UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY FICTION OF IRVINE WELSH

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ABSTRACT

It is important to study the literature of foreign cultures because doing so not only provides insight into other lifestyles, but also because it helps us understand our place in our own society as well as our place in the world around us. Literature provides an avenue for which individuals learn to sympathize or relate in some other way to people and cultures that they might otherwise never know. It does this by introducing the reader to a specific character in a specific place and time. The reader inevitably forms some kind of connection, whether positive or negative, with the text.

I use the word foreign very loosely in this analysis. This thesis serves as an attempt to understand Irvine Welsh's use of violence in Marabou Stork Nightmares. Irvine Welsh is a Scottish writer and is, obviously, foreign in relationship to me as an American reader. However, since the setting of this novel places the reader in the inner city drug culture of Edinburgh, that particular lifestyle is also foreign in the sense that it is very unfamiliar to some, but not all, readers.

When it comes to Irvine Welsh's literature, I am interested primarily in the evolution and critique of violence against women and against developing nations. This thesis is an exploration of those very ideas.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Why do we read literature? Obviously, there are as many answers as there are readers. Mental stimulation, imaginary journeys, escape from reality, educational purposes…these are just a few appealing characteristics of good literature. A reader's choice of literature is a reflection of individual personality, preferences and interests. Literature is also a representation of culture. A great deal can be learned of an unfamiliar society, not just by reading textbooks and historical facts, but also by reading fiction authored by a member of that culture.

Analyzing Welsh's Work through Jungian Theory

I believe the Scottish writer, Irvine Welsh, contributes in important ways to contemporary literature. He explores and highlights the plight of the drug culture in his native city Edinburgh in the early 1990s. Further, his writing allows for a discussion of violence, not only drug related violence and poverty, but violence related to poverty and oppression in a much wider context. When one takes into consideration the lifestyle that Welsh depicts (and, some might argue, practices) and the audiences he attracts, this is a huge accomplishment. Welsh seeks not only to entertain, but also to educate.

One way to analyze Welsh's work productively is through Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the Archetypes. I will concentrate my analysis mostly on Marabou Stork Nightmares. Throughout the entire novel, Welsh juxtaposes two narratives. One tells the story of Roy Strang's world when he was growing up in Edinburgh, his brief stay in South Africa, and then his life back in Edinburgh. This narrative chronicles a gang rape and Roy's failed attempt at suicide, which leaves him comatose. The other narrative is through the nightmares he experiences while in a vegetative state. These nightmares are about ridding South Africa of the hideous, repulsive Marabou Storks. In this quest, he is accompanied by an Englishman. The language of the characters in the realist narrative is uneducated Scots. The language of the nightmare narrative is partly educated upper-class English and partly uneducated/educated Scots.

Because the action throughout the novel alternates between the conscious and unconscious parts of Roy Strang's mind, Carl Jung's theories help unravel the implications of Welsh's work. Jung's theories of archetypes in particular are helpful in examining the extreme violence in both narratives.

In his essay, "The Principal Archetypes," Jung defines the complete or whole person as the "self." The self is composed of the conscious and unconscious aspects of the personality and is made up of several components, one being the ego. The ego is especially important because it represents the center of consciousness and is the key element of the known personality. By "known personality," I mean anything that the subject (any given individual) is consciously aware of and knows to be true about his or her personality. The conscious part of the ego is believed to be unlimited, that is, until it is confronted with the unknown. Theoretically, because the ego is a conscious element, it is capable of being described, in words, by the subject. However, any description would only be evident of the conscious personality and, therefore, would not serve as a representation of the actual self.

Out of the depths of the unconscious arises what Jung refers to as the principal archetypes. Aside from being unconscious, my understanding of the term "archetype" is that it refers to something primordial in nature. In other words, it is something that exists before the actual being or subject and is present at birth. Jung's principal archetypes consist of the shadow, the anima, and the animus. The ego is not technically considered one of the archetypes because of its conscious nature.

The Shadow

The shadow is equally important as the ego in its effects on the self. After all, it takes both the conscious and the unconscious to make up the whole self. Known for its dark and disturbing effects on the ego, the shadow is driven by the collective unconscious. Unlike the personal unconscious (discussed previously), which is acquired through lifelong experiences, the collective unconscious is a set of blueprints, so to speak, that are present from conception. Take for example the following analogy: the collective unconscious is to the ego what DNA is to the physical being. So, the shadow, which is created out of the collective unconscious, is present from the time the subject is conceived. According to Jung, "[t]he shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort" (669). Often, people are not open to embracing the darker side of their personality and reject the idea that there is an evil presence that exists within.

The shadow often reveals itself through emotion, which is uncontrollable by the subject. Jung explains the affects of emotion on the personality as the following:

> Emotion, incidentally, is not an activity of the individual but something that happens to him. Affects occur usually where adaptation is weakest, and at the same time they reveal the reason for its weakness, namely a certain degree of inferiority and the existence of a lower level of personality. On this lower level with its uncontrolled or scarcely controlled emotions one behaves more or less like a primitive, who is not only the passive victim of the affects but also singularly incapable of moral judgment. (Jung 669)

In other words, people do not choose to be emotional; rather, they are victims of emotion. Emotion tends to be at its highest when people feel the most vulnerable. It is at this time, when the personality is dominated by emotion, that people tend to express their poorest judgment and the shadow is often revealed.

While normally it is the unconscious part of the personality that is mysterious and difficult to uncover, in fiction the unconscious is easily made accessible. We depend on the stories from those outside of Roy's world, or other fully conscious characters, to gain insight as to the kind of person Roy Strang was before he went into the coma. Another way readers get a sense of Roy's conscious personality is through his stories about his family and his childhood.

