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URBAN LANDSCAPES AND TEXTUAL SPACES:

THREE PORTRAYALS OF GLASGOW BY A.L. KENNEDY, JANICE GALLOWAY AND JACKIE KAY

The city of Glasgow has been a complex space in the history of Scotland. Its strong working-class connections date back to its progressive transformation into the "second city" of the British Empire, and can be traced through its later economic and social decay after World War II. Since the beginning of the twentieth century Glasgow has been frequently portrayed in literature so as to highlight its difference from aristocratic or bourgeois Edinburgh, the other great urban area in the nation, which has sometimes been iconic in the representation of a romanticized Scotland. In spite of the multiple literary Glasgows coexisting with the "real" one, such as the "Small City", "Hard City", "Kaleidoscope City" or "Deep City" described by Moira Burgess in her comprehensive *Imagine a City. Glasgow in Fiction* (1998), Glasgow became particularly visible as the symbol of a new form of identity asserted by many intellectuals in the interwar period, when some nationalists of the heterogeneous Scottish Renaissance consolidated the city as home of the working-class man who would incarnate the soul of a doubly oppressed nation. Yet, as Margery Palmer McCulloch remarks, even Hugh MacDiarmid's "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle", the urban poem that has become the emblem of the movement, "is rooted in the imagery and language of [MacDiarmid's] Borders childhood and of the ballads and traditional Scottish culture. Glasgow and the urban scene have no part in the Drunk Man's quest for regeneration" (2000: 100).

It was not until the 1980's that Glasgow was vindicated with more persistency in the arts by the so-called "Glasgow Group", that is, by Tom Leonard, James Kelman, Liz Lochhead and Alasdair Gray, chaired by Philip Hobsbaum. During this decade, the strong social and economic crisis affecting the lives of its inhabitants made many Glaswegian writers try to provide the space with the legitimacy it was denied by British institutions. In fact, as Alasdair Gray's McAlpin declares in the famous *Lanark*, it seemed impossible to access the meaning of the place when it had been denied so effectively for so long: "think of Florence, Paris, London, New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he's already visited them in paintings, novels, history, books and films. But if a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively" (1985: 249). It became

necessary to act from two different angles; firstly, reconfiguring the imagination of this "Mean City" (McArthur and Kingsley Long 1957) in recent history, and secondly, contesting what were considered new images of cultural prosperity imposed from the outside (Burgess 1998: 261) for the commemoration of Glasgow as European City of Culture in 1990, but also in the many festivals of the late 1980s, with their slogans proclaiming that "Glasgow's Glasgow", "Glasgow's Miles Better", or trying to attract the attention of potential tourists in asking "What's Glasgowing On". In fact, as Angus Calder stated: "While in Glasgow culture officially replaces shipbuilding as the city's defining activity, the Scottish intelligentsia can find their Scotland and their own identity in their own activities and in the conceptions of Scotland which they themselves use and create" (1996: 223).

The late 1980s witnessed the appearance of a new generation of Glasgow-based writers, some of whom explored the literary possibilities of the text provided by the city from gendered and ethnic perspectives. Some of the early works of Janice Galloway, A. L. Kennedy and Jackie Kay became subjective attempts at deciphering the signs of a complex historical web of discourses inscribed on the space, which have determined the lives of its inhabitants as well as their representation. Kennedy's "The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History" is perhaps one of the best examples of these new perceptions of the city. The story, included in the collection *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990), reflects on the mechanisms employed in the transmission and the narration of history, as well as the intentional "lies" that fill the gap between what happens and how it is translated into the records of the city, or what some contemporary historians describe as the inevitable literary component of the historical text (White 1987). Glasgow becomes a textual space whose grammar depends on the interpretation attached to the names of the streets, the monuments, the many signs of identity addressing its characters as they walk by, discovering the "lies about ships, the weather, trains, communal toilets, drink, pies, comedians, drunks, singers, happiness, tea shops, culture, blueprints, socialists, hunger, anger, clay, houses, capitalists, painters, hogmany and Irn Bru" (Kennedy 1999: 70-1).

