible, so if it was Dracula, they did not have their reflection but still crept up on ye’ (p. 148). Similarly, for example, he diagnoses his confusion over his religion in supernatural terms: ‘I could not see myself in a Chapel. [...] I could not see my body. [...] So if ye were in Chapel ye could not see yerself, maybe if ye were a Dracula it was the same’ (p. 296). Assigning supernatural characteristics to the gaps in his comprehension becomes a way for Kieron to interpret his confusion.

Kieron’s fascination with ghosts can at least partly be explained as a typical boyhood interest in the supernatural. Following his Grandfather’s death, however, and a further alienating move to a secondary school where he is no longer among the highest-scoring classes (and isolated from his Primary school peers), Kieron begins to withdraw from society, and correspondingly engage more with the escapism of his supernatural fantasies. He imagines his grandfather’s presence lingering around his grandparents’ flat, and at one point states ‘[t]hen I saw granda. He was there too. He was. And smiling. [...] Granda could still be here if it was his ghost’ (pp. 331-2). Unlike Patrick Doyle, who is fearful of the spectral beings which are symptomatic of those perceptive gaps which riddle his interiority, Kieron seeks to *align* himself with an imagined realm of supernatural properties, as a means of covering over the gaps in his young conception of the world. Uwe Zagratzki has discussed music in Kelman’s writing, stating that ‘[s]ince all Kelman’s characters have in one way or other lost touch with the rhythm of mainstream capitalist society, they reinvent new

rhythms more in keeping with their natural needs.’⁴¹ Kieron follows a similar process in fashioning a concept of the supernatural through which to feel free from oppression. Unable to meet the pressures demanded by others, he instead conceptualises a spectral realm of his own. In this sense *Kieron Smith, Boy* does not engage the reader in uncanny sensation as do texts like *How late* or ‘Wee Horrors’; rather, the text depicts an individual whose existence is touched by the estrangement and uncertainty of the uncanny, and who responds to it imaginatively by embracing the darker recesses of his imagination, trying to comprehend them as a source of comfort and security. Kieron attempts to fathom the precise nature of ghosts and the spirit world:

Ghosts could just slide about into mid air. If ghosts were here. Ye could get dead spirits from the war [...]. Sailors went down to the bottom of the sea. Their spirits were all down there, except if they went up to heaven, but some did not, they just waited. [...] [W]here did they go? (pp. 109-10)

For Kieron, the intangible nature of the ghost reflects his own familial and social liminality. This is compounded when the boys’ shared bedroom becomes Matt’s study room, and Kieron is only allowed in to sleep. His father tends to dominate the sitting room, while his mother is often in the kitchen, so the only place left for Kieron is the balcony, a peripheral location outside the family home. Knowing his parents would be furious at the thought of him climbing ronepipes to help people who have locked themselves out of their flats (Kieron’s habit repeats that of the narrator of ‘Joe laughed’), Kieron instead turns to ‘a presence, the wind blowing like a whisper and it is the breath of a good spirit floating beside ye, Oh well done, that was good helping that poor woman, you were brave’ (p. 422). Kieron’s determining of a spectral plane is similar to Sammy’s speculation on the figure of a helpful ‘goodie ghost’, but Kieron, younger and more given to elaborate on the concept,

⁴¹ Uwe Zagratzki, “‘Blues Fell this Morning’ – James Kelman’s Scottish Literature and Afro-American Music”, *Scottish Literary Journal* 27.1 (2000), 105-117, (109).

allows it a central role in his perceptions. In his invented mythos there are bad and good spirits, the bad who 'might lift off my fingers if I was going up a tree [or] just blew the wind and knocked ye off' (p. 422). Yet in response Kieron muses that 'yer granda would be there, his spirit would come to yer rescue' (p. 422). As Kövesi states, '[t]his novel suggests that adult power structures collude to muffle a child's critical faculties, to stop a child rebelling, to force submission to adult rule, the rule of school and so the rule of the state' ('*Kieron Smith, Boy*'). While Kieron's adoption of a supernatural otherworld is a source of comfort within which he may determine a *heimlich* reality for himself, that arrangement can only exist in an internalised fantasy. Kieron's withdrawal from society, friendships and family suggest that his adopted, ghostly half-life is ultimately dominated by the empirical systems of state education and parental authority; in Heidegger's terms, his method of resistance only succeeds in casting him among the fallen.

Conclusion: The Political Necessity of the Uncanny

Douglas Gifford identifies a trend 'of social realism and sceptical materialism' in Scottish writing which 'culminates in the work of writers such as Robin Jenkins, George Friel, and James Kelman'.⁴² It is easy to see why Kelman's work might initially have been positioned at the vanguard of such a tradition, but close study suggests that such labels are no longer the most appropriate. It is true that Kelman sets out to depict the day-to-day existences of 'ordinary' individuals, and to this extent his work may be classed as social realism. Yet the term 'realism' for Kelman reflects a blurry, shifting, and unreliable state; real life as experienced by his characters is often very unreal-seeming indeed, and is imbued with an

⁴² Douglas Gifford, 'Decline and Revival: Modern Scottish Literature', in *Scottish Literature*, ed. by Sarah Dunnigan, Douglas Gifford and Alan MacGillivray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 721-736 (p. 721).

uncanny sense of uncertainty and perceptual estrangement. As a natural and inevitable consequence of the experience of being-in-the-world and being-with-others, his characters are faced with gaps which exist within their own perceptions, in relation to the perceptions of others, and perhaps most significantly, in relation to the empirical reality endorsed by systems of power; no two of these individual realities ever quite align. This estrangement frequently triggers a descent in the minds of Kelman's anxious protagonists to dark recesses where associations with the fantastic, the other-worldly or supernatural are activated. These resonances, whether vague apprehensions or well-defined visions, terrifying psychological effects or as a means of escapism, lend a pervasive uncanny atmosphere to Kelman's fictional worlds which destabilises materiality and the mimetic contract and confounds the process of *vraisemblance*. Just as his characters resist perceptual assimilation by the empirical 'vision' of authority, the modal disruption of Kelman's texts means they may not be comfortably assimilated to the realist tradition.

Kelman himself has never subscribed to the critical reception which has positioned his work as a development in a national realist tradition. Yet ironically, the uncanny elements which appear in his texts as a result of his existential and socio-political position align him with another, more disparate line of Scottish writers, Hogg and Stevenson among them, who, for different reasons and in different ways, employ similar sensations and effects. It would be glib to assume Kelman is invoking a specifically Scottish tradition with which to intentionally align his own work. Yet he does identify a trend connecting the supernatural and psychology on national terms. While Kelman rejects nationalism and has more often aligned himself with African authors, and stated his influences as primarily American, French, German and Russian, his own work might also be readily attached to a

development of uncanny Scottish writers, rather than to an ill-defined 'lineage' in Scottish realism. Kelman's prominence at the forefront of Scottish fiction since the 1970s suggests that the uncanny is both a vibrant trend in modern Scottish prose and a connection to authors past, deserving of critical illumination.

Chapter Four

Estrangement of self, nation and tradition in A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am*

Glad

I am finally reassured that there is no evil. There is only the unfamiliar, and to this I may always be accustomed.

A.L. Kennedy¹

French revenant, Scottish tradition

Critics have often seemed unable to agree on how to categorise A.L. Kennedy's fiction. Roderick Watson, for example, writes of her first short story collection *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990) that 'Kennedy seem[s] to be starting from the grim realism of what had gone before, with stories of urban decay, loneliness, misconnection and sexual betrayal',² seeing her emerging in a linear progression from the Scottish realism of John Byrne and James Kelman. Yet he also positions her within 'the trend in "Contemporary Scottish Gothic"' (p. 261). Watson's categorical swithering seems to hinge on one Kennedy text in particular, *So I Am Glad* (1995). While he states that 'Kennedy is more than happy to echo the strategies of Hogg, Stevenson and Gray in what is virtually a Scottish tradition of leaving the reader unsure as to whether this is a supernatural visitation or evidence of

¹ A.L. Kennedy, *So I Am Glad* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 42.

² Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland: The Twentieth Century*, 2nd edn (1984; London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 267.

psychological derangement', Watson also believes that 'the author does gradually persuade us of the "reality" of it all'. This singular novel, Kennedy's most significantly uncanny, will be the focus of this chapter, since the uncanny in this text opens up a consideration of the wider issues of this thesis, exploring the uncanny in relation to tradition and banal nationalism in Scottish literary studies. Watson's appraisals above each situate the text as emerging from or affirming a strand of Scottish literary tradition, yet Kennedy is expressly resistant to definitions based on nationhood and, as I will go on to argue, sees through the processes that naturalise the idea of the 'world of nations'. This chapter identifies a dialectic tension of estrangement and naturalisation in *So I Am Glad* which mirrors Freud's assertion 'heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*'.³ This uncanny disparity pervades both the central character Jennifer's own intimate experience, and her changing perception of how the nation is constituted and promoted as 'homely'. Jennifer's regular interaction with Savinien gradually renders his uncanny presence familiar and *heimlich*. In the process, she comes to a restored perception of the world from which she had previously been estranged. Yet while the company of Savinien becomes homely to her, the world returns to her newly defamiliarised and disturbing.

Kennedy establishes a mode of ordinary, day-to-day mundanity in the text through the conversational tone of M. Jennifer Wilson's narration. Jennifer addresses the reader in a relaxed and personable style, suggesting, for example, that '[y]ou can imagine me, I'm sure, tucked up in the customary way' (p. 1). This assumed commonality with her imagined reader is crucial to the realist mode; rather than describing the way she lies in bed, allowing the

³ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (1919; London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 219-252, p. 226.

reader to 'see' it, the narrative strategically suggests that we recognise and are familiar with the 'customary' position. The realist mode is compounded early on by small material details like 'a) the corner of a failed Welsh Dresser. b) part of a doorframe painted in magnolia gloss because it surrounds a door in a shared house and, although all of us hate magnolia, it is the least offensive possible shade of compromise' (p. 9). These examples of Culler's 'descriptive residue' are enough that the habitual reading process accepts the world depicted as solid, consistent and conventional.

Jennifer, however, is disengaged from the reality around her. She has at some unspecified point in the past

stopped trying to be normal and began to enjoy a small, still life that fitted very snugly around nobody but me. I no longer felt inadequate. [...] I am not emotional. [...] You should be aware of my principle characteristic which I choose to call my calmness. (p. 4)

Her statement emphasises a calculated control which is also evident in her careful narrative construction; by reducing her engagement with the outside world and the emotional lives of others, Jennifer protects herself from harm. Sarah M. Dunnigan notes that

Jennifer's calculated quiescence, however, is paradoxical; as a narrator she strikes an extraordinary intimacy with the reader of her 'testament'. There is a tender, playful and subversive bond which pivots, as in most of Kennedy's fictions, on the tension between disclosure and concealment.⁴

Jennifer and her narrative thus embody the presence/absence dichotomy of the uncanny, and her assertion that 'I can dig down as deep as there is to dig inside me and truly there is nothing there, not a squeak' (p. 97) conversely suggests something hidden or repressed. Yet because, as Monica Germanà points out, 'the narrative structure of the novel deliberately

⁴ Sarah M. Dunnigan, 'A.L. Kennedy's Longer Fiction', in *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, ed. by Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 144-155, (p. 146).

sets out to annihilate the chronological linearity of the story',⁵ the originary moments which produced this tension within Jennifer are obscured, though it emerges that her safeguard of 'calmness' or emotional denial is a result of childhood maltreatment, her parents having forced her to witness their disturbing verbal abuse and sexual acts. Due to the non-chronological structure of the narrative, the uncanny emerges in the text before the extent and origins of Jennifer's emotional repression can be identified as its source, however, and for reasons I will go on to describe, the modal disparity remains even after a possible psychoanalytical explanation becomes apparent.

Jennifer's self-suppression is disrupted by the inexplicable manifestation of a glowing man in the spare bedroom of her shared flat. The conventional realism of the text loses traction as the narrative switches from the material ('[h]is hands, which are square and thick [...] slapped down on to a table top' (p. 8)) to the fantastic:

When he opens his mouth for any length of time there is a pale gleam which reminds me insanely of the light from a self-sealing envelope if you peel it apart in the dark. An unnatural, static blue flash. His hands and face are simply burning. That's exactly what it looks like. But with a silver burning, a chemical flame, fluctuating in and out of colour, running like mercury and then disappearing into air. (p. 12)

In these moments, the realist description of physical sensation is coupled with seemingly marvellous effects: '[h]e snatches up one of my hands as I come within reach and squashes it between his with a little burst of orange light' (pp. 13-4). Jennifer initially assumes the arrival is Martin, the new flatmate she was expecting, but as the stranger's memories gradually appear to return, he reveals that he is (or was) the French writer Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac, somehow reconstituted in present-day Glasgow nearly four centuries after his death. The modal discrepancy and uncanny effect arises from the question of

⁵ Monica Germanà, *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing: Fiction Since 1978* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 157.

Savinien's 'true' nature, either as some kind of symptom or projection of Jennifer's psychological repression, or as an actual supernatural revenant.

Savinien himself is unsure about the nature of his existence or the means of his return, other than that '[t]his is the house I fell into' (Kennedy, p. 19). As he puts it, 'I am not sure, but I have the impression this is unlike me. I am not sure' (p. 12). While apparently confounded by his own manifestation, he also seems on some level to intuitively understand aspects of his returned state, noting that the flame effect 'will eventually fade' (p. 13). He displays some uncertain recollections of a period spent as 'nothing more than my tiny thought of myself adrift along eternity. I was the black of an eye, a cold dry look pressed in against night, and I saw only the absence of God – a far away disinterested ache' which he likens to 'at the very least, purgatory' (p. 16). His vague impressions of 'returning' to the world – 'I am aware of turning and rising [...]. I am in the process of plunging up and into a variety of morning' (p. 17) – is counterpointed by his physicality as he picks up an apple and bites into it, describing the sensation in banal, realist detail and heightening the modal uncertainty which clings to his being. Having identified his sense of the lack of God's presence whilst between states, however, Savinien also recalls a sense of 'drifting, annoyed and loose, somewhere in the mind of an amnesiac Creator' (p. 17). If that creator is not God, another possible explanation presents itself, that Savinien has been manifested by Jennifer herself. If that creator is an amnesiac, this suggests the effect of the uncanny to restore to conscious knowledge what has been long forgotten.

While uncanny uncertainty over the precise nature of Savinien persists, Jennifer's emotional absence and traumatic past suggest that Savinien may be some kind of psychological projection or manifestation originating in some way from Jennifer herself.

After he appears in the flat, Savinien states '[t]hat really would make you my mother, eh? The first woman I hear', and though she replies '[n]o, I don't think it would' (p. 19), the implication persists. Dunnigan further points out that '[i]n the act of naming her 'guest', Jennifer partially invents her lover, and submits unquestioningly to the dissolution of his identity' (Dunnigan, p. 153). As Jennifer states, 'I let Martin turn into Savinien' (p. 84). Looking back at the psychological abuse she suffered at the hands of her parents, Jennifer admits some way into her narrative that '[t]here is a little of myself I may have left there. If I could reach back and get it, let myself out, I would do it' (pp. 71-2), and when Savinien himself appraises the modern world – 'I believe your world has broken, has split itself apart. There is such savagery and darkness and then such ridiculous openness' (p. 228) – he may also be referring to Jennifer herself.

While only Jennifer has seen Savinien in the early stages of the text, the indecision between ghostly or psychological interpretations is further complicated by his apparent independence and interaction with others, including her flatmate, Arthur. As Jennifer states, for example, 'I can, with a clear conscience, say that Arthur and I carried Martin upstairs after he fell in the garden and then I left them to do man putting another man to bed things' (p. 48). At a later point Savinien goes missing, during which time his absence might suggest that he has been a figment of Jennifer's imagination. On his return however, he recounts a period of homelessness and drug addiction, having fallen under the influence of a gang leader named James. Again, Arthur helps Jennifer in taking care of him as he goes through the withdrawal process. While Savinien does not reveal much detail about the gang, he does recount how they encouraged his addiction and treated him degradingly, like an animal, and when the gang locate Jennifer's flat having tracked Savinien down, he elects to fight back.

According to Jennifer's account, she watches him as he 'duels' with James, Savinien with 'something dull and solid like a length of pipe' (p. 244) and James with a home-sharpened sabre. While the 'duellistic' aspect of the combat might give the fight a fantastical edge, Jennifer's description of it is one of grounded material realism:

His opponent slithered against the railings, buckled, tried to brace himself, fell. Savinien stood and waited. Another attempted climb slewed away and down, leaving an ankle jammed clumsily in ironwork. (p. 245)

For all that Savinien appears to belong to another mode besides the everyday realism of the narrative, his interactions with others, as Jennifer recounts them, also grounds him in reality. Similarly, whenever he begins to appear more 'real', belonging to a more conventional mode of realism, the uncanniness comes forth again:

Slowly, he tipped his head back in the pillows, opened the soft dark of his mouth and let nothing out. [...] He was gradually illuminated by the action of the air, a dark shine beginning in his throat and I knew again, freshly, that I had no idea of where he came from, of who or what he was. (p. 54)

Gifford describes that modal confusion as an "'either/or" tension', asking: 'does Jennifer invent this endearing superhuman? [...] What about her flatmates seeing Cyrano? His presence, even as "Martin", seems real enough'.⁶ The uncanny fluctuation between modes, then, hinges on the doubtfulness of Jennifer's narrative, which presents the unaccountable in a grounded, matter-of-fact tone. For all that this might seem a work of the imagination on her part, there is something authentic-seeming in Savinien's credentials as a writer and swordsman from seventeenth-century France, leaving the reading imagination unable to appropriately assimilate the character.

⁶ Douglas Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction since 1945 II: Despair, Change and Hope', in *Scottish Literature*, ed. by Sarah Dunnigan, Douglas Gifford and Alan MacGillivray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 899-980 (pp. 959-960).

Savinien's memories of his previous life in France seem real enough, though this of course is not evidence that Jennifer has not assembled them as part of her narrative strategy. He appears to recall '[m]y friends – Henri le Bret, his brother, Roy de Prades, even d'Assoucy, the bastard' (p. 265), and 'Paris in the summer, it always stank like a rotting dog and howled like a dying one' (p. 263). He recalls a duel 'in the field near Saint Germain' (p. 96) at a time when 'I had already killed far more men than Chevalier d'Andriex' (p. 99), after which he confessed in the church of Saint Julien des Pauvres near the rue Saint-Jacques. In the fight with James, he appears every bit the experienced duellist – 'He was fast and economical, not entirely without grace and he knew precisely what to do' (p. 244). When they travel to France, she finds 'he talked in French – odd French, but French. He *was* French, more than anything else. [...] [A] few hours in France had proved more therapeutic than anything I could do' (p. 260). The oddness of his spoken French implies its origins in an earlier time, though this remains uncertain. Savinien's recollection of his past returns gradually, and he recalls these details in the same banal way that Jennifer describes her everyday life, but they do not definitively prove that he is not a projection of Jennifer's imagination.