From the beginning of the novel, Roy is portrayed as being a violent and abusive character. However, after the experiences with his Uncle Gordon in South Africa, the episodes of violence seem to become more frequent and more intense. Following the death of Gordon, the Strang family left South Africa and moved back to Scotland. It is in the years that followed the return to Scotland that Roy's most violent actions took place.

Most of the acts of violence Roy commits throughout the text can, in some way, be related to his life as a child. He dislikes nearly every member of his family with the exception of his brothers, Tony and Elgin. In almost every case, his father is the instigator of Roy's hate. For example, John forces Roy and Bernard, another one of his brothers, to fight each other until one or both of them is beaten to a bloody pulp. In reference to his father, Roy says, "he was a little bit crazy and we were all frightened of him. He was far too intense about things, and got himself worked up over nothing. I worried about the shotgun he kept under the bed" (27).

Roy also lived in fear of his Uncle Gordon while in South Africa. When the family first moved to South Africa Gordon was actually Roy's favorite person to spend time with because he was fun to be around. Even though Gordon's abuse of Roy was just as bad, if not worse, than

John's abuse, Gordon provided the physical warmth and attention that Roy so desperately craved and which his father denied.

Welsh makes it pretty clear to the reader that these cycles of abuse and familial dysfunction, and the culture he experienced, shaped the darkness of Roy Strang's character. Irvine Welsh leads the reader to first understand how Roy Strang became the depraved character, but he also critiques that understanding. He urges the reader to "condemn more and understand less," which seems to apply to both violence against women and violence against nations. In this thesis, I will present the history of Scotland, discussing ways in which industry and colonization changed the land and how these changes, in turn, affected Scotland's culture, language, and literature. I will also analyze ways in which Irvine Welsh presents these themes in his fiction.

CHAPTER 2. A DARK HISTORY

Both Scotland and its literature have evolved from a long history of violence. The literature is a reflection of a past that involved years of colonization by the English. This brought about changes in the land as well as the people.

The Beginning of a New Era

To understand the violence and depravity in Welsh's work, we need to understand the history, to some extent, leading to the loss of identity in Scotland. The crowns of Scotland and England were united in 1603 after three hundred years of Scottish independence from the time of Robert the Bruce. The infant son of Mary Queen of Scots was crowned James I of England and VI of Scotland to suit the purposes of the power brokers in England and to stop the Scots from continuing wars with England. The Scottish parliament remained in Edinburgh for another hundred years, but early in the 18th century, the English and Scottish parliaments were united in London. In 1707, England gained political control of Scotland by enforcing the Treaty of Union. After the union of parliaments, two uprisings by the Scots helped by the French, in 1715 and 1745, were ferociously put down by the English. Gaelic, the language of the highlands, and the wearing of highland dress were outlawed and the outlawing was relentlessly enforced. Absent landowners, both Scottish and English, drove whole villages and towns out of the Scottish highlands in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many were forced to emigrate.

David Purves, the author of A Scots Grammar, addresses the history of Scottish language (referred to simply as "Scots") and the ways in which it has changed over the centuries due to English influence. He writes:

> Since the Treaty of Union of 1707, generations of Scots have had to come to terms with a situation in which they were taught English at school, and where the way of

> speech natural to them was officially regarded as wrong by definition, or as a dialect unworthy of use as a serious medium of communication" (1-2).

In other words, there was no such thing as proper Scots; there was only proper English. All Scots, even if it was taught in schools before the Union, was considered poor grammar. This caused internal conflicts in Scottish children and soon they began to believe that they themselves were unacceptable and worthless. Purves also claims that "[w]hether any form of speech is generally seen as a language or not is essentially a political question, since it depends to a large extent on the socio-political status of those who speak it" (1). Colonization of Scotland meant the enforcement of English standards of living, not just politically and socially, but grammatically as well.

However, while traditional Scottish culture was being assimilated into the British Empire, Scottish industry began to flourish. In the 1750s, a chemist by the name of Joseph Black discovered that carbon dioxide gases could be created. Soon after, scientists began to discover many new elements that the earth had to offer, and the Chemical Revolution began. It wasn't long before folks began to realize that chemicals could be very beneficial in the workplace, and thus the excitement surrounding the Chemical Revolution was transferred to the Commercial Revolution.

Meanwhile, an inventor by the name of James Watt was keeping up with the studies of Joseph Black. Watt used Black's theories on latent heat capacity to invent the Separate Condenser, which increased the efficiency of the steam engine. This improvement added substantially to the wealth of the Scottish economy. Not long after, in 1812, Henry Bell built the Comet, which is known as "the world's first successful passenger steamship." It wasn't long before the idea of the steamship was put on wheels and the locomotive was introduced.

Much later, in the middle of the 20th century, oil was discovered off the north coast of Scotland. Money from oil and a move away from industrialization eroded the unexamined belief by most Scots that Scotland could not survive economically, separated from England. It also made it more difficult to be independent from England, since there was now this rich resource to enrich the British economy. However, Scottish nationalism revived, and a revitalized Scotland separated the Scottish parliament from English domination. It now sits in Edinburgh.

By the 1980s and 90s, a mass of literature was being produced by native Scots. Glasgow was said to have been "re-invented both on the ground and [...] in fiction" (Burgess 261). In fact, Glasgow was known by some as a "city of writers."