Its first person narrator, a woman who confesses to lie compulsively, in her job as a semi-professional writer of random pieces for newspapers, manages to manipulate the meaning of the city's landmarks with her small acts of literary sabotage, when she invents plots for the death of fictional people or fictions about the life of real ones. She roams the streets of Glasgow reading the narrative of the city and the countless fictions of its inhabitants:

> This city makes you think like that. The roads come together, cross and go on and little strands of history follow them. In some places, many lines will cross: what has been, what it is and what will be and you can walk from one coincidence to another, not step on a crack. It's like strolling across a book, something big and Victorian with plenty of plots. It makes you wonder who's reading you. (Kennedy 1999: 67)

The large-scale project of the city can never be controlled in spite of the efforts made by the authorities or intellectuals to give coherence to its (hi)story if

people are turned into protagonists and secondary characters, in order to confirm the various narrative lines that become more appropriate at different times. Although its connections are constantly changing and the scope of the relations among its inhabitants is immeasurable, this is not an obstacle for the elimination of unnecessary elements in the urban text, just as in any other kind of narrative. Being part of someone else's narration, it is impossible to access the overall sense of the text, and thus every individual action can only be evaluated in its immediate context, as Michel Foucault stated:

> architecture (...) is only taken as an element of support, to ensure a certain allocation of people in space, a canalisation of their circulation, as well as the coding of their reciprocal relations. So it is not only considered as an element in space, but it is especially thought of as a plunge into a field of social relations in which it brings about some specific effects. (1984: 253)

On the one hand, such standpoint facilitates the destruction of any character's potential power to transform the narrative where it is included, but on the other, allows for the rewriting of the story if a change of focus happens and the elements are arranged differently in the text. In this sense, the narrator in Kennedy's story offers her own version of Glasgow proclaiming her right to alter the meanings of her city. By confessing her two passions "When I am out in the city, I enjoy walking and when I am at home, I read" (1999: 66), she is also confessing her passion for the city and her determination to obliterate the less humane side of its life:

> When I walk I see a wonderful city, built in blocks like Boston or New York. This makes it very inviting and hard to get lost in, because its shape is governed by a grid. There are also times, especially in winter, when the sky is solid blue, the sunlight rich and low and the city becomes beautiful. Even where there are chip shops with metal shutters and the homes have putrefied around their tenants; even where there are beggars, really beggars, at the feet of each refurbished edifice, the light that falls here makes it beautiful. This is a city where ugly things happen under a beautiful light. (Kennedy 1999: 66-7)

She intends to immortalise the city, to inhabit it imaginatively, so that Glasgow can be dignified for its dwellers, even if her contribution is insignificant, and shall only be noticed once another hypothetical reader of the space looks for an interpretation she ignores in the present. Her aim is not to compensate for the absence of previous versions in the urban text, since she is known as an author keen on telling lies, but to reveal the strategies available to transform the meaning of Glasgow's signs, as she concludes in another Foucaltian remark.

> I should immortalise our city's strange effects. It is in the habit of murdering. Part of its construction is made for killing. People have built it like that; fatal but disinterested, like a gun. Some of us live in the barrel of the gun

and some of us do not. And some of us describe the mechanism and remind everyone how beautiful it is. (Kennedy 1999: 71)

A much more complex relation with the city is offered in Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1990), a novel about the titanic efforts of a female character to survive in the social after a mental breakdown, where the role of Glasgow and the segregation of the space is essential to understand the transformations undergone by its protagonist. Joy Stone must reconstruct her identity, or what Stuart Hall has defined as the point of suture between "on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpelate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'" (2002: 5-6). Her lack of a coherent identity has been interpreted as a metaphorical representation of Scotland's state of anguish in the late 1980s: "That 'black hole', that 'nothing at all' is the image not only of a woman negated by a patriarchal society but of a society aware of itself only as an absence, a society living, in the 1980s, in the aftermath of its failure to be reborn" (Craig 2001: 199). Joy cannot find a narrative line for her existence, and her obsessive analysis of the details of her life make her enter a spiral of destruction when she discovers there is no tangible truth she can reach. Her fragmentation becomes more evident in the representation of her anorexic body, which is also closely related to the urban spaces she inhabits. Joy has decided to sacrifice her body to avoid the contradictory meanings it receives as a young woman, who is Scottish, yet also British, middle-class, poor, separated, unfaithful, whose boyfriend has drowned still being married to another woman, and whose identity depends on the definitions other people give her. As Glenda Norquay has stated, "The only way in which Joy can create meaning is to resist attempts at ordering her, to create chaos, as the novel itself does, by listing, cataloguing, quoting; the emptiness of such 'order' becomes evident" (2000: 132).