At the same time, his apparently genuine memories and the way he seems to interact with others besides Jennifer might suggest a modal shift into a straight fantastical/supernatural explanation in which this is truly de Bergerac returned to the earth. His nature is differentiated from 'Captain Bligh', a sadomasochistic male persona who 'stands in' for Jennifer during her violent sexual relationship with her radio colleague Steven. As she puts it, 'the Captain would take charge and relieve me of my responsibilities. I always found the Captain a great relief' (p. 93). Manifesting as a protective distancing

mechanism (related to her childhood trauma) when sex and alcohol begin a process of 'unpicking the corners of my brain' (p. 123), Jennifer's straightforward diagnosis of Bligh as an 'alter ego' (p. 123) eschews the fantastic, making the nature of Savinien, at once a seemingly separate entity and somehow inextricably linked to Jennifer, more difficult to fathom.

For Gifford, this ambiguity is evidence of the place of *So I Am Glad* in a Scottish literary lineage. In his appraisal, 'Kennedy keeps the reader guessing for long as to the legitimacy of Cyrano, in the tradition of ambivalence which is the hallmark of the Scottish novel from Hogg and Stevenson to Spark and Gray'.⁷ The sense of literary unanimity in Gifford's choice of words – '*the* hallmark' rather than '*a* hallmark' – is contestable, since the writers he names can also be considered very much as singular, stand-alone figures, both temporally and stylistically, rather than representative of general principles about the Scottish novel. Nevertheless, he insists, Kennedy's work belongs in the tradition. In her appraisal, Germanà also relates the text to Scottish predecessors:

The revenant, however, appears to keep a certain degree of autonomy, too, within the narrative, occupying a space and performing actions which do not seem to be dictated directly by Jennifer's unconscious. In this sense, their relationship articulates the ambiguous sameness/otherness bond which links Jekyll with Hyde and Wringhim with Gil-Martin, with whom Savinien also shares his false identity: Martin is the name of the new flatmate Savinien is believed to have replaced at the beginning of the story'. (*Scottish Womens Gothic*, p. 158)

The 'Martin' connection may seem tendentious, since there is little similarity between Hogg's daemonic shape-shifter and Kennedy's disorientated Frenchman. More questionable, however, is the impulse towards a national tradition. Germanà does not relate Savinien, for example, to other literary doubles like Dostoevsky's Golyadkin or Poe's

⁷ Douglas Gifford, 'Contemporary Fiction II: Seven Writers in Scotland', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy Macmillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 604-29, (p. 620).

M. Vandemar, only to those in texts by Scottish writers. She further observes that ‘by placing the revenant in the prosaic urban environment of the largest city in Scotland – instead of, for instance, an isolated, crumbling mansion house or a remote, fog-ridden island – Kennedy operates a self-conscious disruption of certain codes’ which ‘breaks with the convention of the Scottish ghost story’ (*Scottish Women’s Gothic*, p. 158). In both Gifford’s and Germanà’s readings, Kennedy’s text is taken to naturally belong to a national category, which is perhaps understandable given the nationality of the author rather than that of the ‘ghost’ itself. As a result, however, its particularities are taken as signs of its augmentation of the tradition to which it ultimately belongs. Too determined an adherence to literary tradition as the natural way of appraising a text, however, runs the risk of producing an interpretation focussed on locating the Scottish, rather than the wider concerns of the novel. The text, as I will go on to argue, poses an antithetical pressure, against the naturalisation of national tradition.

Elements of the appraisals by Gifford and Germanà are indicative of a wider tendency in Scottish literary criticism to accept tradition as fixed and definitive, somehow in the DNA of the text itself, endorsing what Michael Billig describes as an adherence to ‘national identity and its assumed naturalness’.⁸ Billig delineates the way tradition – a process of repetition – becomes nationalised and naturalised, during the formation of nation-states, and the same principle applies to the formation of a national literature, a project Scottish studies was engaged with most energetically in the twentieth century, far more recently than, for example, English or French literature. For Billig, ‘nationalism is the ideology by which the world of nations has come to seem the natural world – as if there could not possibly be a world without nations’ (p. 37). Despite the way Gifford describes *So*

⁸ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 44.

I Am Glad as 'a new kind of treatment of fantasy and the supernatural' (Gifford, *Contemporary Fiction*, p. 620), he also assumes that the text can be naturally and critically understood through its relation to the tradition to which he believes it must, at root, belong. By this logic, the text is only inexplicable if it is divorced from that tradition. As Billig states: 'This flagging of what is nationalism (and by implication what is not nationalism) occurs beyond the level of outward argument' (p. 49). Germanà and Gifford here display what Billig terms banal nationalism: a habitual, rather than critical, recourse to national tradition, defining the text as Scottish ghost story, Scottish novel of psychological dualism, or 'Scottish magic realism' ('Scottish Fiction since 1945 II', p. 959) without identifying specific elements which make those categories distinctively or essentially national. I will go on to argue that *So I Am Glad* illustrates how learned or 'accidental' patterns of repetition can make the unfamiliar or uncanny appear *heimlich* (and banal), but simultaneously, how this patterning (in criticism as in art) is arbitrary rather than inherent, and can therefore be regarded as a parallel process of estrangement in that it inhibits the possibility of alternative interpretation.

In her own self-analysis, Jennifer as a narrator is initially resistant to having her assumed reader fall back on a traditional psychoanalytic reading of her relation to Savinien, insisting that 'Freudian melodrama was avoided altogether' (p. 140) (though the doubtfulness surrounding the nature of Savinien as a character makes such a reading, while inconclusive, at least strongly inferable). In a similar way, Kennedy as a writer is wary of the neat explication that a habitually-formed Scottish connection would make of her work. Asked in interview whether her writing responds in any way to Scottish literary traditions, Kennedy speaks plainly while acknowledging a certain level of continuity:

It's nice 'cause they really are an irrelevance with most Scottish writers. [...] We still live in the same place and we still have the same history so there will be lines that you can follow through. But probably if we're going back to anybody it's Stevenson because he was a storyteller and was going back to the Celtic tradition of stuff happening but it isn't necessarily bang down the line real. Also the sense of outrage at things which are unjust. He writes to the realism when it's real and obviously he became a banned author in later short stories. But I don't think that's a conscious similarity – it's just kind of happened.⁹

Kennedy takes a considered, non-essentialist approach to acknowledging the Scottish elements which are present in her work – 'there will be lines you *can* follow through' (my emphasis). She suggests an open-ended attitude to literary continuities which allows *So I Am Glad* to be linked to, for example, Robert Louis Stevenson, via 'stuff happening that isn't necessarily bang down the line real' (in this case, the *unheimlich*), while at the same time describing that continuity as 'an irrelevance' because 'it's just kind of happened'. In Aristotelian terms, her statement makes clear she considers her connection to a Scottish literary tradition to be 'accidental' rather than somehow 'essential'. She states:

I am a full human being with a dignity and identity drawn from many sources, both empirical and theoretical. My nationality is beaten together from a mongrel mix of Scots, Welsh, Scots-Irish and Midland English. Because I love Scotland I will always seek to write about it as enough of an outsider to see it clearly. By sharing my intimate, individual humanity – Scottishness included – I hope to communicate a truth beyond poisonous nationalism or bigotry.¹⁰

Kennedy's position as she envisages it allows for 'Scottishness' as a contingent characteristic, and nationality as one element of identity rather than its definitive grounding. Yet she also wants to see 'beyond' nationalism – the mechanism by which the concept of nations, bound together by shared geography, history, and culture, is rendered natural, invisible – to a sense of individual truth:

⁹ Cristie Leigh March, 'Interview with A.L. Kennedy, Glasgow, March 17, 1999', *Edinburgh Review*, 101 (1999), 99-119 (p. 106).

¹⁰ A.L. Kennedy, 'Not changing the world', in *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. by Ian A. Bell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), pp. 100-2 (p. 102).

I think it represents reality better because we have human beings involved within it. Anything that's going on in their heads will begin to be less and less real unless they're only responding to what happens, never thinking about the future or the past, never mind daydreaming. So it's really just trying to reflect reality, and I think it can give you more of a key into the character of the individual. It depends what kind of things you write. A lot of my stuff is about the interior life of people so it's about the only way you can reflect it. (Leigh March Interview, p. 99)

Her use of modal disruption, like Kelman's, stems from a concern with relating the intimate, lived experience of individuals, rather than an unproblematic, 'objective' reality. Since individual reality is a subjective and contestable idea, nationalism, and by extension national tradition, Kennedy warns, can be a barrier to this particular realist approach.

Gifford sees in *So I Am Glad*'s uncanny modal disruption a contemporary approach to mixing realism and fantasy which leads him to describe the novel as a type of 'new fiction':

Kennedy teases us, knowing full well we'll ask our old-fashioned questions of how and why, when the reality is that the author can make whatever fictions and irreconcilables are wanted. This new fiction accepts few or no limitations to its scope, and is no longer contained by traditional folk-and-Gothic rules [...]. [T]he Scottish and mainly urban present intermingles with anything and anywhere the author cares to imagine. ('Scottish Literature since 1945 II' p. 960)

Here, Gifford seems to envisage a freeing of the texts from the constraints of habitual expectation ('old-fashioned questions') and long-established traditions which he describes in terms of their restrictive and pre-determined nature. In this statement he accepts irreconcilability, and advocates modal freedom rather than being concerned with modal disharmony. However, having identified a 'new fiction' which is unconfined by traditional rules, Gifford brings his reading back within the canonical horizon arguing that the text depends on

two perspectives; on the one hand, a marvellously inventive and ambiguous reworking of the classic Scottish 'either/or' tension between the supernatural and the psychological, and on the other, that of the modern Scottish fiction exemplified in work from Trocchi to Gray, Banks to Galloway, Welsh to Warner, in the depiction of a traumatised mind using displacement and fantastic imagination simultaneously

to avoid and redeem the damage from which it hides. ('Scottish Fiction since 1945 II', p. 960)

The two possible perspectives Gifford suggests in fact rely on differing notions of Scottish literary tradition, the first 'classic' and widely recognised, and the second a modern, but still well-established trend. Gifford's immediate homing in on the antizysygistic to categorise the novel in terms of Scottish psychological dualism makes for a valid reading, but also a limited one which is locked within the confines of a canon-building critical perspective. Similarly, Germanà's statement that the novel is 'self-consciously playing with the psychological quality of the Scottish alter ego' (p. 158) invokes the national without interrogating the basis for that invocation, in other words a pattern of instances which have come to form a tradition. Billig accuses such an approach of 'theoretical neglect' (p. 43). Just as the uncanny inhabits its opposite state, Billig describes how 'the double neglect of banal nationalism involves academics forgetting what is routinely forgotten' (p. 49), or overlooking the processes of national determination by which that tradition becomes naturalised. The tradition renders the uncanny in the text *heimlich* and known, therefore absolving the critic of justifying her positing of a national essence. Just as Todorov's categorical approach to the fantastic, the uncanny and the marvellous seeks to remove the critic from the disorientation of the uncanny itself, the habitual resort to tradition as an explanation of the text negates the need to consider deeply the modal disruption itself, and its implications. Both approaches fail to accommodate the effect of the uncanny as it occurs contemporaneously in the process of reading. Taken in this way, national tradition can be analytically restrictive, since it forces the reading process into banal or familiar modes of interpretation. Following her tautological categorisation of the text as an augmentation of the Scottish ghost story, for example, Germanà turns in her assessment to other elements of the text, including

Jennifer's awareness of the proliferation of what she terms 'Streetpeople' (p. 118) and the way they go ignored by passing pedestrians. As Germanà describes it, 'the novel's use of the ghost trope portrays ghostly alienation as a national state of being; thus the city of Glasgow becomes the simulacral incarnation of the postmodern city, elusive, centreless and haunted by the spectres of its "Streetpeople"' (p. 158). While Germanà gestures towards the text's representation of the postmodern city, a conception which is not nationally specific, her argument becomes nationally confined:

Scotland appears as an unknowable space, a place which mirrors Jennifer's disturbed past [...]. The collective psyche of Scotland, a nation possessed by the ghosts of its repressed traumas, is eminently affected by a profound, endemic guilt feeling [...]. Scotland's is a numbed culture. (p.158)

Germanà is not incorrect in her appraisal – Glasgow is the city and Scotland the country in question, since Jennifer specifies her location several times. But as I will go on to discuss, Jennifer's comments on society, the estrangement of media saturation and the simulacral quality of Glasgow in the narrative are reflective of international processes of estrangement in developed Western nations, as Michael Billig describes – the political ire of the text is not confined exclusively to Scotland.

Movement between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*

In the second half of this chapter I will examine the way the uncanny in *So I Am Glad* operates not only with regard to Jennifer and Savinien but also in the process of banal nationalism which Jennifer becomes aware of. The text warns against the acceptance (and production) of the concept of a national imagination as definitive or *heimlich*, and as I will demonstrate, an analogous process can be seen in influential theories of Scottish literature which, ironically, incorporate Kennedy's text in 'establishing a direct correlation between

fiction and the “nature” of Scottishness’.¹¹ Billig describes the naturalisation inherent in banal nationalism as a circular movement in which nationalism (the ideological process which naturalises the concept of nationhood) appears to vanish while the concept of nation formed in the process is remembered and maintained:

National identity is not only something which is thought to be natural to possess, but also something natural to remember. This remembering, nevertheless, involves a forgetting, or rather there is a complex dialectic of remembering and forgetting. (p. 37)

This dual process is reflected in the progression of Jennifer’s relation to the uncanny in the text, forgetting the strange and supernatural aspects of Savinien through repeated contact with him. Yet this process also involves an estrangement, exemplifying Freud’s notion of the dual movement of *heimlich* towards *unheimlich* and vice versa. While Jennifer helps Savinien acclimatise to life in the modern world, and later helps him recover after his period of homelessness and addiction, this process instigates her own emotional rehabilitation and re-habitation with the world. The growth of intimacy between the couple – ‘I can feel the tick of you making up time in my lungs and listen while we turn into each other’s accompaniment’ (p. 185) – exemplifies the way *heimlich* and *unheimlich* ambiguously gravitate towards one another. In Bernstein’s terms, the uncanny ‘describes a dynamic structure of coming forth unbidden and being covered over again’,¹² and Jennifer’s gradual return to a more conventional mode of existence comes with the seeming absorption of Savinien. She unconsciously begins to emulate his movements (‘[h]e shrugs with one of his wrists, something I now find myself doing’ (p. 75)) and Savinien later notes that ‘[w]e have mixed. I am now a fraction more than me. [...] I have been added to’ (p. 82). As Jennifer’s

¹¹ Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2004), pp. 88-9.

¹² Susan Bernstein, ‘It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny’, *MLN*, 118:5 (2003), 1111-1139 (p. 1118).

capacity for emotional engagement gradually (re)emerges, she allows herself to say '[g]oodbye me and welcome to we' (p. 222). The two travel to France in order for Savinien to return to Sannois, the site of his death in 1655. On reaching that destination, he vanishes before her eyes. When Jennifer describes Savinien's dissipation, the text ostensibly reasserts the conventional realist mode, shifting from fantastic effect to realist detail:

I saw him rock on his heels, stagger and then tumble softly forward. Like parting water, the bricks took him in and there was no more. [...]

Between two blocks of flats, the high trees shivered in a tiny breeze. Flats, trees, a shabby public pissoir, a fat grey church and a scatter of clothes on brick paving. (p. 277)

The fantastical effect of Savinien's dissipation is contrasted with the literal bricks-and-mortar realism which swallows him. Yet for all the material detail that follows – buildings, trees, bricks and the sensation of the breeze – the notion of Savinien's presence just moments before, means the text retains its uncanny uncertainty. In the blank face of the brick paving, we are left with interpretative possibilities – that Savinien was wholly or partly imagined, that Jennifer truly believed he was there, that he was there and her description is a recording of the events as she saw them. By the logic of the psychoanalytical interpretation, by this point Jennifer is finally consolidated with what had been repressed within her, what was *unheimlich* is fully naturalised, and resultantly the figure of Savinien is no longer externalised. For the reader, however, now accustomed to the text's previous modal uncertainty, the realist mode remains starkly visible, denaturalised rather than re-naturalised, following Savinien's dissipation. In the same way, Jennifer is left alone in the conventional mode of reality, emotionally restored and engaged with the world, but her uncanny experience has accentuated her sense of the 'unreal' within the real. Thrown into

sharp relief by her experiences with the uncanny, Jennifer's perception of the 'ordinary' world is newly unfamiliar, and ironically brings with it a fresh sense of estrangement.

De-familiarisation and the Unhomely Voice of the Nation

Previous to her relationship with Savinien, Jennifer's disengagement from emotional interaction also meant a detachment from the world around her, locally and in terms of world events. As Victor Shklovsky puts it, 'After we see an object several times, we begin to recognise it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it'.¹³ Looking back at the way she was, habitually disaffected from news stories that should by her reckoning be shocking and unsettling, she recalls that in newspapers and magazines:

even the most distressing snaps became, after a while, part of my unexpected insensitivity. I could pick up any headline

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with not even a shiver. I had been successfully numbed. [...] The public as a whole, and in particular the criminal classes, has lost all ability to discriminate between fact and fiction. (pp. 132-3)

However, just as realism achieves invisibility as a style through repetition and habit, so it is Jennifer's job to convey the reality of world events in a way that renders them comfortable and 'homely' for the listening public. Jennifer is a 'professional annunciator' (p. 37), presenting news, adverts and other voiceovers for radio, relating atrocities and injustices in a toneless voice. The text describes a modern milieu of hyper-mediation, a perpetual flow of wallpaper reportage that eclipses the actuality of the events related. As Kirsten Stirling notes, Jennifer identifies her childhood with "the dawning of the Age of Stupid Lies", where there seems to be no clear distinction between fact and fiction, and she watches the

¹³ Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. and tr. by L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis, (1917; Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 3-25, (p. 13).

Vietnam War alongside “The Man from UNCLE””.¹⁴ Ironically, the familiarising ‘reality effect’ of news reports is conveyed by an empty vessel, since Jennifer’s own emotional detachment from the reality of the words she is provided with means she is habitually complicit in the perpetuation of a hegemonic version of reality. Like the techniques of verisimilitude used to ‘sell’ realism, Jennifer’s mastery of warm, neutral and reassuring tone provides the repetitive consistency in the process, allowing the broadcast content and accompanying media spin to become familiar, background and therefore unnoticed. Savinien marvels at the possibility of radio, astounded that ‘they will know it, hear it as if you were speaking their thoughts’ (p. 39), but an uncanny slippage enters this process because Jennifer is in fact not speaking either their thoughts or her own. Rather, she is helping to foster a communal acceptance of and indifference to a stable, familiar representation of reality which is in fact an act of estrangement, a ‘covering over’ of the reality of events. ‘I have no say in what I say or even how I say it’ (p. 62), she observes. *So I Am Glad* finds a political equivalence in the uncanny/homely dialectic, in that the public conception of reality (and by extension the conceptual national imagination, whether or not such a thing can be said to exist) is based on an *unheimlich* process of habit and repetition.