This history is important because it helps us create a timeline of events for understanding what Scotland was in the past and how it became what it is today. The history also gives us insight into the transformation of literature over this extended period of time. While the political writing of Walter Scott is a far cry from the violence and obscenity depicted in the works of some contemporary authors, in theory, the purpose of the writing is still the same: to bring to surface the fallacies, perversities, and the deepest, dirtiest secrets of a less than perfect world. In his introduction to The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Fiction, Peter Kravitz summarizes the progress of Scotland and Scottish literature:

> Scotland entered the Union with England in 1707 as some people enter an arranged marriage – without enthusiasm. [...] As this relationship nears its end, the two countries require a course of separation counseling [...]. For the first time in centuries of insecurity and strife, Scotland has begun to stop defining itself by what it is not – England – and is with good humour facing up to what it is, both bad and good. Future generations will applaud the contribution [contemporary writers] played in this process. (xxxvi)

For example, David Purves argues that the true Scots, in terms of written language, is nearly non-existent at this point. Purves writes that "[m]uch contemporary material contains few of the features which characterize the language, and appears to consist of attempts at back translation from English into personal notions of what Scots is" (65). According to Purves' theory, Scottish writers have been using English standards of grammar or orthography since the 16th century. Purves also theorizes that the main reason that there is anything left of Scots is because there is still an existence of Scots in speech:

> Although the existence of a significant literary tradition in Scots has been an important factor in favor of its survival, as a result of the treatment of spoken Scots in the schools, many grammatical features of the spoken language have seldom been represented in writing. Some of these features can still be found in contemporary speech. (3)

While Scotland finally found the liberty to reestablish itself as a nation and as a culture, that process in writing was reversed.

Complicity in Building the British Empire

One of the darker parts of Scottish history was its participation in colonizing South Africa and many other parts of the British Empire. In the beginnings of Scottish industrialism, Scotland's ships would pick up slaves in Africa and transport them to sugar plantations in the West Indies or tobacco plantations in America. Goods were then brought back to Scotland where they were bought and sold. Irvine Welsh uses ideologies and stereotypes associated with the patronizing beliefs of the colonizer toward the colonized in an effort to portray the hatred and intolerance of one culture against another. Part of what his work does is to continue a tradition since Walter Scott of uncovering and illuminating dirty secrets about the Scots. Scotland's involvement in colonizing other nations had dehumanizing effects on both those colonized and on the colonizing

Scots. This portrayal is very evident in Welsh's novel Marabou Stork Nightmares, in which the author not only works prejudices against Africans into the actual personalities of the Scottish characters, but also weaves historical references into the storyline which defines the tension and horrors experienced by those Africans living in British territories.

One way that Welsh represents various cultures in his novels is through the use of dialect. There are several different voices present in Marabou Stork Nightmares and each one represents a separate entity. The voices of Roy's mother and father are examples of urban Leith dialect. These characters are understood to be uneducated and ignorant. They are racist and intolerant of other cultures because they were taught those behaviors by their parents. Also, early in the novel, the reader is introduced to Sandy Jamieson who is said to be a former professional football (soccer) player. This character is English, and his dialect is very different than that of Roy's parents. Roy's voice is representative of standard Scots. It is different from that of his parents because Roy is better educated. As in the above quote from David Purves, standard Scots is nearly nonexistent in the written language but evidence of it can still be found in the spoken language. Roy's dialect is an imitation of what proper Scots might sound like.

Early in the novel, the reader is made aware of two narrators represented through its main character, Roy Strang. Both narrators exist as subconscious voices of Roy since he is in a coma, but they represent different levels of the subconscious. Regardless of which narrator is present at any point in the novel, it is obvious that Roy has been exposed to violence and prejudice against other races and cultures from an early age. It is also obvious that Irvine Welsh has an in-depth knowledge of the perils of colonization. Further into the text, the reader learns what influenced Roy's racial beliefs. For example, Roy's mother, Vet, was prejudiced against Japanese people because her father or grandfather (Roy, when telling the story, can't remember which one) was a prisoner-of-war in a Japanese camp. Vet believed that this was what drove the man insane. Roy says, "She would scrutinize the eyes of my few friends, proclaiming them unsuitable if they had what she considered to be 'Jap blood'" (Welsh 24).

Vet thought South Africa would be a wonderful place because, to her understanding, there were no Japanese people there. Supposedly, there were going to be more job opportunities there for John and the entire family would be better off in the long run. Unfortunately, Strang's experiences during his stay in what was a time of colonialism in South Africa are, in part, responsible for the actions he committed later and the overall prejudices that he carried with him throughout the rest of his life.

Gordon is the epitome of what is likely to happen when the colonized Scot becomes the colonizer. Many Scots migrated to South Africa in an effort to depart from their lives of deprivation and the realities of being at the bottom of the social scale. Gordon had a black housekeeper by the name of Valerie. Upon the Strang family's arrival to South Africa, Roy recalls Valerie being a warm and friendly person who "made a fuss" over the children. Then, Roy says that her attitude toward them completely changed and he knew that it was because Gordon had said or done something to put a stop to her getting close to them. Roy recollects a conversation he had with his uncle at that time:

> I don't want you getting friendly with Valerie. She's a servant. Always remember that; a servant and a Kaffir. [...] They seem friendly, they all do, that's the way with them. But never forget, as a race, they are murderers and thieves. It's in their blood. [...] He showed me a scrapbook he kept of cuttings from newspapers which highlighted what he referred to as 'terrorist atrocities'. I recollect being frightened and fascinated at the same time. (Welsh 64)

Gordon goes on to describe the African people as dirty savages in need of rescue. Roy, being at a young and impressionable age, only wants to please his uncle. From this point on, Roy shows nothing but intolerance and cruelty towards Valerie and other natives.

Gordon corrupts Roy in ways besides teaching him cultural and racial intolerance. Roy is also subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of his uncle. He dismisses the abuse for a little while, saying, "The funny thing was that it didn't really feel like abuse at the time, it felt mildly funny and amusing [...]. I felt a sense of power, a sense of attractiveness, and a sense of affirmation that I hadn't previously experienced [...]" (Welsh 72). However, as the abuse progresses to more severe acts including sodomy, Roy admits to being afraid of Gordon and hides in a well when he knows his uncle is approaching. Gordon finally meets his end when the jeep he is traveling in is blown up in a guerilla terrorist act. Roy says, "Despite frequent reports of guerilla activity by a militant off-shoot of the ANC in Eastern Transvaal, Gordon refused to take heed" (Welsh 85). Roy makes no attempt to save his uncle and shows no emotion in the event of his death. In fact, he finds amusement in the sight of Gordon burning in the flames and comments on the smell of burning human flesh saying, "I recall that the smell of Gordon was so sweet I thought that if I had not known it was human flesh I would have wanted to taste it; would have enjoyed it" (Welsh 85).

It is very difficult to overlook the politics in Welsh's work or pass them off as simply vehicles for creating a storyline. For example, rather than give a generalized overview of what South Africa might be like for tourists at that time, Welsh includes, in one scene, a supposed bulletin about the African nation and culture which he says imitates what the white school textbooks were teaching. This entry was posted on an information board at the Museum of The Republick Van Suid-Afrika:

> The White citizens of the Union are mostly descendants of early Dutch and British settlers, with smaller admixtures of French, German, and other West-European peoples. The white man originally came to South Africa as a soldier, farmer, trader, missionary and general pioneer, and owing to his superior education and his long background of civilization he was able to provide the necessary leadership, expertise, technical skill and finance among races who were for the most part little removed from barbarism.
>
> South Africa is the only country in the world where a dominant community has followed a definite policy of maintaining the purity of its race in the midst of overwhelming numbers of non-European inhabitants—in most not still administered as colonies or protectorates either the non-whites have been exterminated or there has been some form of assimilation, resulting in a more or less coloured population. Indeed, far from the extermination of non-whites, the advent of the European in South Africa has meant that whole native communities have been saved from exterminating each other. [...]. (Welsh 81)

In these paragraphs, it is obvious that Welsh is very well versed in the history and ideals of colonization. He uses absurd characters as well as absurd parodies of actual events and people, whom most of his readers likely detest, as subscribers to the types of philosophies that he, himself, criticizes.

Another section in which Welsh exemplifies his political agenda is when he uses Marabou Storks to make a point about colonizing behavior. Roy, in a subconscious state, is speaking of the storks when he says, "I could have produced a welter of damning evidence of the carnage that these despicable beasts can perpetrate on other wildlife and game; on how they can spread pestilence and disease through the local villages" (Welsh 12). Post colonial studies have presented overwhelming evidence that the white man would often bring disease and upset into colonized lands, subjecting the native people to European sicknesses. This is often referred to as ecological imperialism, which refers to "the ways in which the environments of colonized societies have been physically transformed by the experience of colonial occupation" (Ashcroft 76).

In yet another example, Welsh introduces Dawson, another skilled hunter who accompanies Roy and Sandy through the imaginary journey of the safari. Dawson gives Roy a book titled (ironically enough) Youth in Asia, in an attempt to educate Roy and his companion, Sandy, on his views of what "sport" is. Here, Welsh seems to be comparing colonization to cultural euthanasia, or perhaps genocide. Dawson says, "Sport though, when it has a cultural locus, becomes a source of identity to people. Lose such sources of identity, and you have an atomised, disjointed society" (Welsh 45). He goes on to explain colonization in the following way:

> Yes, in the past people had families, communities. There was a sense of living together. Through this they developed a shared understanding of the world, developed different cultures. Now not all of these cultures are in empathy with the profit system, and therefore they have to be replaced by another, stronger, richer culture, or at least assimilated into it. Families and communities have to be broken up further, have to be taken to where the work is, have to be denied at all costs meaningful interaction with each other. They have to live in, as our American friends call them, subdivisions. They have to be economically and physically subdivided… (Welsh 45)

This narrative is important for many reasons. First, when taken at face value, it defines the attitude of Dawson, a colonist, toward the natives of South Africa at that period in time. When placed in the context of the novel, it contributes to the storyline by taking the ideas of a real life person in Roy Strang's conscious life, his Uncle Gordon, and places those ideals within a character in Roy's subconscious, Dawson. It's like carrying events that happened throughout your day or week into a dream that you have when you fall asleep. If Roy's uncle had not made such a negative impression on him, then perhaps Dawson's character would not have existed in his subconscious. It is also a way of implying that, once learned, these beliefs and prejudices stay with you throughout your life.

Another way to evaluate the quote from above is through the supposed intent of the author. There are no accidents in literature, not even in fiction. Irvine Welsh elaborates on the role of colonizer versus colonized for a reason. Welsh's characters often seem to promote racist beliefs and stereotypes. However, Welsh creates a distance between the reader and these characters by making the characters seem absurd. If Welsh, as an influential writer, were trying to sway his audience toward these beliefs, he would make his characters easier to relate to or sympathize with. Instead, he magnifies the absurdities of racist beliefs by instilling those values in despicable, immoral characters.

CHAPTER 3. CONTEMPORARY SCOTTISH FICTION

The Industrial Revolution completely changed Scotland and ultimately changed its literature from what has come to be known as "cabbage patch" to Scottish Realism.

The New Face of Fiction

The term "cabbage patch" is used to define the traditional idea of what Scotland was, a country of lavish land, rolling hills, and castles. Lewis Grassic Gibbon offers these descriptions in his novel, Sunset Song. One of the characters describes Scotland in the following way: "you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the smell of the earth in your face, almost you'd cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies" (Gibbon 32).

However, this perfect picture was destined to change. The onset of industry meant clearing of land and emigration of people. In A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950, T.C. Smout makes the following claim:

> The Highland clearances reached a peak in the 1840s and first part of the 1850s , especially in the aftermath of the great potato blight of 1846, which left upwards of 100,000 people in the north-west destitute and dependent on the charity of relief funds to keep them from starvation. (62)

In short, when the land was changed, the people were changed. Survival was a struggle as people were forced from their homes and the land that had previously been so sufficient. It was not long after this that some of Scotland's literature became more political and less romanticized.