Jennifer’s discomfort on having her engagement with reality restored indicates the impossibility of inhabiting and accepting the ‘normal’, habitual world when the process of naturalisation through repetition is abruptly severed:

I can tell you exactly how it feels to be this way, all the sensations are natural, focused, strong, entirely normal and I want no part of them. If this is normality I would rather have something else. How is it that a tick or two of electricity in the

¹⁴ Kirsten Stirling, “‘Lying is good like this’: The Collaborative Lie in the Early Fiction of A.L. Kennedy”, in *Ethically Speaking: Voice and Values in Modern Scottish Writing*, ed. by James McGonigal and Kirsten Stirling (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 37-49, p. 43. Kennedy, *So I Am Glad*, p. 188.

meat that fills my skull can be worse than a blow, worse than disease, worse than any fear I can imagine. (p. 262)

The effect is similar to Viktor Shklovsky's definition of defamiliarization, so that in effect Savinien 'exists so that one [in this case Jennifer] may recover the sensation of life [...] of things as they are perceived and not as they are known'.¹⁵ Ironically, while Freud insists that the uncanny is a 'class of the frightening' ('The Uncanny', p. 220), Jennifer is not afraid of Savinien; it is the world of the homely and traditional which makes her afraid since its nature is, for her, acutely de-naturalised. In becoming familiar with the real world Jennifer recognises it as strange, harrowing, and alien: 'I hadn't read the papers for a long, long time and they were coming as quite a shock' (p. 132). During her period with Savinien, she begins to become affected by the news items she reports, of thousands killed in India as a result of poor housing, of the prominence of drugs, homelessness and other 'public sicknesses' (p. 95), stories about regimes 'gassing whole villages, publicly anatomising children, cosmically and domestically designed disasters' (p. 132). She listens as

a prominent parliamentarian calmly explained that widescale public misery was unavoidable, given his party's emotional attachment to ever-decreasing income tax. Finally, public spending would disappear completely up their ever-decreasing arses, but they could not bear to be anxious while it did. (p. 117)

Kennedy has noted common ground with Robert Louis Stevenson's 'sense of outrage at things which are unjust' (Leigh March interview, p. 106), a sensation which Jennifer also experiences once the revelatory power of the uncanny forces her to consider reality afresh. As a result, her colleagues at the Station chastise her – "[y]ou seem to be developing a tone, Jennifer" – and she becomes aware of '[a]n unnecessary colour in the voice, an air of

¹⁵ Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* trans. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (1917; Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 3-24, p. 12.

negative comment' (p. 218), indicating that her broadcasts are no longer anodyne reinscriptions of the *heimlich*.

This process reveals to Jennifer the underlying, repetitious structure of naturalisation which allows tradition – in this case the hegemonic singularity of media representation – to become accepted and unquestioned by a consuming public. As Billig points out, "[t]he voice of the nation" is a fiction; it tends to overlook the factional struggles and the deaths of unsuccessful nations, which made such a fiction possible' (p. 71). The tradition of this false 'voice' may be adjusted over time 'reflecting current balances of hegemony' (Billig, p. 71), realigning what is to be accepted as *heimlich*, but the tone must remain stable, continuous and seemingly essential. Jennifer, along similar lines, notes the way individuality and diversity of opinion are not afforded a place in the news coverage she presents: 'People, individuals, are to be avoided in case they seem more important than the big lies I have to retell' (p. 85). Kennedy addresses the same idea in the tellingly-named short story 'The role of notable silences in Scottish history', in which a researcher instructs the reader:

Go into any place where history is stored and listen. Hold your breath. Hear how still it is. Librarians and archivists will keep their visitors quiet, but this particular silence has nothing to do with them. [...] It is the huge, invisible, silent roar of all the people who are too small to record. They disappear and leave the past inhabited only by murderers and prodigies and saints.¹⁶

The researcher tries to counteract these omissions in the record of the nation by following and studying strangers, composing obituaries for them based on her observations. Individuals leak out of the collective narrative of the nation; similarly, by accepting the vision of nation promoted by companies like those Jennifer works for, '[p]eople enter a line of coincidence and follow it to the end. [...] And then they are silence' ('notable silences', p.

¹⁶ A.L. Kennedy, 'The role of notable silences in Scottish history', *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), pp. 62-72, (p. 64).

68). This is in keeping with Billig's observation that '[t]he battle for nationhood is a battle for hegemony, by which a part claims to speak for the whole nation and to represent the national essence' (p. 27). Thus when Jennifer begins to question the reports she is reading, the radio station producer keeps her on track:

'This isn't even insidious, it's barefaced trading on fear. Protection money'.

'Could we just get this over with'.

'Of course, of course. [...] If our unsolicited lives are given to us free, we won't even learn what they're worth so it's perfectly reasonable that we should pay for their healthy continuance. We should always have paid – fancy getting away with it for so long'. [...]

'Starting on my signal, light and warm'. (p. 63)

The producer, representing the technical agency behind the re-production of hegemonic political frames, urges on their seemingly inevitable continuation. As Jennifer's awareness of this process grows more acute, 'the voice of the nation' whose words she relays becomes insidiously *unheimlich*. Cairns Craig states:

The imagination of a nation is both the nation's imagining of its future – something we are all constantly engaged in since the nation shapes our individual futures – and it is the process of reconstituting the nation's past by retelling to ourselves the values which the nation embodies and by which those futures ought to be governed.¹⁷

Jennifer's job impacts on the imagination of her listeners in this way, but Craig's emphasis on repetition – 'reconstitution', 'retelling' – as the basis for forming a uniform conception of the 'home' nation and its relation to others also displays the *unheimlich* foundational units of its construction. Like the uncanny, concepts of nation are formed through the repetition of images and ideas, until a pattern is caused to emerge. While in moments of the uncanny that pattern stands out as strange and unsettling, the patterns which form national

¹⁷ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 32.

traditions eventually become naturalised and invisible. Yet the way they share the same originary process indicates a similarity between the two; the difference lies in the way they are assimilated.

While Jennifer becomes mistrustful of 'the voice of the nation' and the vested interests which attempt to influence the (debateable) construction of a national imagination, however, her own narrative is similarly questionable. As Kirsten Stirling notes,

the reader encounters Jennifer's voice as writer, rather than speaker, and we are seldom allowed to forget that this is written narrative, as Jennifer highlights the textual architecture of the novel, foregrounding its very structural units. [...] The narrative voice, while constantly reminding us of the mechanics of novel writing, insists on the non-fictionality of what is being related, as if the breaching of the artificial structural units of the novel was a guarantee of non-fictionality or truth. (pp. 40-1)

As a narrator Jennifer repeatedly draws the reader's attention to her own act of narrative construction in a way that renders her story doubtful throughout. She, for example, offers readers advice ('[i]f you find what I tell you now rather difficult to believe, please treat it as fiction. I won't be offended' (p. 12)); highlights falsities in her account ('[t]hink of what follows as the letter I would have written then and it will serve you and the story perfectly well. Indulge me for a page' (p. 203)); and at one point she suggests the reader skip ahead since '[h]ere is where I'll put down something that's for me, a corner of all this writing which is only mine and not a confidence I'm going to offer, not part of my calculations' (p. 69). The reference to the 'calculated' nature of her narrative adds another layer of uncertainty to an already unsettled textual mode, to the extent that '[i]n fact, if I was you, that whole *writing a book* thing might make me wonder just what kind of person I could be' (p. 129). The very doubtfulness about Jennifer's narrative brings further uncertainty to the events related; besides a spectre and a psychological projection or manifestation, Savinien might also be

regarded as a writerly device or metaphorical strategy by which Jennifer seeks to convey her story, a way to give voice to her own experiences. Addressing her assumed reader, she states 'I'm trying to give you as much of the truth as I can' (p. 19). Indeed, just as the national imagination must be seen to have a singular, united voice in order to be naturalised by the 'receiving' public, Jennifer displays the need to control or curb the voices of others. Her gagging of Steven during sex because 'I didn't want to hear what he'd try and say' (p. 128) reflects her need for narrative control and singularity of voice. The narrative itself, then, might seem a concerted effort on Jennifer's part to avoid or estrange other interpretations in order to preserve the voice that she has recovered, yet her need for authorial control ironically replicates the media process she criticises. Jennifer's argument therefore, it might be inferred, is that there is a difference between a single voice relating personal experience (albeit with great ambiguity) and the widespread public acceptance of a single (and centrally prescribed) voice of the nation. The uncanny elements of her narrative, while categorically *unheimlich*, are for Jennifer a way of representing the reality of individual experience and interpretation, while the voice of the nation, in a more insidious way, attempts to disable alternative interpretation or speculation, making a singular vision of reality seem natural and definitively real.

While Jennifer warns against the naturalisation of tradition and the construction of banal nationalism, Cairns Craig incorporates her narrative ambiguity to support his own conception of the Scottish national imagination. What distinguishes the national imagination of Scotland from that of other nations, according to Craig, is its Calvinist inheritance, in which the act of literary creation unconsciously emulates a Calvinist

theology, the text forming a doubled (and diabolic) emulation of reality in which the writer replaces the figure of God. In Craig's conception of a Scottish literary tradition,

the novel, by its very form, replicates the world as envisaged by Calvin, since it presents reality not as an open future in which human beings have choices to make but as a fixed plot over which the author broods like "the God of Calvin", able to see "the beginning and the end". (p. 204)

The doubtfulness which characterises Jennifer's narrative, for Craig, encapsulates Scottish literature's collective creative failure to move past Calvinist doubt in the creation of fiction. '[T]he text knows it is playing with the *diabolus* of the imagination as an alternative to the eternity ruled by God', Craig argues, '[s]ince we are confronted by a narrator who admits that "Sometimes the best beginning is a lie"' (Craig, p. 217, Kennedy, p. 280). For Craig, this basis in falsity demonstrates that 'the devil of art claims to represent the world but instead consumes and negates it, tells its truths – if they are truths – only through deceptions, forcing us to acknowledge not what we "must know" but precisely how little we know' (Craig, pp. 217-8). Yet in co-opting the text to verify the tradition of Calvinist doubt he sees as characteristic of 'the Scottish novel', Craig neglects to illuminate the 'little we know' of the text itself, eschewing a detailed analysis of the novel and bypassing the central character's resistance to the definition of homogenous national imagination. Contrary to this conception of the Scottish national imagination, Kennedy states that 'my whole understanding of writing and my method of making it does not stem from literary or national forms and traditions' ('Not changing', p. 100). By Craig's theory this statement might be considered of little consequence other than as a voice of dissent which instantly joins the hereroglossic debate which comprises the Scottish imagination at a given time. Similarly, Jennifer's alienation from the production of banal nationalism (with which she is complicit) might be seen merely

as an expression of the entrenched doubtfulness which, Craig maintains, Scotland has about its own imagination. However, as Bell points out:

claiming the existence of a “national imagination”, however plural and accommodating it might be, will also always remain problematic, for it must repeatedly essentialise and reduce the nation, whether consciously or unconsciously, in order to verify its existence and character. (*Questioning Scotland*, p. 88)

Gifford and Germanà at times display banal nationalism in the way they turn to tradition as a basis for their appraisals, indicating how naturalised that tradition has become in Scottish literary criticism. Craig, by contrast, creates his own historicised conception of the national imagination which, because of the concrete autarchy of its construction (however unique an intervention it represents in Scottish studies), runs the risk at certain points of assuming its own authority. In so doing, Craig’s theory inevitably encourages its own naturalisation, and thereby its own banal replication. As Bell notes: ‘Craig at times creates the illusion of singularity, justifying the existence of a linear tradition which can be read definitively, which may satisfy his own view of the “national imagination”’ (*Questioning Scotland*, p. 88). Again, this is the dialectic of hegemony/estrangement and *heimlich/unheimlich* that *So I Am Glad* cautions against.

Conclusion: Personal and Political *Unheimlich*

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson cites the media, and in particular the newspaper and the novel, as key to the way national imagination is promoted as the way communities are bound together.¹⁸ On a personal level, meanwhile, Kennedy states:

Part of my definition of myself and elements of my identity like nationality comes from the media. I believe writing is the most intimate of the media. I believe that

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 22-36.

fiction with a thread of Scottishness in its truth has helped me to know how to be myself as a Scot. ('Not changing', p. 102)

Kennedy speaks of 'Scottishness' but is unconcerned with defining it, merely noting that it is partly learned, and that it can comprise one element of identity or one 'thread' within texts. Yet nationality, like writing, by Kennedy's reckoning, is 'intimate', rather than indicative of the nature of supposedly 'whole' communities. Critics, however, have at times based their analyses of *So I Am Glad* on the assumption of its apparent place in an intrinsically Scottish literary tradition, or taken the text explicitly as an indicator of the makeup of the nation itself. 'The inevitable "nationalization" of literatures',¹⁹ in which the identification of characteristic traditions plays a defining role, has been comparatively recent in Scotland, and perhaps because of this those traditions are still a commonplace in Scottish studies. Yet just as Gavin Miller points out that Scottish critics 'no longer have to discover the real essence of the nation in order to justify what we do',²⁰ Kennedy's text centres on the indefinable nature of personal experience and the effects of the media as a naturalising tool of nationalisation, rather than being concerned with a specifically Scottish dimension of those issues. Drawing attention to the similarities between the processes of repetition through which uncanny effects and national (and literary) traditions are formed produces a reading which sees past the potential reductiveness of a habitual recourse to Scottish literary tradition, and allows for a broader interpretation of the text in terms of both the international politics of nationalism and the intimate experience of traumatised individuals. By further considering Kennedy's novel through a lens which is more critical of the concept of national traditions, in this case that of Michael Billig's 'banal nationalism', the dialectic of

¹⁹ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M. B. Debevoise (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 104.

²⁰ Gavin Miller, 'Scotland's Authentic Plurality: The New Essentialism in Scottish Studies', *Scottish Literary Review*, 2009, 157-174 (p. 170).

the uncanny in the text demonstrates that a movement towards accepting one definition of nation as *heimlich* is always a hegemonic process at the cost of estranging other perspectives. Interpreted through this approach, the novel demonstrates the dual movement of the *unheimlich*, so that Jennifer's progression from emotional estrangement to the *heimlich* of 'normality' concurrently leads her to a different state of defamiliarisation when faced with the horrors of the real world and the collective torpor that is the ideological function of the media corporations she works for. At the same time, her analysis of the repetitious systems of nationalism – a process designed to promote 'nation' as 'the homely' (and the world of nations as natural) reveals the denaturalisation inherent in that construction, and the *unheimlich* foundations of a national imagination.

Chapter Five

Looking for answers in the great beyond: Alan Warner

*Of this white page, ask no more sense
than of the skies (though you may believe
the rain His tears, the wind His grief,
the snow His shredded evidence*

Don Paterson¹

The differing ways in which Alan Warner's fiction has been critically appraised over the years marks it as a body of work which is difficult to pin down. His first published novel, *Morvern Callar* (1995) gained him acclaim and notoriety, but this novel, his inclusion in anthologies designed to appeal to a trendy youth- or dance culture-orientated market,² and the accompanying coverage in non-traditional style magazines like *The Face*, *GQ* and *i-D*, led to his work being initially associated with that of Irvine Welsh and the supposed 'chemical generation', a label with which Warner has long expressed frustration and which still persists in some journalistic quarters. Critics were divided over whether this was a novel about a disaffected, amoral delinquent, or a character of mystery and depth. In 1998 *The Independent* ran the sub-heading '[d]oes contemporary fiction need another Scottish writer

¹ Don Paterson, '02:50: Newtyle', in *God's Gift to Women* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), unnumbered p. 63.

² *Disco Biscuits: New fiction from the chemical generation*, ed. by Sarah Champion (London: Sceptre, 1997), and *Children of Albion Rovers*, ed. by Kevin Williamson (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc, 1996).

of grittily realistic prose? If that Scot is Alan Warner, winner of literary prizes and object of style mag hero-worship, the answer is probably yes'.³ Two years earlier, however, Carol Anderson notes that 'for all its social engagement, this is not entirely realist fiction',⁴ while Frank Kermode describes Warner as 'A fantasist with an interest in folkish tales with a modern setting'.⁵ Warner himself has noted with bemusement, in relation to *These Demented Lands* (1997), that 'many critics seemed to take it not as a fever dream (possibly a dream Morvern is having, safe in her bed, pregnant?) but as a work of pure realism!'⁶ Tim Martin, meanwhile, reviewing the 'disorientating, frustrating' *The Stars in the Bright Sky* (2010), states that '[t]he cumulative effect is so odd that one keeps expecting the walls to fall away and the author to reveal that the whole thing is part of a metafictional game or set in an alternative universe'.⁷ Few, it seems, can quite fathom what Warner's work is *about*; yet there is a persistent conviction amongst these and other commentators that it must surely be about *something*, that some underlying significance must be present. In its mix of social and economic realism, existential questioning, fantastical tales, mythology, history, pop culture and psychedelia, and its knowing acts of off-kilter vernacular and gleeful literary

³ Tobias Jones, 'Interview: Alan Warner – The Wild Man of Letters', *The Independent*, 24 May 1998, in 'independent.co.uk', <<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/interview-alan-warner---the-wild-man-of-letters-1157673.html>> [accessed 16 January 2013]

⁴ Carol Anderson, 'Morvern Callar', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 44 (1996), 64-67, (p. 65).

⁵ Frank Kermode, 'Lager and Pernod', *The London Review of Books*, 24.16 (2002), 28-9 <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n16/frank-kermode/lager-and-pernod>> [accessed 16 January 2013]

⁶ Colin Waters, 'The SRB Interview', *The Scottish Review of Books*, 7.3 (2011) <<http://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/index.php/back-issues/volume-seven-2011/volume-seven-issue-three/419-the-srb-interview-alan-warner-extended-version>> [accessed 16 January 2013]

⁷ Tim Martin, 'The Stars in the Bright Sky by Alan Warner: Review', *The Telegraph*, 11 June 2010, in 'telegraph.co.uk' <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/7817834/The-Stars-in-the-Bright-Sky-by-Alan-Warner-review.html#>> [accessed 15 January 2013]

artifice, Warner's work hovers liminally between possible means of interpretation. The writer seems to set up differing potential strands of interpretation before calling them into question. By repeatedly suggesting and confounding reader expectations, the texts resonate with Susan Bernstein's theory that 'the uncanny principle, then, really describes a dynamic structure of coming forth unbidden and being covered over again'.⁸ That dynamic never fully dispels the sense of truth 'coming forth'. Rather, each 'covering over' of a possible line of interpretation or location of significance leaves a trace of itself, a lingering suggestion which colours the reading process, loading the text with a sense of a central 'truth' or reality hidden within the swirling surface of the text. Warner's texts refuse to be one thing or another, the prose fostering an uncanny sensation of estrangement which is further enhanced by other uncanny elements within the fictional worlds themselves. This chapter will look at this perennial state in Warner's fiction of uncanny 'coming forth' and its effects on the mimetic contract, considering the implications of this scree of suggested interpretations both for his characters in the fictional world, and on the level of reader expectation and the realist mode.