By the end of the eighteenth century, there was a strong foundation of writing produced by well-educated middle-class men. Literature, which had traditionally been steeped in Romanticism, was turning toward realism. In the early 1800s, Walter Scott and contemporaries who were also Unionists (those in active support of the trade union between England and Scotland) began producing, "narratives of Scotland that would diagnose Scotland's historical and internecine divisions and try to heal these self-inflicted wounds, by showing protagonists representing Scotland struggling with issues of Scottish history and politics, religion and social change" (Gifford 193-194). In other words, Walter Scott and his contemporaries were, through their writing, exposing the actual changes that were taking place in Scotland, representing them as problematic, and offering (through suggestive scenarios in their fiction) solutions. Meanwhile, many other writers of Scottish descent, referred to as the literati, were claiming to be English and representing their work as Anglican because of the stigma associated with Scotticism at that time. The Scottish literati also refused to believe that members of the working class could produce literature. Robert Burns had to be seen as touched by God to explain his working class ability to write poetry.

The time between the death of Walter Scott and the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s is referred to by many as a so-called "wasteland" because of the lack in production of truly inspirational literature. While there was plenty of activity as far as politics and education taking place during this period, most of the literary successes were regarded as English.

In Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction, Moira Burgess discusses the history of Scotland and its literary movements, but she concentrates on these events as they took place in Glasgow. She writes, "The discussion of Glasgow working-class fiction has brought to light one recurrent complaint: that middle-class writers have taken up working-class themes and made a mess of the job" (205). This makes sense when one takes into consideration the idea of colonization in which one group of people, a so called dominant group, attempts to take over or in some way represent what they consider a less civilized group. In the big picture you have England trying to represent Scotland. In this case, you have the middle-class attempting to represent the working class. It does not work because the dominant group is not capable of accurately representing the subordinate group. This is true not only because of ignorance or their lack of understanding of the lifestyles and circumstances of that group, but also because of their unwillingness to represent that group as it truly exists. In most cases the dominant group is going to represent the subordinate group as a culture in need of direction. The dominant group is there to show them a better, more politically correct way of life. Therefore, a higher class can not focus on anything other than the negative aspects of the class below them.

Burgess goes on to argue that there is still very much of Glasgow that is left unwritten. In the following excerpt, she quotes novelist Allan Massie in his early writings on Glasgow literature:

> As early as 1903 a history of Scottish literature had recognized:
>
> > ...the immense amount of stuff, as yet practically untouched and lying ready to the novelist's hand, in the life of the Scottish professional, commercial, and middling classes.
>
> Yet ninety years later the novelist Allan Massie could still remark:
>
> > What we know as the Glasgow Novel has a tone all its own. It is gritty and angry. It tells the story of men and women – though more usually men – who have been cheated by their experience of life...[But] there has always been another Glasgow; there still is, and few writers have dared to deal with it. (Burgess 205)

Whatever the reasons, Glasgow fiction is indeed traditionally grim and melancholy and is often reflective of events taking place at various intervals in history. For example, in the 1960s the slum clearance process was taking place. Residents were being relocated from high-rise blocks to housing schemes or new towns. Land was being cleared of houses and businesses in order to build roads. This resulted in a complete destruction of the normal way of life for many Glasgow residents.

By the 1970s, Glasgow produced the writers who would have a direct influence on Irvine Welsh and a whole generation of writers who came after them in the late 1990s. Most importantly in the 70s, a group of writers formed in Glasgow called the Glasgow Group. Glasgow University's Philip Hobsbaum chaired this group made up of men and women who would later become internationally known authors, such as Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead, Alasdair Gray and James Kelman.

Born and raised in Glasgow, James Kelman bases his stories on the life that exists in that part of Scotland. However, he claims that his work, his language, and the language of his characters, could represent any city with large numbers of unemployed and never employed men and women, any place. He reacted, as many Scottish artists did, against growing nationalism and flag-waving Scottish Nationalists in general. In the early 1970's, Kelman's work was often criticized for dismissing the concept of place. Native Scots took offence at the author's rejection of traditional Scottish associations. In Scottish Literature, Douglas Gifford states that "Kelman's starting place may be Scotland, but he universalizes it so that his characters speak for a modern rootlessness of language, place and morality" (Gifford 877). The geographical setting in many of Kelman's stories seems to lack specificity and this is no accident. The Glasgow dialect of his characters and his narrator, however, never changes. This depiction of a shunned, lower class life resulted in scorn from Scottish critics for a while. One critic even went as far as counting and reporting the number of times Kelman used the word "fuck" in a certain prize-winning novel. Despite some of his Scottish audience's disapproval of his earlier works, Kelman has earned numerous literary awards throughout the course of his career. Among these is the highly acclaimed Booker Prize, which he received in 1994 for his controversial novel How Late It Was, How Late.

The Voice of Scotland's Working Class

James Kelman was one of the first Scottish authors to write predominantly through this working class Glasgow dialect. His greatest contribution to the literary world was his use of a narrator that spoke in dialect. Other authors had previously used dialect to represent their characters, but the narrator was always represented through standard English. Kelman insisted that his narrator share the same dialect as his characters. Many contemporary Scottish writers have followed Kelman's lead in the use of Scottish working class dialects and other dialects from all over Scotland.