In his choice of locations, Warner's texts occupy definably uncanny territory. In his Scottish-set fiction, the writer renames recognisable geographical locations so that the settings are identifiable but mysteriously different to the real thing. Thus, Oban becomes 'the port', Edinburgh 'the Capital', and 'the Island' is presumably Kerrera or Mull, lying as they do across the sound from Oban. The vagueness of these names defamiliarise the locations, rendering them ill-defined and strange. The places surrounding the port also acquire unlikely names which sound more like they may have been lifted from a Scottish

⁸ Susan Bernstein, 'It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny'. *MLN* 118:5 (Dec 2003), pp.1118.

fantasy novel akin to Matthew Fitt's *But n' Ben A-go-go* (2000) or Alasdair Gray's *A History Maker* (1994): Back Settlement, Concession Lands, Boomtown, Silvermines, Aluminiumville. The locations on the island take on even more surreal, unfixed and dream-like monikers: Far Places, Inaccessible Point, Outer Rim. When Morvern states she is 'Crossing The Interior to The Drome',⁹ her words might seem equally at home in the science fiction of Iain M Banks or the existential trudgings of Samuel Beckett's protagonists. In *The Man Who Walks* (2002), Macushla (or 'the nephew') ventures outwith the locations nearby the Port, however, and Warner's 'far-away-places with strange sounding names' mingle with undisguised Scottish locations: Argyll, Loch Lomond, Inverness ('Inversnecky'¹⁰). Macushla mentions Ibrox stadium, Culloden and Dunblane. An equilibrium is created whereby Warner's locations seem at once to be set in Scotland's real geography and somewhere other, a more fantastical or dream-like parallel of the real. The effect is strengthened in the nicknames by which the majority of the characters populating these locations are known. While some, including Morvern Callar, Lanna and the choir of the (oddly vampiric-sounding) Our Lady of Perpetual Succour School for Girls go by recognisably 'ordinary' names, the sheer proliferation of unusual nicknames for other characters charts a landscape full of cartoonish and bizarre individuals. In *Morvern Callar* we encounter Red Hanna, Creeping Jesus, The Shadow, The Commander, The Skiabhanach, Tequila Sheila and The Panatine, in *The Man Who Walks* Macushla meets The Foreman, Old Dear, Raincheck, Old Barrels and the titular Man himself, and in *These Demented Lands* the Island is home to Devil's Advocate, Brotherhood, Ferryman, Nam the Dam, The Argonaut, Knifegrinder, and Halley's Comet.

⁹ Alan Warner, *These Demented Lands* (1997; London: Vintage, 1998), p. 259.

¹⁰ Alan Warner, *The Man Who Walks* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), p. 1.

David Leishman sees these nicknames as stemming from a defining trait or moment in the lives of each character (thus after enduring his lengthy culinary monologue, Macushla names one of the Argyll Mafia 'Syrupy Piece'). For the reader, however, they serve to make strange the populations of Warner's familiar-but-unfamiliar locations. The reading process is therefore unsettled immediately upon entering Warner's fictional territory, the places familiar yet other, the characters rarely given 'real' names in favour of often unfathomable monikers. Leishman describes Warner's settings as 'an uncertain world in which largely disorientated and isolated youngsters wander searching for some semblance of meaning',¹¹ and this drive to establish meaning is reflected in the reading process itself. In this way Warner sets up a parallel between the lives of his characters, looking for the way to understand their reality, and the reader, searching for a way to naturalise the fictional world (either by correlating it with the 'given' world of reality, or identifying it as an unsettlingly similar *elsewhere*).

The habitual reading process, as Culler states, assumes that there exists a consistently intelligible reality, or an ostensibly referential interpretation of the text, and continues to search for it until it is located. Many of Warner's characters carry out a similar process in their lives, as Leishman indicates. From the desperate futility of life in the small town of the Port and the settlements nearby, industrially stunted by 80s Thatcherism and artistically limited due to their size and location (and arguably by a 'small-town' mentality), to the vast, forbidding spaces of the surrounding landscapes, Warner's characters struggle with their sense of reality as something imbued with significance and power. Career opportunities are few, and individuals seem to face a routine future in the port, as Morvern

¹¹ David Leishman, 'Breaking up the language? Signs and names in Alan Warner's Scotland', *Etudes Ecossaises*, 8 (2002), 113-129, (p. 127).

Callar and Lanna do in their jobs at the supermarket. Warner writes of the Sopranos that '[t]hese 17-year old girls live in a town with few opportunities [...]. They have no money. They're not going on to further education so they'll probably never leave this town; it's all still about what guy they end up getting pregnant to'.¹² In the face of such bleak future prospects, Warner's characters habitually turn instead to the past in their search for significance, invoking the histories, folk tales, and myths the landscape has accumulated over time. The elderly Couris Jean maintains an oral tradition of storytelling, recounting the sinking of a fourteenth-century galleon near the island, the arrival of Morvern's ancestors on the same ship, and her own memory of witnessing dozens of horses galloping out of the sea on to the beach around her when a wartime cargo boat capsized in the Sound. Similarly the Argonaut recalls a story in which

Centuries ago some old greyhead had second sight that one morning all these little children would walk down the sand to the water's edge and drink the salt water which was sweet; then it was always called Sweetbay. But when I was a kid, in 1975, this barge *The Lusitanos*, got stuck out on the reed beds then sunk; it was carrying ninety tons of sugar that became invisible salvage: it all dissolved, and for a week all the kiddies could walk down on the sand, lift the seawater to their lips and it was sweet. (*Demented Lands*, pp. 171-2)

Such stories leave the reader with a fantastical impression in spite of their rational explanations, imbuing the texts with a deep sense of the land as a very ancient thing, a patchwork of local tales and folklore, and an impression of otherworldliness and fantastical events from days gone by. Other characters enact a more obsessive fetishisation of old artefacts and rituals in an attempt to re-invoke an earlier, more 'magical' sense of the world. In *The Man Who Walks* Macushla finds himself at a large bourgeois gathering in a manor house, during which the landlord Old Barrels stands behind a podium and ceremoniously

¹² Amy Hempel, 'Alan Warner', *Bomb*, 67 (1999) <<http://bombsite.com/issues/67/articles/2227>> [accessed 15 January 2013]

reads passages from the Black Book of Badenoch, 'a witch's book, said to date from the sixteenth century; been in this family for generations since: cures, spells, invocations, strange tales. Creepy stuff' (p. 140). According to Bill 'Raincheck' Wright, 'they say it's bound in human skin' (p. 139). In this way, the text hints at a supernatural past, while Macushla's derision of the 'ceremony' and interest only in the monetary value of the book serves to belittle and refute it. While Couris Jean and others place significance on oral tradition, in ethereal stories hinting at the fey otherworldliness common of Scottish folk tales, black magic seems to be the prerogative of the bourgeoisie in Warner's Highlands. Old Barrels' overblown black book ceremony, for example, follows a gastronomic orgy of grotesque indulgence. Similarly it is the wealthy landowner's daughter Varie Bultitude who engages Simon in a 'magic' midnight sex ritual within a salt circle in *The Deadman's Pedal* (2012), during which Warner again toys with reader expectations. During the violent ritual Varie mistakes the clatter on the slate roof as 'demons' claws'¹³ in a moment of fear:

There was a scrabbling on the roof, as if several small, lithe creatures slithered about irritably after descending through the air and attaching themselves up there – then suddenly the roof began to hammer with excited vibrations. (p. 293)

Having set up a potentially fantastical episode which might verify a supernatural level to the port novels, Warner immediately dispels it; Simon realises the sounds are being made by hailstones. The supernatural is further invoked and denied in the same text, when Simon is driving his girlfriend Nikki home on his motorbike at night:

Then he saw it – only for an instant.

A black demon was briefly caught in some appalling secret action in the middle of the road and no passing place. It seemed as tall as them, wetly black with actual wings.

¹³ Alan Warner, *The Deadman's Pedal* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), p. 293.

Simon jerked the handlebars, put his right leg out, and he felt the appalling and slight contact as the beast impacted his foot and lower leg. [...] Nikki's arms were torn so surely from him – gone in such an instant – he was sure that the untethered demon had swept in on them from behind and snatched her. (p. 214)

In panic, 'into [Simon's] mind came an image of Varie Bultitude in her huge and haunted house, bent over a single candle, murmuring, and he knew what she was doing – she was calling forth one of her demons to come and get Nikki Caine' (p. 216). Soon after, the 'demon' is revealed to be a swan covered in black oil. The reader cannot help but relate the idea of a conjured demon to Simon's conflicted sexual desires, however, an impression further strengthened by the swan feather used later as part of Varie's sex 'ritual'. Warner is toying back and forth with reader expectations here, setting up impressions of supernatural elements while simultaneously cancelling them or making them doubtful. These elements establish residual sensations which continue to haunt the mimetic contract thereafter. The realist mode of reading works towards comprehending the reality depicted by the text, and Warner's fictional reality becomes infused with a sense of 'real' supernatural forces, magic or other unseen powers influencing the world from 'behind the scenes'. This uncanny effect is described by Bernstein as 'the condition of not-being-revealed that allows for something to creep into view' (Bernstein, p. 1118). Tales and rituals are not, however, the only elements of the past that Warner's characters are driven to revise, restore, and resurrect.

In a similar obsessive or habitual way, others depend upon 'official' history, the dates and locations of significant (and often bloody) events in the landscape's past. In *These Demented Lands*, Morvern encounters a man she dubs 'Air-crash Investigator', who is obsessively piecing together the minutiae of a mysterious double plane-crash from ten years earlier, seeking debris from the crash and staying in the hotel room of one of the pilots, poring over logbooks and video of the submerged wreckage. The Investigator fervently

maintains that ‘the answers are always there, in the wreckage; the answers are *always* in the wreckage’ (p. 77). This drive for exacting detail and meticulous reconstruction is rife in Warner’s novels. Morvern also meets a group of students recreating a fifteenth-century cattle drive, with Arts Council and EEC funding – the recreation of the past is validated and sponsored by official bodies as well as individuals. Macushla notes how Historic Scotland leaves markers around the Highlands commemorating ‘confirmed’ or ‘approved’ historic landmarks, which seem to consist of battlefields and the sites of killings and massacres. One reading might suggest that perhaps this is a landscape scarred by the past, in which the remembrance of those events, a habitual process of going over the details, is somehow part of the way of life of its people, connecting the land and its inhabitants. The Foreman, in his supposed plot to capture the AWOL Man Who Walks, orders Macushla to ‘[g]et him at Ballachulish, hang Man Who Walks high, by the neck, when his flesh falls, string his skeleton with barbed wire so his bones click in the wind’ (p. 112). The Foreman’s instructions echo the infamous Appin Murder of 1752, when the wrongfully accused James Stewart was hanged at the same location; as Macushla recounts the story, ‘when his bones fell they were tethered together again with wire, to hang clicking in the wind’ (p. 165). The text wills the reader to infer the eruption of the landscape’s traumatic past in the present here. For Freud, this type of repetition is uncanny in itself:

Among instances of frightening things can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny [...]. [T]his uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.¹⁴

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, “‘The Uncanny’”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (1919; London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 219-252, p. 241.

The Foreman's desire (knowing or unconscious) to recreate the fate of James Stewart with *The Man Who Walks* might seem just such a repetition of a past, traumatic event (the truth of which, it can be argued, has been repressed by the passage of time and in the fact that the 'Red Fox' himself was framed). So too might the work of Raincheck and the crew, intent on recreating the Appin Murder and other events from the aftermath of the Jacobite Rising in their Hollywood adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* (1886). As Macushla points out: 'Piper Alpha, Ibrox, Lockerbie, Dunblane. You know, for such a small country, I feel we're pretty well represented by massacres' (pp. 172-3). Yet applying Freud's psychoanalytical notion of the uncanny as the return of the repressed to the land itself, in effect attributing a tangible connection between the land and the psyche of the people living upon it (whether collectively or individually) is something Warner's text again suggests and casts aspersions on. There is an inherent critique in these texts of such behaviour as a kind of mania of the people, a fetishistic worship of (often gruesome) past atrocities in an attempt to find meaning in the connection between land and people. In keeping with the conception of the uncanny approaching but drawing back before it is fully revealed, Warner fosters a notion of the land being haunted by past trauma, while also highlighting the impossibility of 'recovering' or contacting that primary scene or originary event, the accumulated violence and disruption keeping his characters in the present separated from those focal points of history. Thus, the cattle drovers are hopeful Morvern will be carrying an Ordnance Survey map, since they are 'using this fifteenth-century one and it's loaded with inaccuracies' (*Demented Lands*, p. 26). Their giddy proclamation that 'we've been doing hunting and fishing, trying to do the fifteenth-century thing with Gore-Tex and a video camera thrown in!' (*Demented Lands*, p. 27) emphasises the futility of the project; the 'reality' of the past cannot be summoned up or connected to, for all that it haunts the land

and culture. Macushla, meanwhile, points out that the Forestry Commission's 'official' site of the James of the Glen murder is inaccurate, since the memorial cairn is situated on top of an older one 'perhaps that was put there in the nineteenth century' (*Man Who Walks*, p. 163), and that the land itself has been altered by bulldozers in the 1950s. Macushla shows the site to Raincheck, whose *Kidnapped* adaptation will be filmed in the most suitably dramatic-looking parts of the Highlands rather than the actual sites of the events which Stevenson's novel, an adaptation itself, is based on (and the location of which, Macushla claims, are uncertain in themselves). Just as Bernstein describes the uncanny as a dynamic structure of coming forth and receding or being covered over, Warner's realism resonates with forces which always seem *about* to make themselves known, immanent but not emergent. This impression of a hovering on the brink of transcendence imbues his texts with a unique sense of modal uncertainty. The 'real' world he represents is alive with the stuff of folk tales, myth, history and the supernatural. At the same time the very ordinariness with which these concepts and haunting images (the skeleton clicking in the wind) appear allows the more conventional aspects of realist prose to make them seem day-to-day. Thus, while the glowing phosphorous beds are a chemical reaction of waste materials beneath the sea, the image is also one of a submerged, otherworldly landscape of haunting ethereal power. The dual effect of this uncanny arrangement antagonises the mimetic contract; the realist mode of reading accommodates these other 'codes' as part of the reality depicted. So while Warner's characters are concerned with wasp-stings and nail varnish, the world represented around them hums with the power of unseen forces which lie somehow 'beyond'. Yet the character's attempts to grasp at this level of reality seem doomed always to fall short.

Macushla in *The Man Who Walks* encounters many of these repetition obsessions as he trudges and hitch-hikes through the lands north of the port, without buying in to any of them along the way. His goal remains clear – to track down his escapee Uncle, the titular character, a bizarre and deranged figure who drinks whisky from the mouth of a salmon, presses tiny shards of coloured railway signal lights into a compound in his empty eye socket, illuminating them with a tiny torch stored in the cavity behind, and lives in a *'network of filthy papier-mâché tunnels and igloos he had constructed inside the rooms and corridors of the house: the papier-mâché made from years and years of unread quality newspapers'* (p. 93, Warner's emphasis). The Man Who Walks has apparently absconded with a pub's £27,000 World Cup cash kitty, and Macushla is only too keen on obtaining his share, having been dispatched to hunt his uncle down by the Foreman, current boyfriend of his mother and member of the Argyll Mafia. Macushla focuses only on his share of the kitty, but Warner's text hints continuously at deeper links between his journey and the land itself, and the narratives of history and local storytelling which have occurred there in earlier times. Macushla is not against an otherworldly view of the land himself:

'The land is here, all round us, but each of us pulls from it or inserts into it what we want, we all see it different, like we could meet the ghosts of other folks' needs and dreams wandering the places at night'.

'Watch you don't meet your own,' Paulette curled her lip, a little uglily.

'Exactly. I believe we live in a semi-spirit world. Sometimes the deceased just forget they're dead for a moment or two. Like I knew soldiers, eyewitnesses, who can't agree on where they all were on the field of battle cause you have all these highly excited individual viewpoints jostling with each other'. (p. 67)

Macushla's view is paradoxical – it might be possible to meet these ghosts, but they are formed only from people's 'needs and dreams', not from any actual spiritual connection between land and people. At the same time, he is quite possibly espousing spiritualism in an

attempt to rekindle his former relationship with Paulette. For all his opinions that 'it's where our head is at that prints our impression of the landscape' (p. 48), Macushla fails to detect (or even look for) any deeper significance in his own quest. The reader may do just that, however, with so many potentially meaningful elements being suggested – the folk tales, the historic details, the Gaelic origins of Macushla's name, the references to traumatic events past and the regular emphasis on the landscape itself. Macushla is presented walking, rowing, and hitching lifts across endless spaces sparsely peppered with small settlements; following in his uncle's footsteps past hills and woods and along railway lines, roads and tracks. In this way, Warner again evokes the uncanny notion of repeating the actions of the past, as a kind of spiritual legacy or a cultural tradition. Berthold Schoene discusses this idea in his analysis of the text, stating that

as soon as it becomes entextualised in a narrative format, the act of walking positions the walker, his or her itinerary, and experience of the landscape in relation to the itineraries and experiences of other, previous walkers in the same landscape.

15

Macushla's repetition of his Uncle's journey seems to take on uncanny significance as, increasingly bedraggled, weather-beaten and unhinged, he begins to be mistaken for The Man Who Walks himself, such as when he enquires at the Ferry bar near the James Stewart monument:

'Has The Man Who Walks been in?'

'I'm sorry?'

'Has The Man Who Walks been in here today. Or in the last few days?'

'I'm sorry but aren't *you* The Man Who Walks?'

'No. No. Certainly not. Fuck no, man. I'm his Nephew. He's my Uncle, I'm afraid'. (p. 167)

¹⁵ Berthold Schoene, 'The Walking Cure: *Heimat*, Masculinity and Mobile Narration in Alan Warner's *The Man Who Walks*', *Scottish Studies Review*, 7.1 (2006), 95-109, (p. 101).

Macushla is taken aback at the thought of being mistaken for his Uncle, but the unnerving doubling effect persists when later he meets Tracey, a former member of railway trolley staff:

‘Hey, don’t I know you, you’re yon Man Who Walks, are you not? Oh, that’s hysterical. I’ve seen you by the track from the train.’

‘Jesus, no!’

‘Oh, right enough, you’ve both eyes.’ (p. 220)

Again, Warner’s text sets the comparison up for the reader to invest in, in the search for significance. As Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle point out, however, the uncanny mode of repetition ‘involves a kind of *duplicité* (both doubling and deception) within the familiar’.¹⁶ The doubling effect is encouraged by the narrator as the journey wears on:

Nephew, who scraped his fingers up his forehead, letting the nails scratch into his drizzle-itched skull and shove back wet hair, but as his eyes looked sideways, his crow’s-feet wrinkles pulled back, and in a feral instant, his throat moved like a sleeping eel, cheekbones darted and reappeared. He bore a stunning resemblance to The Man Who Walks then. (pp. 212-3)

The narrator’s impression of a ‘feral instant’ hints at something wild and primordial, Macushla reverting to a more primal being as a result of his immersion in the landscape and re-inscription of culturally significant journeys. Yet as Bennett and Royle indicate, there is also a duplicity here, since the Foreman has in fact been holding The Man Who Walks captive all along, stored in the boot of his car, having stolen the money himself in the first place. This is a double deception; as Macushla realises his journey has been for nothing, based on a central falsehood, so too does the text abolish readerly notions of a deeper significance to his travels. As the Argyll Mafia arrive and proceed to break Macushla’s knees, both protagonist and reader are in the same boat – this has literally been an illusory

¹⁶ Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 4th edn (Harlow: Pearson, 2009), p. 41.

quest with no possibility of completion – nothing, in fact, to search for at all. ‘Everything was becoming a confluence of narratives’ (p. 141), Macushla observes, as the black book, the folk tales he has overheard, the historical markers, his Uncle’s notes held on spools of typewriter ribbon, seem to coalesce before him. But no notion of an underlying narrative offers much consolidation when Colin of the Argyll Mafia is taking a sledgehammer to your kneecaps. This annulment of the inferred central premise is common in Warner. In *The Worms Can Carry Me To Heaven* (2006), having searched for meaning in recounting his life story, it is revealed to Lolo that he is not dying at all, as he had believed; the whole thing was a practical joke arranged by his friend and doctor, Tennis. In *The Stars in the Bright Sky* (2010) the holidaymakers never get anywhere due to flight delays; in ‘Costa Pool Bum’ (2003) the pool-shark protagonist, whose self-assured narrative convinces the reader of his impending victory, finds himself defeated and psychologically dismantled by his opponent. *The Man Who Walks’* lengthy descriptions of the landscape itself, the weather and the flora and fauna, harsh, immutable and indifferent to the people upon it, further exemplify a severed connection between land and people. ‘Man has never been able to sufficiently impress himself on this land, men can only turn on one another under these heartless mountains, useless as beauty’ (p. 17), the narrator observes. The narrative goes so far as to suggest that Macushla is ‘a symbol of his nation’ (p. 87), yet as Schoene states, ‘in Warner’s text hallucination is introduced either to increase the probing power of the narrative, or to act as a lubricant of the novel’s final revelation, which is that Scotland, as it has traditionally been conceived, is ultimately nowhere to be found and has become residual at best and, at worst, irreparably fragmented’ (pp. 100-1). Again, the uncanny process of concepts seemingly coming forth before receding plays with the reader. But that process of toying

(Warner 'believe[s] [...] that all art originates in play'¹⁷) is a technique in itself, and just as the habitual reading practice of continuing to search for the appropriate level on which to conceptualise the text goes on, perhaps there is a deeper purpose to Warner's uncanny. Schoene states that 'the childlike innocence of both Nephew and Uncle renders them easily exploitable, remote-controlled victims in someone else's plot' (p. 97). While referring on one level to the Foreman's use of Macushla and The Man Who Walks as pawns, the text's 'is it or isn't it' conceit again raises the question as to whether there is some 'higher power' at work behind the reality Warner depicts. This raises the disturbing idea that the mimetic contract of this literature requires the reader to invest the reality of the fictional world with a sense of something deeper lying *behind* the uncanny play of suggestion and denial.

In this toying with the mode of reading required, Warner humours the conventions of realist literature before ultimately denying them, drawing attention to the 'rules' of the writer's craft whilst showing that they need not apply. This is perhaps most clearly symbolised in the figure of Morvern's boyfriend in *Morvern Callar*, an unpublished writer who has meticulously constructed a model of his home village and its surroundings in the attic of their shared flat. Peter Brooks draws an insightful parallel between realist literature and model-making, in that '[t]he pleasure that human beings take in scale models of the real – dollhouses, ships in bottles, lead soldiers, model railroads – must have something to do with the sense these provide of being able to play with and therefore to master the real world'.¹⁸ Brooks' observation offers a likely insight into the mind of Morvern's boyfriend, his obsessive mastery of the contained worlds of his model and his novel and, perhaps, of his

¹⁷ Graham Thomson, 'Interview with Alan Warner', *The Barcelona Review*, (1997)
<<http://www.barcelonareview.com/arc/r2/eng/warnerint.htm>> [accessed 15 January 2013]

¹⁸ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 1.

domestic life too. In the real world, however, it seems he has lost that sense of control. His suicide, significantly, is revealed in the opening passage of Warner's first published work, as Morvern recounts that '[h]e'd cut His throat with a knife. He'd near chopped off His hand with the meat cleaver. He couldn't object so I lit a silk cut'.¹⁹ The defiance in Morvern's lighting a cigarette (which would have apparently been against his wishes) gives an initial indication that traditional authorial rules are no longer being enforced, while the partially-severed hand reflects the boyfriend's failure to maintain control of even this final act. The way Morvern describes her boyfriend in life is indicative of the figure of the 'author god' looking down on the creation over which he has total control:

He's spent hundreds till it seems exactly like the real thing, so he sits up there just doing these big stares at it; from the railway line to the top of the stairs and the hotel with the pointing-up tower, to the graveyard path above where you see an exact little model of the actual Tree Church all flowered in a summer-time. Then you see the pylons stood up along the sides of the pass, up towards the dam of the power station. I've got all that right up there in my loft. (p. 38)

The exacting detail of the model indicates a similar mania for the mastering of detail and imposing order on one's surroundings which is displayed by other Warner characters. However, the model also appears like a neat metaphor for writerly control and realist literature. The boyfriend's writing ('[h]e has this computer and god alone knows what He's always putting in to that, He doesn't let me see; He's always saying He doesn't have much time' (p. 38)) displays a similar process of creation and control. Like the other inhabitants of Warner's texts, the boyfriend has created his own conception of the world; staring at it as if worshipping its exactitude. All the model's details are clearly delineated, perfectly modelled and neatly fitted together. The image of the omniscient author is in keeping with James Joyce's famous description of the way '[t]he artist, like the God of creation, remains visible

¹⁹ Alan Warner, *Morvern Callar* (1995; London: Vintage, 1996), p. 1.

behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails'.²⁰ The image of the author looking down like a deity on the world he has created also reflects the readers' habitual practice of naturalising realist prose, a process which by its nature maintains an intrinsic faith in a 'higher order' *behind* the text; a centrality of vision or an underlying meaning that can be discerned by locating the correct set of 'rules' for comprehending the complete pattern. Significance is placed on the author figure since Morvern's boyfriend goes unnamed in the text; references to 'Him' are capitalised; while mention of 'god' lacks capitalisation. As such, when the model is destroyed by Morvern dropping the corpse of her boyfriend on to it from a winch following his suicide, Warner presents something of a grand metaphor for his existential approach to literature. With the analogy of the image – '[h]is toes at the far end of the pass. His face beyond the railway line. His body crushed the hotel with its pointing-up tower at the top of the stairs. The Tree Church on the sgnurr above where he lay back upon the land' (p. 53) – Warner rejects the core conceit of realist literature – that a single vision of reality can be created, controlled and comprehended in art (or in life) – and rejects, too, the figure of a controlling 'author-god'. The way Warner is representing a reality goes beyond the realist template of visual descriptions of physical objects and the mundane everyday, and the mode of reading must be adjusted accordingly to register a level of symbolism and power behind or external to that of bricks and mortar. Like the model, the landscape of the text is in disarray, showing traces of a grand design or an overall 'meaning' which are ultimately obscured, covered over or demolished. At the same time, Warner's texts are filled with striking images and moments which are charged with iconic power, like the Aircrash Investigator of *These Demented Lands* bearing the aircraft propeller on his back as he

²⁰ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916; Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1992), p. 166.

staggers across the landscape, or Lolo and the two Vietnamese girls swimming in the cocoon of the hotel water tank in *The Worms Can Carry Me To Heaven*. Warner's fiction is full of such moments, strangely symbolic-seeming, though the ultimate significance of each remains obscured or out of reach.

The allegorical annihilation of mimetic stability affects the mode of reading in the same way it unsettles Morvern's conception of the world. The result in both cases is an estrangement, an *unheimlich* effect, which can be interpreted via William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. For James, as I described in Chapter One, an intense uncanny sensation can occur as part of a psychological process following an event or period of severe personal disillusionment, disturbance or trauma. In such cases of psychological trauma or spiritual crisis, James argues, the individual's relation to the world around them is estranged – the world is defamiliarised, or rendered *unheimlich*. James believes that our natural conception of reality as ordered and *heimlich* stems from a sense of presence or an organising force which positions us at right relations with the world. That sense might easily be related to authorial control and textual convention, just as it relates to Morvern's boyfriend and his centrality to her perceptions. Additionally, this fundamental change in circumstance alienates Morvern from her own life, bringing into sharp focus the emptiness of her existence in the port. As James puts it, '[t]he world now looks remote, strange, sinister, uncanny. Its colour is gone, its breath is cold, there is no speculation in the eyes to glare with'.²¹ The suicide of Morvern's boyfriend destroys her sense of order and 'homeliness' in the world. In parallel, Warner's killing of the author-God figure, and the related disavowal of the ordered conventions of realist prose, renders his texts strange,

²¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902; New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 151.

resistant to *vraisemblance* and modally indefinable. There is a direct equivalence, then, between Morvern's losing and seeking to regain a *heimlich* sense of the world, and the reader's search for the correct mode by which to naturalise their reading of the text. The reader's comfortable, habitual faith in a set of comprehensible rules for realist fiction, and the notion that the text will inevitably carry an overall meaning intended by the author are disrupted. Yet as Jonathan Culler describes, the reading habit is to continue to search for an appropriate way to naturalise the text, and there remains a nagging sense of underlying order to Warner's texts as a body of work.²² While Warner's narrators often seem local to the port and somewhat parochial, they also at times hint at a possessive or manipulative force which imbues them with an unfathomable sense of significance: 'the Black Lynn, which flows beneath *our* town' (*Man Who Walks*, p. 4), '[o]ur Nephew stumbled to the ground' (*Man Who Walks*, p. 133, my emphases). The arrangement of the Port novels, the self-referencing organisation and the recurring characters, locations and events at times produce an uncanny sense of overarching communal organisation *behind* the narratives of the texts themselves which leads to that same '*feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we might call 'something there''* (James, p. 58) that James describes. While there are other uncanny elements within Warner's stories, this is a wider impression of 'the immanent divinity in things, the essential spiritual structure of the universe' (James, pp. 31-2), or in this case the text, which is often detected but never comes fully into view. This sense of an underlying structure to the port novels informs (or perhaps misinforms) a shared reading of the individual texts, in antithesis to their apparent denial of a deeper significance or order. In exploring this *unheimlich* sensation, which grows when considering Warner's texts as a body of work, the writer's first published novel becomes a kind of

²² Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1975).

central reference point or urtext which is pivotal to the uncanny balancing act Warner constructs between the sense of an underlying reality or organising 'presence' and the existential denial of that sense, both in textual and narrative terms. Morvern Callar, a character critics have struggled to pin down, therefore represents the central figure to the uncanny sense of 'grand design' which seems just out of reach behind Warner's texts.

Little Star of Bethlehem: *Morvern Callar*

[T]he hero of the book is condemned because he doesn't play the game. In this sense, he is an outsider to the society in which he lives, wandering on the fringe, on the outskirts of life, solitary and sensual. [...] [I]n love with a sun which leaves no shadows.

Albert Camus²³

And once more: what is the origin of the uncanny effect of silence, darkness and solitude?

Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 246.

It seems fitting to end an examination of the uncanny in Warner's work by returning to his earliest published novel, *Morvern Callar*, since the figure of Morvern herself haunts many of the later works. After intimations throughout, the final page of the sort-of-sequel *These Demented Lands* eventually confirms that the central character is Morvern herself (or perhaps a sort-of-Morvern). Morvern's foster-father is mentioned in *The Man Who Walks*, in which text it is reported that

the Nephew's only society was splitting a can Special Brew with the disgraced train driver, him never the same after his runaway foster-daughter drowned crossing the Sound on the little illegal ferry [...]. [A] right little ride that wrote some novel book no less, that you saw, thumbed and passed among the young ones in the pubs. (pp. 41-2)

²³ Albert Camus, 'Afterword' (1955), *The Outsider* (1942; London: Penguin, 1983), pp. 118-9.

The novel, of course, was written by Morvern's boyfriend, but published under her name, against the wishes expressed in his suicide note; it is Morvern rather than her late partner who has become part of the lore of the port, like one of Couris Jean's stories. She is mythologised as '*the best bit of real writer that ever rose above these bogs*' (*Man Who Walks*, p. 42), spoken about with awe as 'her' novel is passed around in fascination amongst the younger generations in the port. When that 'disgraced train driver', Red Hanna, reappears in person (as Red Hannan) in the earlier-set *The Deadman's Pedal* (2012), his future foster-daughter Morvern springs to mind, echoing into the port's past as well as its future. And just as that novel begs the question of when in Hannan's future he will encounter Morvern, so a fleeting glimpse of her boyfriend drinking alone in *The Sopranos* (1998) encourages speculation as to whether Morvern is in the port that night, what she is up to, and how soon after this the events of *her* text will transpire. Various characters recur throughout Warner's novels thanks to his regular setting, in particular the Man Who Walks (in 'After the Vision' (1997) and *Morvern Callar*), but it is Morvern who most consistently retains a spectral presence in the minds and stories of the port. Morvern has become a haunting revenant, spoken about and wondered over in her home town and lurking as a conspicuous absence in the reading imagination, suggesting obscure connections throughout Warner's work. Even in the Spanish-set *The Worms Can Carry Me To Heaven*, one wonders if Manolo Follana's apartment in the 'Phases Zone 1' is near the same Spanish town Morvern visits, and almost expects her to appear at the bar of the Imperial Hotel once owned by Lolo's parents. The recurrence of various elements across Warner's texts, and traces of Morvern in particular, forms a kind of intertextual haunting; coming to one text, the reader may sense allusions to or repetition from another (often with slight but unsettling differences, as with 'Red Hanna'/'Hannan'), casting an uncanny disturbance on

the reading process. As Warner's 'originary' protagonist, Morvern is often 'called forth' in the reading imagination in this way. With this in mind, it is notable that the precise nature of Morvern as both a character and a literary figure has fascinated and confounded critics since the book's publication. Her journey is a key to appreciating what is uncanny in Warner's texts, a guiding reference point like the 'Little Star of Bethlehem' from song by the *kosmiche* (or 'cosmic') rock band Can which she often refers to.

Morvern, however, proves an elusive quantity – in some respects an uncanny figure in herself. Critical attention has centred on Morvern's behaviour upon finding her boyfriend's body and immediately thereafter, since the narration tends to detail her actions while eerily omitting her thoughts or emotions. She appears to carry on as normal despite the violent suicide of her lover and the presence of his corpse, 'bare and dead face-down on the scullery lino with blood round' (p. 1). The narrative coolly describes her physical actions as she 'came back towards the scullery then did a running jump over the dead body. The sink was full of dishes so I had to give them all a good rinse. The face was by my bare foot. I fitted the kettle spout under the tap' (p. 2). While she is obviously aware of the corpse as a physical object, the narrative offers no insight into Morvern's emotional response to the suicide, as she proceeds to bathe, shave her legs, play music, smoke, and plan her outfit for the evening, noting her makeup and clothes with exactitude: 'I used a touch of Perfect Plum Glimmerstix and Raspberry Dream powder blush then did my lips with Unsurpassed Wine' (p. 4). Warner has cited the influence of Camus's *L'Etranger* and its precursor, *A Happy Death*, on the narration of the text. Most apparently, Morvern's matter-of-fact approach to the suicide and the physical body itself is reminiscent of Meursault's reaction to his mother's death in the opening of *L'Etranger* ('Mother died today. Or maybe it was

yesterday. I don't know. [...] I caught the two o'clock bus. It was very hot. I ate at Celeste's restaurant as usual' (Camus, *The Outsider*, pp. 1-2)). She carries on to the supermarket where she works her shift, going on to spend the evening drinking and attending a house party where she and her friend Lanna have group sex with two boys from outside the port. 'All was as per usual' (p. 76), Morvern states of the following months during which her boyfriend's body lies in the attic. Reviewers have reacted differently to Morvern's inscrutability. Charles Taylor assessed that Warner had 'created a heroine who's anything but empty, who spends much of her time trying to deaden the feelings crowding her insides. Morvern is engaging, determined to express what she can't articulate'.²⁴ Certainly, it is possible to *ascribe* an inner-life to Morvern as Taylor suggests, but the text offers no evidence that she is 'determined to express' a glut of emotions – rather, she seems to embrace silence and appreciate the inexpressibility of things. When the text slips into free indirect discourse, Morvern registers only the vaguest of sensations: 'a sort of wave of something was going across me' (p. 1), she offers while relating her discovery of the body. She returns to the same ambiguous phrasing throughout the text, noting 'The feeling was going across me' (p. 105) on learning that Lanna had slept with her boyfriend on the afternoon of his suicide. When Morvern does express emotion after finding the body, it is at the sight of the presents under their Christmas tree, explaining that 'useless little presents always made me sad. I start for me then move on to everybody when I greet about the sad things. Her from Corran Road with all sons drowned off the boats' (p. 1). Once the body is stored, Morvern carries on her everyday routine until the summer heat wave of 'High Season' (p. 76), during which time she works, drinks with her friends, and takes driving

²⁴ Charles Taylor, 'Morvern Callar', in *Salon* (1997) <http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/warnera/morvern.htm> [accessed 06 February 2013]

lessons. She remains unnervingly silent on the subject of her boyfriend other than telling family and friends that he has 'Gone' (p. 41). In her review of the novel, Jennifer Kornreich writes that '[w]hile Morvern's opacity is obviously meant to convey hip disaffection, the novel's matter-of-fact amorality quickly grows tiresome'.²⁵ Perhaps buying into the notion of a 1990s 'literary movement' centred on disaffected youth lifestyles and rave culture, Kornreich's dismissive appraisal blinds her to the fact that there is nothing 'obvious' about Morvern's behaviour, or the way it is conveyed in the narrative. There is no sure way to confirm whether Morvern is exercising a powerful restraint on her emotions, whether the narrator is denied access or refuses to detail her 'inner-life', or if she is rather, as some critics claim, an 'amoral' or 'apathetic delinquent' for whom '[n]ot even the discovery that her live-in lover has killed himself in a particularly gruesome way can penetrate [her] emotional anaesthesia' (Kornreich, para. 1). Yet the vagueness with which Morvern describes her emotions and the scarcity of this type of detail (common to realist prose) accentuates the loss of the author-god figure; without that author-ity, it is left to a narrator to observe Morvern's bodily actions alone, fostering a sense of textual alienation.