Through his excessive and repetitious use of taboo language (he rejects using the term "swear words," as he believes swearing is a value, or something that holds truth, and the use of these types of words is in no way related to the actual truth within the sentence or phrase), James Kelman attempts to disassociate violence from the actual terminology. The words are used casually, just as any other adjective or figure of speech. According to Kelman, language, or an actual physical word, is not in itself taboo. Rather, it is the way that people use words and language that attaches violent or offensive connotations and leads to undesirable interpretations. According to Scottish Literature, "the use of what is conventionally regarded as foul language is not only necessary – it's just not an issue, since such categorization of language isn't accepted as anything other than an attempt to create ghettoes of expression which will enable distancing" (Gifford 874). In other words, language is used as a vehicle that in many ways connects or separates the reader to or from the text. In this case, taboo language is no different from any other form of language. If a reader is not part of, or at least familiar with, the culture of which the narrator is coming from, then the reader will be further removed from the text and will probably be offended by or turned away from the language and situations taking place within that text. However, readers who have had experiences similar to those of the narrator and can relate to the situations presented are far less likely to find offence in the language or actions of the characters. While physical violence is also a predominant trend in some contemporary Scottish fiction, it is derived from the *actions* of the characters, not from the language.

Like James Kelman, Irvine Welsh claims that he is opposed to categorizing language as "swear words." In an interview with Welsh in 2002, Sally Vincent quotes the author in his stance on the use of language:

> You've got to accept [. . .] that the meaning of words changes through use and abuse, and becomes something else. [. . .] Words should have the power to inform and to move, not the power to send people scurrying away [. . .]. But if you attach that much emotional energy to a word, it gives people the power to hurt each other. (par. 7)

Vincent goes on to explain that, according to Welsh, he does not use foul words and offensive language for their shock factor; rather, just as Kelman suggests, the words are simply used as a form of expression and as a means to represent the personalities of the characters that are using them.

The similarities between the writing styles of James Kelman and Irvine Welsh (and many other present-day Scottish authors, for that matter) are impossible to overlook. Kelman is a key figure in the history of Scottish literature because he successfully removed the restrictions that were traditionally placed on language. When Welsh came along a few years later, he pushed to the very edge every aspect of all things taboo. Like his predecessor, Welsh relays most of his stories through the use of dialect. Welsh claims he started using dialect because he "wanted the content and the form to be more contemporary." He goes on to say, "Standard English is useful for getting information across, but in terms of entertainment, it's not the funkiest language in the world" (Welch, pars. 10-11). To heighten the effects of his literature, Welsh also indulges in the use of what some might consider taboo language. Moreover, Welsh's writing not only dramatizes language, but also sex, drugs, violence, and all the ugliness of the human mind; and he does so to a degree far beyond anything Kelman ever wrote. Take, for example, the following scene from his novel Trainspotting in which one of the characters is desperate for a drug fix and all he is able to get his hands on are a couple of opium suppositories. Soon after inserting them, he gets a case of diarrhea. He is so desperate to retrieve the lost suppositories that he is willing to rummage through a toilet of his own waste:

> Ah fall off the pan, ma knees splashing oantae the pishy flair. My jeans crumple tae the deck and greedily absorb the urine, but ah hardly notice. Ah roll up ma shirt sleeve and hesitate only briefly, glancing at ma scabby and occasionally weeping track marks, before plunging ma hands and forearms intae the brown water. Ah rummage fastidiously and get one aye ma bombs back straight away. Ah rub off some shite that's attached tae it. A wee bit melted, but still largely intact. (26)

As this scene demonstrates, nothing is left to the imagination. There is nothing moderate about Welsh's writing.

His portrayals of violence are equally as vivid and disturbing. His refusal to censor his writing is the force that drives Welsh's fiction. His language and the images he portrays grabs and holds the attention of his audience. If he were less forceful and more sensitive in his style of writing, then perhaps the underlying issues, such as the problematic nature of violence and racism in society, would not come through as strongly.

CHAPTER 4. WHO IS THE REAL IRVINE WELSH ?

One has to wonder, after reading the work of Irvine Welsh, where these ideas of filth and violence are coming from. As it turns out, there is quite a bit of controversy as to the life of the author.

Irvine Welsh: Fact or Fiction?

Everything about Irvine Welsh, from his date of birth to his upbringing is questionable. Welsh has been said to fabricate stories when asked about his age and his youth. There is little doubt of the fact that Irvine Welsh was born in Leith, Edinburgh, the place that is most often recreated in the setting of his stories. His characters, when they speak in dialect, speak in the dialect of Leith, not to be mistaken for the upscale city of Edinburgh of which Leith is a part. While most recent sources indicate that the author was born in 1961, an article by Ron McKay in the February 4, 1996 edition of The Observer states that Welsh claimed to have been born in 1958 but a police report declared his year of birth as being 1951. Anyone researching Irvine Welsh will discover the same confusion in terms of his actual birth year. For example, BBC offers a website dedicated to Scottish writers called "Writing Scotland." This reference contains a biography of Irvine Welsh which states that his birth year is 1961. However, in a 2005 interview with Sean O'Hagan, Welsh claims to be 47 years old, which would place his birth year at 1958. His teenage years through early adulthood are also a bit of a mystery. According to some biographies, Welsh was indulging in alcohol by the age of 14. In his later teens, he was supposedly sleeping in parks by day, seeking raves at night, and living a rough, rebellious existence all the while. He eventually went to work and got married, but he never desired the domestic home life or paternal role. He continued to engage in heavy drug use during his young adult years. This picture of Irvine Welsh, however, may not be true to life. In McKay's article, Welsh's life is portrayed as being quite the contrary:

> His friends insist that much of this potted biography was invented by the writer to confuse the literary press. In keeping with someone whose dumpy, featureless appearance stands in bemusing contrast to his supercool stature, Welsh's early life story is a series of elusive, unsubstantiated rumours. A cynic might suspect that he had mythologised his life in order to conceal how embarrassingly straight he really was. (par. 6)

The article goes on to say that Welsh received an MBA form Heriot-Watt University, where he was, according to his colleagues, "well-liked" and "well-dressed," and if he was indulging in drugs and a rebellious lifestyle, "he kept it well hidden" (McKay, par. 7).