While the conventions of realist fiction might lead the reader to expect an insight into Morvern's thoughts and emotions, the text emphasises the actions of her body, moving around and carrying out activities, and the information (sights, tastes) her senses receive, without explaining the drives or agency behind them. At times Morvern's body seems to behave of its own accord:

Look, your hand is shaking, says Lanna.

I looked at it and it was. (p. 74)

²⁵ Jennifer Kornreich, 'Morvern Callar', *The New York Review of Books* (1997), in 'nytimes.com' <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/bib/970518.rv114953.html>> [accessed 06 February 2013]

This disconnection, during which the body seems the locus of agency and Morvern's mind seems a passive observer, makes the body appear literally *unheimlich* – as if there is 'nobody home'. Similarly, when she decides to dispose of the corpse, her experience in the meat section of the supermarket hardly seems explanation enough for the cold, systematic way the text describes the process of chopping up the body, with Morvern's free indirect speech slipping into what may be a detached second-person or the narrative voice:

I cut away the still-hanging hand and sliced into the first arm. The coloured goggles helped take away the reality of what you were up to and you didnt smell a thing with those tight noseclips that would do fine for Lanna on holiday too.

What you do is divide the limbs and wrap them in a good few layers of binliner and absorbent hessian sacking bound again and again with strips of thick parcel tape. [...] You dont get difficulty with the head or limbs, it's the organs pushing out from the torso sodden through with blood. (p. 81)

While the transitions between 'I' and 'You' in these sections of the narrative might legitimately be explained as her distancing the trauma of her experience, it also serves to further estrange the bodily actions being observed by the reader. Unlike the uncanny in Kelman's work, which arises through the meticulously detailed inner-lives of his central protagonists, here the text gives no concrete detail of the character's feelings, sensibilities or reflections on her situation. Her account of the group sex she takes part in on the night of the suicide is related in a similarly cold manner: 'I let them do anything to me and tried to make each as satisfied as I could. I concentrated on the different positions' (p. 26). An uncanny sense of presence and absence arises – if Morvern is a passive inhabitant of her body, what force, unseen and unspecified by the narrative, is the agency which drives that body to do what it does? At the same time, the uncanny aura surrounding Morvern is compounded by the suspicion that there *is* something there below the surface while the body carries out those acts; the reading practice, which habitually takes the realist mode as

the starting point for conventional assimilation, demands that there must, surely, be a 'real' character with thoughts, feelings and desires behind the physical existence presented. Having replaced the name on her boyfriend's manuscript with her own, readying it to send off to the first publisher on his list, her neck movements '*as if* I was easing the muscles' (p. 83, my emphasis) describe an artificial act. As Sophie Dale puts it, '[a]s a narrator, Morvern reveals her thoughts and works through indirection, such that the reader is intrigued by what she *doesn't* say, and it is this withheld emotional power, as much as the events of the plot, which compels you to read on'.²⁶ The very absence of those thoughts and emotions generates an uncanny sense of presence – a silence which implies something being suppressed – from which the reader may gradually begin to discern (or conjecture) Morvern's underlying character.

For all that Morvern haunts Warner's other texts as a trace of memory, a mythical figure in port lore or a tangible absence for the reader, she herself is a haunted figure. On several occasions Morvern is described sitting silently with her face in her hands (see for example pp. 48, 125, 147), and while the narrative does not reveal her sensations, it is safe to assume that the loss of her boyfriend, the nature of his death and her treatment of the body are haunting her, unprocessed and unprocessable. This unspoken, traumatic knowledge casts a residual shadow over the narrative. Elements of his suicide, including the attempted severing of his own hand, recur disturbingly in her dreams, when for example 'the horse heads came out the water but fixed to men bodies. All the bare bodies had a hand missing. The menhorses walked up and surrounded me. Blood came from the missing hands when they turned me over to attack' (p. 42). The way he leaves her a message on

²⁶ Sophie Dale, *Alan Warner's Morvern Callar* (New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 35.

disc, while ostensibly loving, also reads as a classic gothic trope, a 'voice from beyond the grave' leaving an ominous set of last wishes, as well as reflecting an authorial drive to maintain control even in death. The boyfriend's haunting of Morvern is indicated by the recurring motif of a shadow which calls to mind his suicide note, and its particularly gothic-sounding instructions to 'FEEL MY LOVE IN THE EVENINGS IN THE CORNERS OF ALL THE ROOMS YOU WILL BE IN' (p. 82). That first evening, drunk at the house party, Morvern makes no reference to what has happened during the day, but notes that '[s]hadows were jumping on the ceiling and I felt sick' (p. 25). The shadow recurs at key points in the text as part of the gothic motif, a ghostly emblem of his absence and the distress it causes Morvern. However, while *vraisemblance* involves the recognition of identifying tropes with which the reader is already familiar, leading to the naturalisation of the text as part of a 'known' genre, the supernatural or gothic elements in *Morvern Callar* seem *unheimlich* (or not to belong); they cannot account for the text as a whole or the uncanny within it, merely adding another unsettling source of estrangement for the reader. William James sees psychological trauma as the loss of the sense of presence which naturalises reality, and Morvern's grasp of reality is estranged by his death. A further effect of this trauma is the new, unnatural sense of his presence *after* his death, adding another level of disturbance to her perceptions.

Morvern's journey in the novel is transitional, however, and the haunting shadow gradually abates when she buries the body parts around Beinn Mheadhonach and the hills surrounding the port, while camping out over a long weekend. After disposing of the physical remains, the shadow motif returns as Morvern cooks an evening meal on her campfire: 'The dark outline of all the mountains was round me. The butt of a Silk Cut lit up in the ashes. A shadow wobbled by the tent. I yawned and there was a buzzing in my ears' (p.

95). Despite the disturbing qualities of the apparition – the word choice makes it unclear whether the shadow is moving past the tent or hovering nearby – this time the shadow is less upsetting and more stabilised. Rather than jumping, it is merely wobbling, and rather than sick, Morvern simply feels tired. With the burial of the body, the haunting effect loses potency. Despite the potential grimness of the burial scene, and for all that the text withholds emotion, there is a strange brightening of mood here. Morvern is carefree in the isolation of the landscape; washing and paddling in mountain pools, sunbathing and using her new pedicure set, cooking on her campfire, playing music on her walkman; as she describes it, ‘everything was luminous’ (p. 94). Later, in the sunlight of a Spanish resort, Morvern notes: ‘I held my hand up and it blotted out the sun itself. I splayed my fingers out and the shelter of the shadow was on my eyes letting me study minutely my fingers and rings against the bluey height moving up forever above’ (p. 195). In a generic gothic sense, laying his body to rest allows the light in, banishing his haunting shadow, and Morvern comes to accept his memory as a part of herself which she has gained control over.

While not delineated through reference to her thoughts and emotions, the palpable upswing in mood during the hillside camping scenes is the beginning of a process through which Morvern moves from an estranged and *unheimlich* impression of the world to a new state. In the port, Morvern’s position in life is fixed like a pin in the model village; she has worked at the superstore from the age of 13, been with her boyfriend since 16, and seems to know only the port and its surroundings. Morvern has lived her life in a small town where everyone knows everyone else’s business, where, as Warner states ‘there are no artists, bookish people or intellectuals’ besides her boyfriend (Dale, p. 30), and where, as her stepfather tells her, there are ‘no big pleasures for the likes of us, eh? We who eat from the

plate that's largely empty. [...] You get told if you work hard you get money but most work hard and end up with nothing' (pp. 44-5). This mindset has become naturalised for Morvern, yet the suicide throws her situation into painful focus; her situation in life, the culture around her, and the absurdity of daily routine are defamiliarised, made alien and unhomely. The lack of feelings and thought represented in the narrative therefore reflects not a dearth of emotion or amorality on Morvern's part but a spiritual crisis, manifested as profound uncanny sensation. As James puts it in his analysis of the victims of trauma and personal crisis,

there are some subjects whom all this leaves a prey to the profoundest astonishment. The strangeness is wrong. The unreality cannot be. A mystery is concealed, and a metaphysical solution must exist. If the natural world is so double-faced and *unhomelike*, what world, what thing is real? An urgent wondering and questioning is set up, a poring theoretical activity, and in the desperate effort to get into right relations with the matter, the sufferer is often led to what becomes for him a satisfying religious solution. (James, p. 152, my emphasis)

In the hills, Morvern develops just such an acute desire for change or evolution, while the reading instinct continues to look for 'right relations' with the text. Yet just as the reading process is habitual and instinctive, as, for example, Culler defines it, it may seem doubtful just how much 'poring theoretical activity' Morvern applies while attempting to resolve her uncanny estrangement.

Jordana Brown charts Morvern's spiritual growth in the novel, but remains convinced of a specifically Christian redemption for the character:

A closer reading reveals that Morvern, far from being an empty opportunist or a shallow hedonist, is deeply unfulfilled by her life in Scotland, and that, rather than being wretched, she is desperately seeking salvation. *Morvern Callar* is not a bit of

rave propaganda; it is a book that, in part, charts a young woman's quest for religion.²⁷

Brown sees Morvern's acceptance into a Catholic ceremony in Spain as a turning point towards her religious salvation, yet her earlier immersion in the natural isolation offered by the hills around Beinn Mheadhonach is the first scene in which she seems perfectly at ease. Despite her grisly task, she has no need to think; she can simply *be*, in the sunlight, basking on rocks and dipping into mountain pools. William James remains adamant that any faith, religious or otherwise, whether or not it has a specific god-figure, may provide the route for individuals to restore the *heimlich* sense of order to their world. As he states, 'when in our definition of religion we speak of the individual's relation to "what he considers the divine," we must interpret the term 'divine' very broadly, as denoting any object that is *godlike*, whether it be a concrete deity or not' (p. 34). Further, James argues, the process of 'realignment' need not be on religious terms at all:

to find religion is only one of the many ways of reaching unity; and the process of remedying inner incompleteness and reducing inner discord is a general psychological process, which may take place with any sort of mental material, and need not necessarily assume the religious form. [...] For example, the new birth may be away from religion into incredulity; or it may be from moral scrupulosity into freedom and license; or it may be produced by the irruption into the individual's life of some new stimulus or passion, such as love, ambition, cupidity, revenge, or patriotic devotion. In all these instances we have precisely the same psychological event, - a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency. (pp. 175-6)

As such, the hillside scenes can be taken as Morvern's first communion with a stabilising 'homely' sensation. Rather than a religious journey *per se*, then, Morvern's is a movement towards a sensual 'at one-ness' with the world as she perceives it. As Gustavo San Roman states:

²⁷ Jordana Brown, 'Finding Her Religion: The Search for Spiritual Satisfaction in Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar*, *Ethically Speaking: Voice and Values in Modern Scottish Writing* ed. by James McGonigal and Kirsten Stirling (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 99-115, (p. 102).

The bathing is significant, suggesting a constant preoccupation in the novel with sensory experience. Morvern is attracted to modern music, the changing morning light, the consistency of the snow or mud in a river in the Highlands, and the various sensations she feels swimming by night in the Mediterranean. There is a certain echo of the *nouveau roman* in this sensual world with little psychological depth, which gives us the impression we should not try to analyse Morvern, just as she never tries to analyse what is happening around her. Morvern's response to the world is sensual rather than cerebral and verbal.²⁸

In contrast with the many characters searching for meaning in Warner's texts (including the boyfriend who pored over his novel-writing and the meticulous replica of his home village), Morvern comes to realise she has no use for detail or exactitude; rather, she is concerned with enjoying her senses and simply *being*, in the moment, within her surroundings. Warner expands:

I think Morvern is a far greater sensualist than [her boyfriend] and this is an important and often overlooked point. [...] I don't think Morvern is promiscuous, I think she's a great sensualist and that's a specific difference. I think sensuality is a virtue but sensuality is more complex and has more grace than just mere sexuality or enjoyment of food or whatever. Morvern is full of these awareness [sic] for Nature, for swimming, for the texture of a specific sunset, for the limitlessness of sexual athletics and why not? (Dale, p. 37)

Taken this way, the burial and subsequent camping scenes in the hills around the port read less as the savage act of an adolescent without morals, an emotionless process of waste disposal, or a theological epiphany, than as the beginning of a harmonising reconnection to nature:

You could feel the heat rays on my skin but also bouncing off the rock next to my flesh.

The odd insect buzzed.

The water shushed away.

Breeze in leaves.

²⁸ Gustavo San Roman, 'Alan Warner: The Scottish Onetti', *Posdata* (1997)
<<http://www.barcelonareview.com/eng/artict5.htm>> [accessed 15 January 2013]

Birds.

I curled my fingers. (p. 103)

On the hillside, when Lanna disturbs her solitude, Morvern has become comfortable not communicating and can only emit a sigh and shake her head (p. 91). While Macushla despairs that '[m]an has never been able to sufficiently impress himself on this land' (*Man Who Walks*, p. 17), for Morvern the land offers an escape from mankind, and a way to connect with something deeper in nature. As she later tells her friend, '[t]his place, it doesn't care, it's just *here*. It helps that this place is here just a few hours' walk away. All this loveliness. It's just silence, isn't it?' (p. 104). It is not going too far to call this immersion a form of communion, according to James' description of:

This sense of the world's presence, appealing as it does to our individual temperament [...]. [O]ur reaction, involuntary and inarticulate and often half unconscious as it is, is the completest of all our answers to the question, "What is the character of this universe in which we dwell?". It expresses our individual sense of it in the most definite way. Why then not call these reactions our religion, no matter what specific character they may have? Non-religious as some of these reactions may be, in one sense of the word 'religious', they yet belong to *the general sphere of religious life*, and so should generically be classed as religious reactions. (p. 35)

The appearance of Lanna, talking excitedly and throwing stones into the pools, cuts Morvern's hillside reverie short. She senses her new-found harmony dissolving: 'There was a long bit of silentness. You heard wee splashes and when I squinted up you saw she was tossing pebbles in the pool. I put my head down again' (p. 103). At first Morvern tries to remain in tune with her newfound *heimlich* sense of 'rightness' behind the chatter of people:

It's a real all-over tan you've got, eh? Lanna says.

Aye, I goes.

I just got my passport Friday, you should see my photo.

Sshh, I went.

Lanna gave a big huff.

The water shushed. (p. 104)

As Heidegger states, however, being-in-the-world necessitates being-with-others, and inevitably, Morvern's long weekend has to end, and she dreads the return to port life which now seems estranged and *unheimlich* to her. As a result, she seeks to remove herself from familiar surroundings entirely. Morvern's 'conversion', to use James' term, reaches its apex during her two visits to Spain, the first a holiday which Morvern extends until her publishing advance runs out, the second a much longer stay after receiving the inheritance left to her boyfriend by his father.

On the first trip, Morvern quickly leaves the horrendous, anti-sensual hedonism of Youth Med (and Lanna) behind her. Heading up the coast without a destination in mind and with money to spend, Morvern begins to feel the same sense of 'correctness' in her perceptions – the uncanny sensation of her previous everyday existence begins to dissipate. Morvern divides her time between eating – alternating mouthfuls of differing flavours and savouring the contrast – sunbathing, and swimming. Her acclimatisation to her surroundings is only enhanced by her lack of knowledge of the local language: 'The noise of words was so meaningless it was restful, I was nodding off a bit' (p. 201), she says, happy to let the sounds wash over her as the taxi driver, for example, 'said some of his words' (p. 122). Morvern embraces her inability to speak the language as another freedom, and her sensual, language-free 'restoration' in Spain allows her a deeper understanding of herself. In *These Demented Lands*, she describes how she has come to appreciate her own unique sense of existence, 'what I call privately *La me da igual*' (*Demented Lands*, p. 12) or, roughly

translated, 'the same to me'. Morvern describes categories of feeling and sensation which she has established to suit her own mode of existence:

what, to myself, I call The Correspondence Feeling. There's the others I could explain: The Toffee Feeling, The Thin Hair Feeling, The Rudder Feeling, The Cheese Sandwich in the Back of the Car Feeling, The October Afternoon Feeling, Peeling the Tangie Feeling: all the ones that make me me. (*Demented Lands*, p. 13)

Rather than ascribing to the beliefs of a certain religion, Morvern spends her time in Spain seeing through the illusory and insignificant aspects of life, grasping what she sees as a kind of purity of essence. 'I feel free when I live The Indifferent Feeling myself' (*Demented Lands*, p. 13), she states, describing an apathy to trivial choices – such as matching outfits or selections from a menu – as the sign of living everyday life on a higher plane. This is the culmination of a latent sense-of-things which Morvern has arguably carried with her throughout the text – the search for a naturalised sense of existence. She also spends time in the resort's dance clubs. In contrast to the desire to find a sense of meaning through various obsessions displayed by other characters throughout Warner's texts, the 'rave catacombs' offer a place where dancers may try to lose themselves in what can easily be related to a desire for 'the divine', a deeper, euphoric sense of communion: 'Immersed in the darkness [...]. [T]he music was just a huge journey in that darkness [...]. You didn't really have your body as your own, it was part of the dance, the music, the rave' (*Morvern Callar*, pp. 202-3). The catacombs become a place of worship to movement and sound, their inhabitants losing themselves through intoxicants and motion (though Morvern remains sober, requiring only the sensations of the rhythm of the music, the pulsing of the lights, and the movement of the body). Yet the setting also has a hellish or purgatorial quality:

we were back in hardcore again and he pushed the 'core as long as I could take it [...]. You felt the whole side of a face lay against my bare back [...]. The male hand slid up and started to go a bit dirtyish on me so I turned away then felt my way to the

left. My foot found the edge of the carpet but you couldn't tell if I was on the near or far side of the room. I started moving left but bumped a pillar then stepped on a leg of someone. (pp. 203-4)

The claustrophobic darkness and heat, the writhing bodies, the inability to communicate over the cacophony, the parallel release and threat of anonymity, is as much a macabre, infernal scene as it is a place of freedom and escape. The catacombs are another example of Warner's texts leaving the reader unsure exactly of how to interpret them – as a dark, claustrophobic setting of youthful debauchery, or a place of spiritual communion or religious euphoria. The infernal nature of the rave manifests in an unnerving moment of sensory disturbance or doubling before the lights dim again, when Morvern notes '[y]ou saw people on their own, drinking Red Bulls and looking the same as me then the darkness came again' (p. 202). Rave clubs in *Morvern Callar* are locations where young people try to embrace life, yet also have associations with death; the Spanish club is called 'The Spook Factory', while in the London club where Morvern later goes dancing with her intoxicated publishers,

The guy behind the bar told us the club owner could only get the black marble for the bar from a stonemason who made graves and if you felt under the rim where I was standing you could feel an abandoned inscription. I ran my fingers under it and it was right enough; we were leaned against all these gravestones. (p. 163)

The effect of these relics and intimations of death and the afterlife, hidden in plain sight, is to charge Warner's locations with a gothic significance, enforcing the hellish aspects of these places of dance, 'worship' and life. Again, Warner's reality is at once mundane, and seemingly a location of deeper forces lying beneath the surface.

The rave catacombs are not the only 'place of worship' Morvern visits in the text, and for all that she may appear to find her own spirituality, a conflicting reading of her 'rebirth' as one of religious significance can also be discerned. She attends a church

ceremony with her drunken publishers in London, shushing them and genuflecting: 'when the priest touched my head with long thin fingers I swayed as if I was going to faint. [...] then I took the wafer with its taste in my mouth. [...] I screwed my eyes shut tight and had a little prayer' (p. 165). While her feeling faint might be explained by her having stayed up all night drinking and dancing, its occurrence at the point of contact with the priest during the ceremony also suggests a reaction to elements beyond the material, some fundamental force external to the scope of the narrative and to the realist mode. Morvern later tries praying in her apartment, and in the tree church outside the port, each time after returning from her trips to Spain. Jordana Brown's religious interpretation of the text goes to unlikely extremes in electing Morvern as a Christian saviour of polytheistic and heathen Britain, reborn and 'destined to be a new St Columba, bringing sacred healing to a country that is spiritually adrift' (Brown, p. 114), despite Morvern's sensual investment in herself and her own drifting, unemployed state at the end of the novel. Yet the more atavistic aspects of Morvern's 'conversion' – an animalistic prioritising of sleeping, eating, exploring and relaxing – suggest that Morvern's enlightenment does not subscribe to a particular belief system beyond the sensual. Whether she is taking part in a religious ceremony, a rave, or swimming in the sea, Morvern naturalises herself with her environment thoughtlessly and sensually. In this way, Morvern becomes attuned to 'the divine', and is raised above other Warner characters; in the way she is called to mind by other texts she becomes a touchstone for the reader, albeit one whose ultimate significance remains oblique. After her first trip to Spain, returning to the port she finds Lanna and Red Hanna further estranged from her new sense of being; conversation is awkward and '[t]here was a long bit of silentness as I blew out smoke' (*Morvern Callar*, p. 181). Morvern has brought her silent one-ness back with her, yet here it alienates her from the others – *she* appears *unheimlich*

to *them*. Shortly thereafter, she leaves them at her flat, exiting wordlessly to return to Spain. She is *unheimlich* within Warner's textual world, somehow not belonging, but she is also the touchstone of authentic feeling, belonging in a deeper way which the other characters can only strive for in their misguided approaches to locating meaning. For the reader, an uncanny uncertainty surrounds whether she is more than just a young woman finding herself, but perhaps also a symbolic figure indicating something deeper behind the texts, guiding towards an augmented mimetic contract which accommodates the unseen but powerful dimension to the reality Warner represents.

Morvern's route to restoring a *heimlich* sense of the world is through a process of letting go, what James refers to as 'the passage into nothing' which he states is defined by '[p]assivity, not activity; relaxation, not intentness, should be now the rule. Give up the feeling of responsibility, let go your hold, resign the care of your destiny to higher powers, be genuinely indifferent as to what becomes of it all' (p. 110). In the marked difference between Morvern and other Warner characters in her approach to life and the way she locates significance, and the related way the character recurs or is brought to mind in other Warner texts, Morvern carries a uniqueness and centrality in the writer's work. Similarly, her instinct towards not speaking (and her related pleasure at not comprehending Spanish) also indicates a symbolic, meditative sense of being-in-the-world. As a 'Youthmed' rep explains: 'caller, ah, it means, ah, silence, to say nothing, maybe' (p. 125). Regarding the character as a sensual icon who better comprehends and is at one with her existence suggests that there is indeed a deeper, more symbolic level to the texts. In turn, this implies a higher design or sense of 'presence' which, through Warner's use of recurring characters and locations, extends throughout his work. While Macushla states '[I] don't want to travel,

I want to *arrive*, be elsewhere, like old Ovid, concerned with objects that transform themselves' (*Man Who Walks*, p. 64), Morvern is transformed in such a way that she has *always* arrived, wherever she is at a given moment – an airport bar, a London church, or the Spanish ocean. She is like the land itself ('it's just *here*' (p. 104)). Morvern is the symbolic antithesis of Macushla, who struggles against nature every step of the way, being battered by the elements, covered in welts after disturbing a wasp byke, growling at the indifferent mountains and repulsed by the creatures that inhabit the land: 'woe betide the circumstances a few hours of shuttled sunshine produce as crawling things spill forth' (*Man Who Walks*, p. 17). Similarly Macushla hates water, and nearly drowns on the one occasion he tries to use a boat. For Morvern, swimming and bathing are immersive, sensual occupations, engaging her whole bodily surface. Her sensuality echoes Freud's uncanny theory of the recurrence of mankind's earlier, more primitive existence. This primal behaviour can be clearly observed when Morvern is starving as she crosses the island in *These Demented Lands*:

I was so hungry I trembled [...]. My tongue flicked at the diamonds of liquid then my lips clamped onto the moss, by rubbing my face side to side with the base of my tongue right out I could gulp down gallons and taste the salady smeg of raw blossoming life. I could connect to our fetid origins in the faded, damp places. I found a pink growth and kneeled, my arse up in the air as I shoved my face deeper into that planetary sponge of mossflowers, biting away at the base. (p. 25)

On a symbolic level the figure of Morvern here connects the sensual, the bodily, the originary and the spiritual, reaching for the divine through the recurrence of an earlier mode of being:

gods are conceived to be first things in the way of being and power. They overarch and envelop, and from them there is no escape. What relates to them is the first and last word in the way of truth. Whatever then were most primal and enveloping and deeply true might at this rate be treated as godlike, and a man's religion might thus

be identified with his attitude, whatever it might be, towards what he felt to be primal truth. (James, p. 34)

If gods are 'first things', an essential, originary force which has always been present, then Morvern's 'resurrection' and return to an earlier mode of existence renders her godlike to the reader, and within her own existence, connecting her to the divine through the immersion in nature. That primordial truth, or design, might go some way to explaining both the apparent disconnection between Morvern's bodily actions and her mind; as she states in her letter to Red Hanna in *These Demented Lands*, she has '[l]istened closely to my body and done what it told me' (p. 183). James also links the religious and the uncanny sense of existence through the body:

For the psychologists the tracing of the organic seat of such a feeling would form a pretty problem – nothing could be more natural than to connect it with the muscular sense, with the feeling that our muscles were innervating themselves for action. Whatsoever thus innervated our activity, or 'made our flesh creep', - our senses are what do so oftenest, - might then appear real and present, even though it were but an abstract idea. (p. 63)

Morvern relinquishing herself to her body and enjoying its movements forms her connection to an external, controlling agency or presence. While the existential tendencies in Warner's texts often deflate the sense of a deeper meaning to reality (immediately after 'regressing' to the state of desperately eating the moss, for example, Morvern realises she's in view of the cattle drivers), what is most uncanny about the figure of Morvern is the way, despite her seemingly shallow emphasis on bodily surfaces (tanning, make-up) and exterior sensation (swimming, eating), she becomes an indicator of 'something there' outwith the realm of the senses, even while the narrative reveals very little about her own inner life.

Warner's Mythopoeitics

In *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach's seminal study of the representation of reality in European culture, the author identifies the Homeric style of literature (though centuries before the idea of representing reality became central to the literary) by focusing on Odysseus' scar. In book 19 of *The Odyssey*, Euryclea recognises the disguised Odysseus from the scar on his thigh, at which point the main narrative is postponed, switching to a lengthy and detailed description of the boyhood boar hunt on which the scar was obtained. Auerbach identifies Homer's

need for an externalization of phenomena in terms perceptible to the senses. Here is the scar, which comes up in the course of the narrative; and Homer's feeling simply will not permit him to see it appear out of the darkness of an unilluminated past; it must be set in full light, and with it a portion of the hero's boyhood.²⁹

The scar functions not only as a plot device but also as both an authenticating detail, grounding the character in a mimetic reality, and a symbol of the mythology surrounding the heroic figure of Odysseus. For Auerbach, then, the Homeric poet must give a backstory – the scar cannot emerge from nowhere. Thus the character is at once a real man and an archetypal figure. A similar mythopoeitic device is introduced in *Morvern Callar* when Lanna exclaims: 'Morvern's got a special knee. Come on, show the boys your special knee cause it's Christmas' (p. 17). The observers in the pub look on in wonder as '[t]hey could see the different coloured specks shining just under the surface of the skin and the whole knee sparkling when the beam of light caught it' (p. 18). The narrative digresses as it does in *The Odyssey* as Lanna relates how Morvern obtained the sparkling effect: 'when she was wee she came horsing in the scullery, slid on her knees and skinned one deep on these Christmas

²⁹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (1946; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 6.

cards she was making and the glitter sunk right in her' (p. 18). The knee is described prior to Morvern's travels (unlike Odysseus' scar, revealed upon his return), but in a similar way the knee marks Morvern out as different, other, 'special'; she will later provoke similar fascination when showing it to the boys at the house party and to Susan, her publisher, and considers showing it to Couris Jean. Warner is explicit about his desire to give Morvern mythical significance:

There's a fashionable word in seventies criticism – "mythopoetic" – I always liked that word, and in *Morvern Callar* I wanted to tell a working class person's story as if it wasn't just realism, so that it had something of the quality of myth. In everything I've done, I wanted to try and give the impermanent the quality of myth. (Dale, p. 66)

Taking this mythopoetic aspect into account goes some way to explaining the uncanny indefinability of mode in Warner's texts. Reading Morvern as a mythopoetic archetype or guiding figure connecting the physical and the divine in Warner's work contributes to the mysterious sense of significance in his texts.

Having observed a train of ants salvaging the remains of a dead cicada, Morvern later becomes aware of ants similarly carrying away a chipped fragment of her scarlet-painted nail. Like the cicada, and the ants, and the waves, Morvern has become one with the ecosystem. In an epiphanic moment after three days without sleep in the rave catacombs, Morvern goes swimming in the dark, her natural senses uncannily heightened: 'Another wave came in and you could sense by the pull and suck of the water it was deeper to my left so I stepped there. You could hear water pouring off a flat rise of rock behind me. I was getting all the deeper' (p. 207). Morvern is acutely aware of her physicality, 'legs hung in that huge deep under me and the layer on layer and fuzzy mush of star pinpricks were above me with the little buzz of me in between' (p. 208). The emptiness of the scene with

Morvern as a speck in an existential nothingness emblematises her insignificance, while her central position in the vast spaces above and below her enforce the mythopoetic quality of her experience. Eventually staggering out of the water and making her way back to the resort, in another moment full of symbolism Morvern perceives that '[a]cross the orchard there was something else. You could see part of a giant blue eye in pale light' (p. 210). Rather than some creator-figure revealing itself or a vision of an 'author-god', however, the image is part of a drive-in cinema screen, partly hidden by trees. Yet this typical Warner deflation does not rob the scene of its power; that initial impression of Morvern being observed by an all-seeing creator-figure remains, as with Bernstein's impression of the uncanny receding but leaving a trace of itself, and the scene retains a significance beyond the mundanity of the conventional realist mode. As a result of this and similarly symbolically 'charged' moments, by this point Morvern makes a transition, becoming something of a mythopoetic archetype or guiding star within both the world/s of Warner's texts, and the estrangement of the reading process. She becomes the divine connection to the reader's sense of meaning or 'presence' behind the port texts, haunting the shadows as her boyfriend did to her: 'you became aware of the perfumes from the thick leaves that were black in those shadows where I stood' (p. 210). While Warner's uncanny hinges on the axis between existential nothingness and the possibility of a 'great design' behind reality, Morvern can be allegorical to either, or more accurately, both.

When Morvern returns following a second, lengthy stay in Spain, she avoids the port itself, looking for work in the surrounding areas having run out of money. Morvern is many things by this stage in the text, and perhaps this explains the lack of critical consensus surrounding the character – she can be read as an indicator of the divine, possessing a self-

contained 'oneness' with existence which suggests a grand design or organising presence *beyond* the material realm. She is at the same time a kind of spiritual nomad, and a mythical figure in stories amongst the port's inhabitants who pass 'her' novel around like a holy text or a dirty book. She is also homeless, unemployed, and single, pregnant and with little formal education. When she reaches the tree church, significantly a place of religious worship, a structure built from living nature and a prominent marker on 'His' model of the landscape, she by turns vomits, sleeps, and prays. In these actions the character encapsulates its own ambiguity, controlled by the drives of her body but seemingly also deferent to a 'higher' power, while at the same time desecrating its place of worship. Spiritually she has gained a supreme vantage point, while physically looking out over the landscape where the corpse of her once-controlling boyfriend's body lay, giant and dominating, on the model. Adding weight to the religious reading of Morvern's 'restoration', Brown points out that the anonymity of the father of her 'child of the raves' (*Morvern Callar*, p. 229) chimes with the concept of immaculate conception, and while that critic's proclamation of a 'virgin birth' (Brown, p. 113) may seem a step too far given the physicality of the rave catacombs, the mystery lends weight to the impression of Morvern as a vessel of divinity in a Christian sense. As James puts it:

When we come to study the phenomenon of conversion or [...] regeneration, we shall see that a not infrequent consequence of the change operated in the subject is a transfiguration of the face of nature in his eyes. A new heaven seems to shine upon a new earth. (p. 151)

In this final scene, the text suggests a tangible religious connection between Morvern and 'a new heaven' when, inexplicably, she 'looked up and there seemed to be a feather coming down to me out the night' (p. 226). In this uncanny moment Morvern turns to a natural explanation, having recently heard about eagles in the area, while the reader may make the

religious inference of an angelic presence looking down on the church and the reborn Morvern; typically for Warner, however, the feather is in fact 'the first snowflake twirling down' (p. 226).

Conclusion: 'His Shredded Evidence'

'I looked out at the landscape moving without haste to no bidding at all'.

Alan Warner, *Morvern Callar*, (p. 90)

As with many of the protagonists in James Kelman's work, Warner's characters are constrained within existences which seem *unheimlich*, and live with the ephemeral feeling that there is a deeper way to appreciate life, their surroundings, and their links to history, land or folklore, one that suspends what is rationally intelligible, if only they could locate it. Similarly, the sense of a symbolic or mythopoetic order in the texts raises questions of agency and the suggestion of other forces of religious, spiritual, psychological or bodily influence, hidden from character, narrator and reader alike. The resulting modal disharmony means the mimetic contract is continuously unsettled as the mundane, the mythopoetic, the psychological and the pseudo-religious jostle, interact and converge.

Morvern, unlike Kelman's protagonists and uniquely among Warner's, is presented with the financial opportunity to remove herself from her situation and gain a distanced perspective on the uncanny sensations which estrange her sense of being-in-the-world. On the rare occasions when Kelman's characters do achieve that kind of vantage point, abolishing the *unheimlich*, they do so, like Morvern, through processes which isolate them from others – the Nightboilerman's solitude, Kieron Smith's imaginary ghost-guardians, or Patrick Doyle playing his mysterious pipes, for example. However, while Kelman's work

holds the reader in tight proximity to the protagonists' experience and inner-life, the narrative of *Morvern Callar* denies the reader access to Morvern's mind or inner-experience, an uncommon technique in realist prose which estranges the main character by disallowing the habitual assumption that a character's actions will be intelligible with reference to their revealed inner states.

In contrast to Warner's other characters, Morvern's 'letting go' through not looking for any deeper meaning ironically attunes her to the divine, resulting in 'the getting of [her] soul in order, the discovery of its genuine habitat and vocation, the escape from falsehoods into what for [her are] ways of truth' (James, p. 186). Morvern seems to be the central figure, the key to grasping the 'bigger picture' of Warner's fiction, but she also retains her ambiguity so that, in an uncanny way, the unseen 'truth' which lies beyond always seems about to come into view but never arrives. Warner postulates a chaotic and godless world following the death of Morvern's boyfriend (which accordingly takes place just before the opening of his first published work), and a parallel sense of textual disorder for the reader:

Books that have tight elegance often fall dead for me. If you look at James Cain or Raymond Chandler, they're perfect and formed in relation to plot. They're ideologically short. I like books to feel slightly out of control, inelegant, with long detours. Of course it's a construct but you create a *vérité* feel.³⁰

Vérité implies realism or naturalism (apparent in Morvern choosing her lipstick or shaving her legs), but in cinematic terms it also suggests improvisational techniques which capture the messy and unplanned aspects of life. Warner's construct is achieved by denying and deliberately disrupting other, conventional constructs – a designed sense of being under-designed. There are many minor uncanny occurrences in Warner's fiction, such as the

³⁰ Stuart Jeffries, 'A Life in Writing: Alan Warner', *The Guardian*, 1 May 2012, in 'guardian.co.uk' <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/may/25/life-in-writing-alan-warner>> [accessed 16 January 2013]

suggestions of demons in *The Deadman's Pedal* and the blue-tinged ghost seen by Morvern and the Aircrash Investigator in *These Demented Lands*. These smaller examples conjure a sense of strangeness and uncertainty to the fictional world, problematizing the realist mode. The broader uncanny effect of these works, however, is founded on that sense of *vérité* or constructed chaos Warner describes. While the Hollywood film crew in *The Man Who Walks* is 'determined to force a vision on the mundane and curse the consequences' (p. 277), the disparity between the texts' everyday realism, existential questioning and sense of power or order behind the narrative itself, leave the reader in doubt over whether or not that vision is justified. Warner's uncanny, then, is far removed from the Scottish tradition which predominantly informs, for example, James Robertson's approach. Like Kelman's, it is based in existential questions of perception and significance. Yet beyond the scope of his characters' search for meaning, considering Warner's body of work as a whole constitutes a sustained site of uncanny disturbance which documents the banal even as it gestures towards something beyond.

Conclusion

‘CHANGE RULES is the supreme graffito’.

Edwin Morgan¹

This thesis has challenged long-standing critical conceptions of Scottish literature and its development in the modern period, particularly those which essentialise realism as both the characteristic means and the necessary end of Scottish writing. Whether stated or implicit, the notion of Scottish literature as a medium of national representation, and its accompanying teleology of ‘authenticity’, tend to obscure the range, complexity and instability of the realist techniques employed by the writers at issue. Resisting this teleology allows us to decentre one (essentialist) image of tradition while positing a range of other continuities and patterned tensions across modern Scottish literary history.

To this end I have identified and explored a Scottish ‘counter-tradition’ of uncanny fiction. Examining this tradition serves two purposes. Firstly, it brings a much-needed critical focus to techniques of modal disruption and the uncanny in the works of a number of significant modern Scottish writers, effects previously overlooked or marginalised by approaches centred on realism and its development. Secondly, it demonstrates the need to think critically about the accidental origins of tradition, rather than treating tradition as if it emerges from some ‘essence’ of the nation, and to contest totalising readings based on a prescribed ‘realist’ teleology. In so doing, I argue that tradition be acknowledged and

¹ Edwin Morgan, ‘Preface’, *Essays* (Cheshire: Carcanet, 1974), p. vii.

incorporated into wider interpretative schema in a sophisticated way that responds to the particularities of individual texts.