Welsh's early writing consisted of short pieces published in Scottish literary magazines including The Clocktower Booklets and Rebel Inc. Some of these pieces were later converted to the novel we now know as Trainspotting.

Currently, Welsh is said to spend his summers in Amsterdam and his winters in Dumfermline. He enjoys traveling and has participated in a couple of marathons. He also still enjoys the nightlife and loves to party. In the course of the interview with Sally Vincent, Welsh is offered a drink, which he declines. His habits are as follows:

> He's not the sort of man who has "a drink". He's the sort of man who decides to go to the pub for lots of drinks, then on to a club for more drinks, then get some drugs and go back to his place and go on all night and the next day and the next night, until he's either off his face or recovering from being off his face for a fortnight. He binges. He abstains. That's the balance. (par. 10)

Irvine Welsh has gained enough success as a writer that he will never have to work a day job again. However, his lifestyle and his expensive habits encourage him to keep pushing out new ideas.

Poverty, Politics and Literature

Welsh's work is said to be the "end-product of post-war skepticism and a widely-felt sense of blighted urban possibilities" (Gifford 884). His use of dialect, black humor and language are not new or original, but his ability to so accurately portray the darkest sides of human nature and society through his writing, is what sets his work apart from that of his peers and predecessors. Welsh is a chronicler of Scotland's east coast drug culture. Regardless of his birth year, his adolescence, current hobbies, or his personal life in general, Irvine Welsh's work is widely published and, apparently, widely appreciated.

Like James Kelman's, Welsh's writing has been rejected by some Scots who feel that his work does not do justice to typical Scottish societies. Some feel that his portrayals of Scotland and Edinburgh may have negative consequences on the multi-million dollar tourist trade. In Welsh's writing, there are drugs and diseases everywhere. Babies are dying from negligence or diseases passed from their mothers. HIV is as rampant as the common cold. The land and its people seem contaminated. Welsh sets his stories in Scotland because Scotland is the place he knows. He does not suggest that all of Scotland is like those places he writes about. He writes about the struggles of the youth in lower working-class societies, the ghettoes, the so-called Scottish underworld.

Sally Vincent's article discusses ways in which the middle class has a hard time dealing with the anger generated by the working class:

> The working classes see they are denied the educational and social tools to get out of their poverty trap. There's not even any point in setting themselves goals because they already know they are going to be frustrated. That's their normality. Anger and frustration. That's their lot. (par. 8)

These feelings of anger and frustration are well-represented in Welsh's writing. He doesn't attempt to represent the middle class in the majority of his fiction. He seeks to represent those whose stories and voices have traditionally gone unheard. When confronted with questions concerning morality, Welsh says: "My thing was never to moralise or to judge the characters. People call me amoral, but why would I moralise? I'm a novelist. I was honestly trying to show life as I had experienced it" (O'Hagan, par. 18).

Since Trainspotting, Welsh has produced many other novels, short-stories, and screenplays. Among his works are: Acid House, a collection of short stories published in 1994; Marabou Stork Nightmares, published in 1995 and also later performed on stage; Ecstasy, a collection of three novellas published in 1996; Filth, in 1998; Glue, in 2001 and Porno, in 2002. His latest novel will be available in August of 2006 and is titled The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chef. His work has been translated into more than 33 languages. Though Trainspotting, which is currently celebrating its 10th anniversary as a stage production, has been his most successful novel, Welsh claims that Marabou Stork Nightmares expresses his writing at its best.

When asked if he writes himself into his fiction, suggesting that author's true personalities are somehow reflected in their work, Welsh replies that "[w]hen you read a lot of fiction, you can see that the person that's writing the fiction obviously wants to be seen as the central character. It's wish fulfillment. I try to get away from that" (Kemp, par. 12). Welsh claims that despite the fact that his writing and his characters may seem angry and depressive, he himself is not typically angry or depressed when he creates them. In defense of his fiction and his own morality, Welsh proclaims:

> When we break taboos, [. . .] it doesn't mean we also break moral codes. Unless they're psychotic, people know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad. Nobody's born wanting to rape and kill. People have a basic morality that comes from their humanity. We have to institutionalize some kind of moral framework only so we can all live within the same one. Nothing wrong with that. (Vincent, par. 28)

While Welsh has no problem admitting to his drug use and various other shady habits, he makes it clear to the reader that he is not a psychopath nor a sociopath. What he does is critique racial and sexist views through his fiction.

An example of this critique can be found in his epigraph in Marabou Stork Nightmares. It reads, "Scepticism was formed in Edinburgh two hundred years ago by David Hume and Adam Smith. They said: 'Let's take religion to the black man, but we won't really believe it.' It's the cutting edge of trade." Here, Welsh brings to the forefront the ideas behind colonization and the white man's intentions to exploit the black man through the use of religion. The idea was to give the subordinate group something to believe in so that they would trust the colonizers. Then, the colonizers could manipulate them in whatever ways they desired. Welsh illuminates the atrocities brought on by colonization, racism and sexism.

The Author's Voice Unveiled

Despite Welsh's attempts to remove himself from his fiction, there are several incidences in the novel when the author's voice comes through in the narrator. Roy Strang's voice is represented through both educated and uneducated Scots dialects, but there are times when Roy expresses beliefs or makes comments that are completely out of character for him. Roy is a very violent character. He discusses Kirsty, a female classmate in the following way: "Slags like that have to be taught a lesson, or they'll pish all over you. Fancied herself as the top girl, a bug fuckin cock tease. Hung around wi the boys but nae cunt could git intae her keks" (177). However, after Kirsty is raped by Roy and several of his friends, Welsh has his narrator, supposedly speaking through Roy, say:

> Her body, which had always looked so good, so lithe, athletic and curvy as she danced in her tight and flimsy clothes, now looked broken and bent, twisted and scrawny. I realised what we had done, what we had taken. Her beauty was little to do with her looks, the physical attractiveness of her. It was to do with the way she moved, the way she carried herself. It was her confidence, her pride, her vivacity, her lack of fear, her attitude. It was something more fundamental and less superficial than those things. It was her self, or her sense of it. (Welsh 190)

Here, Welsh appears to be critiquing the horrendous effects of rape. Prior to this comment, Roy has said or done nothing to make the reader believe that he is capable of this kind of thinking. Roy's character would not be remorseful enough to reflect on his actions in such a way.

The author's feelings are also revealed as he reinforces the ideas of Zero Tolerance throughout his book. Right from the beginning, on the epigraph page, Welsh includes the quote, "We should condemn more and understand less." This piece of information serves as a very obvious testimony of the author's feelings about rape. After the rape, Roy is haunted by memories of that night and signs from the Zero Tolerance campaign in Edinburgh seem to follow him wherever he goes. Every time he sees an advertisement or a word with a 'z' in it, he is reminded of the campaign. For example, at a concert one night he's sees a sign above the stage that reads, "Rezurrection." He says, "The Z luminated and the slogans came rushing into my head: No man has the right—When she says no she means no—There is no excuse—There is never an excuse" (252). Earlier he sees a sign that reads, "Two out of every five women will be sexually abused or raped—Z.—There is no excuse" (241). The signs are all around. Welsh uses this campaign strategically as a means to enforce the fact that even though he is very graphically depicting a rape scene in his writing, rape is wrong and should not be tolerated by society. He reinforces this by highlighting the absurdity of those that are ignorant or might believe otherwise. Kirstin reads the following parody, supposedly from the *Police Review*, to Roy before she retaliates against him:

> It should be borne in mind except in cases of a very small child, the offence of rape is extremely unlikely to have been committed against a woman who does not show signs of extreme violence. If a woman walks into a police station and complains of rape with no signs of violence she must be closely interrogated. Allow her to make a statement to a policewoman and then drive a horse and cart through it. It is always advisable if there is any doubt of the truthfulness of her allegations to call her an outright liar...watch out for the girl who is pregnant or late getting home at night; such persons are notorious for alleging rape or indecent assault. Do not give her sympathy. If she is not lying, after the interrogator has upset her by accusing her of it, then at least the truth is verified...the good interrogator is very rarely loved by his suspect. (223)

The Zero Tolerance campaign serves to fight against this kind of ignorance. Welsh's inclusion of these quotes in his novels is his way of educating his audience. It's his way of saying, yes, these things happen. Yes, it is okay to talk about them. We should be free to write about them. But, no, it is not okay to violate others in this way. It is not acceptable to overlook these things. And we, as a society, cannot tolerate these kinds of behaviors.

Welsh does not apply these ideas to rape alone. The author shows the same feelings against colonization. Throughout Marabou Stork Nightmares there are many examples of this. Welsh uses the characters, specifically those in the nightmare narrative (as opposed to those in the realist narrative), as representations of the English, with the complicity of the Scots, colonization of South Africa. For example, Sandy Jamieson is the typical upper-class Englishman. Roy is the Scot. They are together on a safari through the African continent. Their goal is ostensibly to capture and kill the Marabou Stork, symbolizing the African natives, and "drive this evil and ugly creature from the African continent" (4). Sandy, "an experienced hunter of man-eating beasts," is the leader of the pair while Roy follows his example (4).

The South Africans are described as being savages while the Englishmen and Scots are supposedly showing them a better way of life. Roy refers to the natives as "morally deficient" and "roguish." He also refers to the native children as "undernourished specimens" (Welsh 4-5). Gordon, whom has gained wealth as a colonizer, says, "as a race, they are murderers and thieves. It's in their blood" (Welsh 65). At the same time, however, Gordon is abusive and manipulative of his servants and his family. Welsh depicts both Roy and Gordon as being savage-like beasts.

The reader does not learn until the end of the novel that the Marabou Stork actually symbolizes Roy and the white colonizer at the same time. Throughout the story, Roy is extremely self-conscious over the large size of his ears. However, in the end as he is dying, he says, "I have no visible ears, I never really had much in the way of ears, it was always my nose, Captain Beaky, they used to call me at the school" (Welsh 264). He goes on to say, "I have the gait of a comical scarecrow, I shuffle like an old man who has shat his pants. I'm so tired...I spread my large, black wings..." (Welsh 264). In this final scene, Roy meets his death at the same time Sandy Jamieson shoots the Marabou Stork. Since Roy represents both the stork and the Scot at the same time, this is a depiction of the ways in which the English colonized the Scots and then made the Scots into colonizers. Thus, England dominated Scotland; the Scots became assimilated to the English way of life and joined them in their efforts in colonizing South Africa. This is a prime example of hegemony, or "domination by consent" (Ashcroft 116). According to Post Colonial Studies, "[h]egemony is important because the capacity to influence the thought of the colonized is by far the most sustained and potent operation of imperial powering colonized regions" (116). In other words, true domination is achieved when one can convince another that they are in need of leadership or assistance, as opposed to forcing them to comply.

As this thesis demonstrates, literature is often a reflection of culture and the history of a culture. Irvine Welsh highlights the atrocities of colonization in his fiction to demonstrate the evolution of society and the dangers that are present as a result of a violent past. He dramatizes violence in such a way as to criticize it rather than condone it. This is made clear to the reader, especially in the case of Marabou Stork Nightmares, because Welsh explicitly reveals Scotland's past, including their colonization by England and then their complicity in building the British Empire by colonizing South Africa. It is also evident in the way he brings forth the shadow of his central character, Roy Strang. The reader is assured by the end of the novel that Welsh is not a psychopath nor a sociopath; rather he critiques psychopathic and sociopath behaviors.

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