The Scottish Tradition in the Uncanny, Post-1970s

The scope of this thesis does not allow an exhaustive consideration of every writer who might be associated under the above heading. However, the selected texts indicate and exemplify what I believe to be the analytical scope offered by an increased awareness of the way these writers employ uncanny effects and how that use relates to the wider concerns of the fiction. At opposite ends of the spectrum of contemporary Scottish uncanny writing are Ali Smith and James Robertson. Smith has been shown to incorporate and reconceptualise an existing Scottish uncanny motif – the uncanny guest – as part of the wider contemporary debates of her work, in which the *unheimlich* aspects of those strange figures ironically reflects their affinity with ‘the real’ in the midst of an estranged postmodern world. Her use of the uncanny invader recalls the earlier creations of Muriel Spark, but this correlation should not overshadow the critique of the hyper-real twenty-first-century which is the ultimate concern of these texts. Smith reenergises the familiar trope by setting it to new purposes, her modal intruders stalking and defamiliarising habitual everyday lives and restoring disturbing attention to contemporary issues from the Iraq war to the narcissistic pseudo-pleasure of social media. As such, Smith’s texts require an actively responsive critical approach which situates her as perhaps the central figure of modern Scottish uncanny fiction.

For Robertson, by contrast, the uncanny is a set of techniques, perfected by Hogg and Stevenson, which recur in a linear continuity. As I have argued, Robertson’s work has much to say about the relation between culture and history and the progression of religious

faith in Scotland, for example, yet in so faithfully emulating the effects of those nineteenth-century Scottish writers, his uncanny loses its ability to disturb, instead becoming a comfortable, *heimlich* indicator of the national lineage to which his own work is added as a contemporary instalment and extension. If the conception of national inheritance displayed in Robertson's work is reminiscent of Michael Billig's definition of banal nationalism, A.L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* starkly identifies just what is *unheimlich* in conceptions of 'the voice of the nation' and nationalism itself. Critical analysis has often habitually confined this key uncanny Scottish text within the boundaries of existing national tradition and familiar literary reference points. As I have demonstrated, however, Kennedy's novel does more than recall Hogg or Stevenson, exploring the ways in which the uncanny and the homely inhabit one another in the spheres of personal relationships, individual psychology, and politics. Like Smith, and unlike Robertson, in Kennedy's work the Scottish connection is shown to be incidental rather than essential.

A strong, recurrent strain of uncanny modal disruption is demonstrated in the work of James Kelman, the central and culminating figure in several appraisals of Scottish literary realism. While Kelman is undoubtedly the pivotal figure of post-1970s urban realism, re-conceiving him as a writer of the uncanny posits a dramatic reconsideration of the trajectory of twentieth-century Scottish literature. At the same time, a key irony clings to Kelman's technique viewed under the sign of the uncanny, since his disruptions of realism are necessitated precisely by his unswerving emphasis on authenticity of representation. Discrepancies between reality as perceived experientially by his isolated central characters, and empirically by bodies of state authority and elitist power structures, render their lived experience *unheimlich*, dissociative and oppressive. Alan Warner's approach to the uncanny,

while also stemming from the lived experience of his characters, is stylistically distinct, since his modal disruption comes about through the conjuring of a mythopoetic dimension to everyday settings, a sense of oblique but imposing significance which seems to hum ominously behind the textures of everyday reality. The writers under consideration in this project employ uncanny effects for different reasons and to different ends, but their general concern with modal disruption contests the notion that this period of Scottish writing is unproblematically characterised by realism.

Moving forward, an awareness of this counter-tradition within the 'renaissance' period of the 1980s and 1990s and beyond is also of critical importance in the appreciation of emerging writers. Two recent debut novels, Jenni Fagan's *The Panopticon* (2012) and Linda Cracknell's *Call of the Undertow* (2013), for example, show the abiding recurrence of uncanny effects in Scottish writing. Cracknell's resituating of the Scottish selkie myth in a contemporary setting is a more straightforward application of folklore than Ali Smith's postmodern reworkings of the uncanny wanderer figure. While James Robertson performs a very determined emulation of earlier authors' uncanny techniques, Cracknell's text is geared towards simply telling a mystery story which raises questions about motherhood and guilt, invoking Scotland's folkloric history rather than the specific works of nineteenth-century novelists. In this her text is arguably more similar to the way Hogg, Stevenson or Barrie transferred traditional oral tales to the medium of prose fiction. In *The Panopticon*, by contrast, Fagan's appreciation of the post-1970s uncanny tradition is tangible in the experience of her protagonist Anais Hendricks as she fights to maintain a sense of self and of reality while struggling through the Scottish care and legal systems: 'I'm a bit unconvinced of reality, full stop', she says, 'It's fundamentally lacking in something, and

nobody seems bothered'.² Her oppressive paranoia and sense of observation from the care system and the police pushes Anais into dark and recursive corners of the mind which recall, for example, Sammy Samuels' experiences in *How late it was, how late*, and which Kelman traces in an existential tradition uniting Franz Kafka and James Hogg. At the same time, Anais's obsession with her unknown origins (having no memory of her parents) leads to her uncanny conception of 'the experiment', a shady organisation which grew her 'from a bit of bacteria in a petri dish' (p. 31) and now monitors and tests her in ways which are both sinister and hopeful, since she imagines they hold the truth about her identity. The way she imaginatively clings to the uncanny recalls the way Kieron Smith incorporates his recently-deceased grandfather into a reassuring conception of a protective spirit-world in *Kieron Smith, boy*. Yet her pursuit of her origins, going to the institution where she was born to talk to a patient who claims to have known her mother, leads only to further confusion and disorientation, just as it does for Eve Smart in *The Accidental* and Morvern Callar when she seeks her mother's grave in *These Demented Lands*. From the works of both Cracknell and Fagan it is clear that the uncanny is an ongoing concern in contemporary Scottish fiction. Elements of Fagan's text in particular call to mind uncanny dimensions of key Scottish texts from the 1980s and 1990s, suggesting that that period might now be historicised as an influential site of uncanny writing.

Another central finding of the thesis emerges in the parallel between the process which forms national and literary traditions, and the mechanism through which uncanny effects are generated. As has been demonstrated, both tradition and uncanny sensation come into being when a pattern of repetition is identified; the originary moments of that pattern pass unnoticed, while recognition occurs some way into the repetitive process. The

² Jenni Fagan, *The Panopticon* (2012; London: Windmill, 2014), p. 100.

point of confirmed difference between the uncanny and tradition follows that moment of recognition. As Michael Billig argues, hegemonic pressures seek to make particular recurring elements seem traditional and therefore *heimlich*, consolidating and institutionalising features of national literary character. By contrast, when the uncanny is recognised in a pattern of repetition, it is marked by the way it destabilises what seems natural or homely. In identifying the counter-tradition of the uncanny – in the work of writers who are often positioned at the heart of post-1970s Scottish realism, among others – this thesis reveals the arbitrary or accidental formation of the realist trajectory in Scottish fiction and the mistake of accepting tradition uncritically.

Yet crucially, recognising this inessentiality does not deny tradition, but relativises it, refining how the concept of tradition might be approached. My thesis demonstrates the necessity and value of a critical responsiveness to decentred ‘national’ connections within wider thematic, narratological and analytical schema. This is not to invoke misguided attempts to redefine the national by its multiplicity and heterogeneity under the ‘national’ idiom of anti-essentialism, a process by which

[t]he illusion of cultural homogeneity is reconfigured as a pre-theoretical appearance stripped away by methodical investigation to reveal a previously hidden cultural plurality. This plurality is then offered – equivocally, not quite explicitly – as the real essence of Scottishness. (Miller, ‘Scotland’s Authentic Plurality’, p. 165)

Rather, the method set out in this thesis allows for national traditions to be fruitfully considered without recourse to banal nationalism, reductive pre-existing templates or rigid assumptions of inheritance. The similarities between the uncanny guests of Ali Smith and Muriel Spark, the deep blacknesses of recursive thought experienced by Kelman’s Nightboilerman and Hogg’s Robert Wringhim, and particularly the correspondence between *The Testament of Gideon Mack* and *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified*

Sinner, are evidential, as my thesis demonstrates. Other writers, like Alan Warner, do not so much recall particular Scottish forebears or textual archetypes, but the sense of uncanny estrangement from reality and the loss (and sometimes the revelatory regaining) of a naturalising sense of presence that characterise the wanderings of Morvern Callar is equally on show in Jennifer's relation to Savinien in *So I Am Glad*, the power of Miles Garth over crowds who are disenfranchised by their postmodern environment in *There but for the*, and even Gideon Mack's childhood loss of faith in an out-of-body experience and his later location of a very different guiding presence in the form of Gil Martin. These connections should not be dismissed, but neither should critical focus upon the fact of these continuities be to the detriment of the wider implications of the texts under examination.

New Cartographies

As indicated in the introduction, the scope of this thesis has led me to be selective in choosing writers whose work offered a broad consideration of the issues in question. Resultantly, there remain writers whose work might similarly benefit were critical focus turned to their use of uncanny tropes and techniques, among them Jackie Kay, Ron Butlin, and Iain Banks. Nor must this focus be directed exclusively towards prose fiction. David Greig's play *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*, for example, in which an academic becomes the protagonist of her own supernatural ballad (which is inspired by the plot of 'Tam Lin'), might provide another angle from which to consider the Scottish tradition in the uncanny. As Jeanne Schaaf notes, Greig 'exemplif[ies] the ways in which contemporary Scottish dramaturgy conjures up a "canon" without getting trapped inside of it'.³ Indeed, Schaaf's identification of recurring theatrical features which have become associated with

³ Jeanne Schaaf, 'The Strange Redoing of Popular Storytelling: A Study of David Greig's *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*', unpublished paper (Glasgow: The University of Glasgow, 5 July 2014)

Scottish drama, and the play's 'constant shift in the modes of discourse displayed' ('Strange Redoing') demonstrate similar concerns with the uncanny and banal nationalism as does this thesis, indicating that the principles I have explored here are concurrently being applied to Scottish fiction in other media. Kirsty Macdonald, for example, has applied a similar focus to modern Scottish cinema.⁴

Michael Billig argues that the process of nationalism produces restrictive conceptions of territory 'where boundaries are rigorously drawn' (p. 20), which then become habitually accepted and banal, whereas in much earlier times conceptions of those borders were less precise, if they were conceived of at all. This thesis applies pressure to the map of Scottish literature, drawing attention to the accidental nature of the traditions that have been inscribed as its defining features and rejecting the way it has been confined to a linear progression in which, in the twentieth-century at least, realism has been deemed the central path. In so doing, potentialities for remapping or de-territorialising are suggested, not only for criticism, but for the Scottish canon.

Loosening national boundaries in criticism and restoring awareness of the critical choice involved in the way we approach national traditions opens up avenues of international comparative study. Scottish texts can resultantly be juxtaposed with works from other countries as a healthy means of interpretative defamiliarisation. While I have compared the experiences of Patrick Doyle in *A Disaffection* to Dostoevsky's *The Double*, for example, Kelman makes a further connection:

you're into the darker recesses of the mind, reminiscent of the stories of that great writer [...] Edgar Allan Poe, these strange tales of imagination and mystery. Poe's

⁴ Kirsty Macdonald, 'Against Realism: Contemporary Scottish Literature and the Supernatural', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. by Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh, Edinburgh: University Press, 2007), pp. 328-335.

stepfather was Scottish and as a boy young Edgar spent a little bit of time in Ayrshire. He enjoyed magazines such as *Blackwood's* which published writers like James Hogg.⁵

A comparative study of the uncanny in the works of Dostoevsky, Hogg, Kelman and Poe might similarly produce new developments in Kelman studies. Douglas Gifford's description of *So I Am Glad* as 'Scottish magic realism',⁶ meanwhile, might productively be pursued if, perhaps, the word 'Scottish' were parenthesised. While Gifford defines the mode of Kennedy's text through reference to Hogg and Stevenson, Savinien might instead be compared to other literary revenants such as, for example, that of José Arcadia Buendía in Gabriel García Márquez' *100 Years of Solitude* (1967); both are apparently dead figures from long ago who return in ways which problematize assimilation not only by their reappearance but in the way that the characters around them accept this recurrence. While James Robertson's careful emulations of Hogg and Stevenson can be seen as expressions of banal nationalism when examined in the context of Scottish studies, meanwhile, in an international study those texts, as well as Smith's postmodern augmentation of the wandering 'witch' figure, might be reconsidered as contrasting examples of the maintenance and inheritance of folk tales and oral tradition in contemporary literature, alongside works by writers such as Angela Carter, Alice Munro, or Salman Rushdie.

In terms of the Scottish canon, I have already indicated how identifying the uncanny as a major Scottish tradition repositions formerly 'problematic' writers (in the sense that critics have found their work hard to define or difficult to position in relation to other writers) more centrally – Ali Smith and Alan Warner come to occupy key positions as stylistic

⁵ James Kelman, 'When I Was That Age Did Art Exist?', in *"And the Judges Said...": Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002), pp. 415-446 (p. 442).

⁶ Douglas Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction since 1945 II: Despair, Change and Hope', in *Scottish Literature*, ed. by Sarah Dunnigan, Douglas Gifford and Alan MacGillivray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 899-980 (pp. 959).

innovators developing the uncanny tradition in unfamiliar and freshly-unsettling ways. Kelman's inscribed centrality to Scottish urban realism is also reconfigured in response to the new awareness of his uncanny techniques. *So I Am Glad* is taken in this thesis as a major work of Scottish uncanny literature, standing somewhat apart from Kennedy's more modally-consistent texts much as Hogg's *Justified Sinner* also seems distinct from many of his other writings. Indeed, from the regularity with which it resonates with the texts considered by this thesis, Hogg's novel might now be considered the key nineteenth-century work which anticipates the modern tradition now under discussion, and the way the novel rose to acclaim and influence following its republication in 1946 can be seen as a disruptive flashpoint in the habitually-given realist teleology of the twentieth-century. The Scottish tradition in the uncanny is therefore located in works written before the inception of the anti-Kailyard moment which many studies take as instigating the emphasis on realism reflecting the authentic life of the Scottish people which has been so prominent in Scottish studies. At the same time, if George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* marks the rejection of Kailyard romance and sentimentality and a milestone in that implied urban realist trajectory, it also finds a place in the uncanny tradition. When Brown's character John is possessed by fever and alcoholism after accidentally killing his father, the terrifying Gourlay, he is haunted by visions of glowering red eyes following him. His experience is reminiscent of both Gil-martin's demonic pursuit of Robert Wringhim and Sammy Samuels' sense of impending observation and blackness: 'He strained his eyeballs in a horrified stare at vacancy. [...] If he looked, the eyes might burn on him out of nothingness. The innocent air had become his enemy – pregnant with unseen terrors to glare at him'.⁷ John goes on to describe

⁷ George Douglas Brown, *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901; Edinburgh: Polygon, 2005), pp. 275.

‘the red e’en; coming at me out o’ the darkness – the darkness! [...] They’re aye watching me, watching me, watching me, watching me’. [...]

The vision he beheld against the darkness of his mind, projected itself, and glared at him. (p. 278)

In spite of this association, Brown’s novel might be considered a less pivotal work in the light of the uncanny tradition; while his decrying of the Kailyard remains a decisive moment, this thesis has given cause to reconsider the realist trajectory he is credited with catalysing.

Although mentioned only passing in the thesis, J.M. Barrie can also be seen as an early exponent of the type of unsettling modal fluctuation that characterises this tradition, particularly in stories such as ‘Farewell Miss Julie Logan’ which both recalls the folkloric elements favoured by Hogg and Stevenson and invokes the fluctuation between actual, imaginary and psychological interpretations the like of which remain prominent in contemporary works like Fagan’s *The Panopticon*. While Andrew Nash has done much to distance Barrie from the Kailyard, the uncanny tradition under discussion might further reposition some, though not all, of his texts as exemplars of the Scottish *unheimlich*.

Muriel Spark’s significance to Scottish writing remains steady, as the major Scottish writer employing uncanny effects in the 1950s and 1960s. More recently, Alasdair Gray’s *Lanark* is often accepted as the inaugural text in the literary ‘renaissance’ of the 1980s and 1990s. While Gray’s contribution to Scottish literature is beyond doubt, his synthesis of working class realism and fantasy means he is a less significant figure where the uncanny is concerned. While Irvine Welsh has been treated as emerging in a lineage from Kelman’s brand of urban realism;⁸ that progression is destabilised when Kelman’s uncanny techniques are fully acknowledged. While some of the drug-induced effects Welsh depicts in

⁸Douglas Gifford, ‘Scottish Fiction since 1945 I: Continuity, Despair and Change’, in *Scottish Literature*, ed. by Sarah Dunnigan, Douglas Gifford and Alan MacGillivray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 834-898, (pp. 884-5).

Trainspotting are unsettling, for example, the realist mode in which Mark Renton exists and injects heroin remains apparent to the reader throughout. Instead, the field is open for the uncanny to be identified in the work of other, less acknowledged writers. As Carla Sassi suggests, 'we should [...] go against the very grain of the canon by retrieving texts that do not conform to our disciplinary expectations'.⁹ In the inter-war period, for example, Nan Shepherd's *The Weatherhouse* (1930) might be reconsidered as the site of a modernist take on the *unheimlich*, in the way her characters' memories of reality as they experienced it differ to the point of dissolution, such as when Lyndsay recalls a dog called Demon, the existence of which her Aunt adamantly denies: 'He seems so real when I look back. Did she only make me think I saw him?'.¹⁰ Other writers, more peripheral in the realist tradition, might similarly be reconsidered once attention is restored to the uncanny.

My purpose in gesturing towards a reconceptualised Scottish canon is not to replace one rigid teleology with another. Rather, I hope that decentring the critical conception of tradition will encourage new formulations of Scottish literary development, and allow our understanding of texts and writers to be repositioned or reimagined, provoking fresh angles of interpretation. Canonical fluidity is to be encouraged, and a sophisticated criticism which accommodates a plurality of analytical positions embraced. In identifying a modern Scottish tradition in uncanny writing, this thesis has sought to refocus awareness onto the critical choice involved in conceptions of tradition, realism, and Scottish literary development.

⁹ Carla Sassi, 'Glocalising Scottish literature: a call for new strategies of reading', *The Bottle Imp*, Supplement 1 (2014). <<http://asls.arts.gla.ac.uk/SWE/TBI/TBISup1/Sassi.html>> [accessed 8 July 2014]

¹⁰ Nan Shepherd, *The Weatherhouse* (1930; Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988), p. 199.

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