In fact, such emptiness becomes clear in the different areas of the city where Joy lives, as well as in the way she shares those spaces with other people. Elizabeth Grosz (1992) has highlighted the analogies between the body and the city, as well as the effects of the urban space on the construction of identities; the city determines the relation of the subject with itself, as well as with other selves, and the use of its space is fundamental to understand our perception of gender. Being traditionally linked to the domestic, women have only accessed the city recently, but still in different ways than men have. In fact, as Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones state, for women "House, body and mind are in continuous interaction, the physical structure, furnishing, social conventions and mental images of the house at once enabling, moulding, informing and constraining the activities and ideas which unfold within its bounds" (1995: 2).

In this sense, Joy's four different homes parallel her physical and psychological transformations. The flat in the city where she lived with her first boyfriend is a claustrophobic place that made her feel trapped in her role as housewife, and where she developed her neurosis, given the extreme links she was expected to have with the space: "I thought I was going crazy. (...) I became afraid

of leaving the flat in case [Paul] could tell things by feeling the walls when I was out" (1990: 42). Once this relationship is broken, Joy moves to the only place that will provide her with some freedom and with a positive definition. In fact, there is a strong connection between Joy's psychological state in this part of the novel and the location of her small cottage: in a nice area in the outskirts of the city, near some shops and by a bus stop that connects her with any area in the city, and on a metaphorical level, with the social. However, when her affair with Michael, a married man, is discovered, both Joy and her house start to be invaded by a disease; Joy's progressive self-destruction mirrors the damage caused in the cottage by an invasion of mushrooms.

> LOOK I said and we both looked again. This one was more securely attached. It didn't break first time so Michael got a knife and cut it away from the side of the window. It left a little pink trail like anaemic blood where it had been growing. After a month there were little shoots of walls and baby mushrooms appeared overnight. (1990: 64)

After Michael's death, and due to the deterioration of her own home, Joy has to move to the excessively large house he rented, which is located in a marginal area of Glasgow, badly connected to the city centre and with no facilities at all at hand, and which contributes to her detachment from the social, since "It's too big really. There are four rooms. One is decorated as a bedroom and the others randomly. There isn't enough furniture to go round. (...) It never looks as good as I'd like" (1990: 19). Yet it is again her Foucaultian confinement in a psychiatric hospital what will determine her complete alienation from the city. In this place she is no longer asked to have an identity of her own, nor to live according to the norms of a society that has marked her as incomplete; here she is only considered an insane patient, and therefore she is free to reconstruct her self, to learn how to "keep breathing". In fact, after this traumatic, but also necessary, time there is hope for Joy at the ending of the novel. She manages to take control over her body again, at the same time that she finds the strength to come back to her cottage and start its reparation, symbolically repairing the bonds with the social she had previously been unable to maintain, but most importantly, showing her reconciliation with herself.

Glasgow has also been portrayed as a space where different cultural communities coexist, the Irish Catholic community (Burrowes 2004), the Highland migrants (Gunn 1991), although surprisingly enough, given, for example, the large Asian population living in the city, not many "ethnic" writers have reached popularity, with the exception of Jackie Kay. In spite of the variety of themes in her work, many of her texts portray a Scotland, but more frequently, a Glasgow where the negotiation of difference still remains unresolved, as she has stated:

> Scottish people will either refuse to recognize my Scottish accent, or my Scottishness, or they'll say, 'Are you American?' And Black people will just hear my accent or think it really funny and say they've never met such a person before. And so being Black and Scottish is always treated as a kind of anomaly. (Wilson 1990: 122)

The Adoption Papers (1991), *Other Lovers* (1993), *Off Colour* (1998), *Why Don't You Stop Talking?* (2002) show how to transcend social prejudice, and how to construct a positive definition for the self in a hybrid context. Glasgow usually becomes the point from which some of Kay's partially autobiographical characters and voices can articulate transnational or Atlantic connections (Gilroy 1999) in search of cultural referents from other areas, like Africa, or the USA. The influences they receive from the city are thus adapted to their needs when more positive elements participate in the definition of their alternative existence, as the author herself demonstrates in *Bessie Smith* (1997), where the biography of the singer emerges from the autobiographical connections between the writer and her teenage hero in a city with no other black referents at hand. In fact, her popular poem "So You Think I'm a Mule?", which was inspired by a real incident in a pub in London (Forbes 1998), portrays the general conception of the city as a white space.

> "Where do you come from?"
> 'I'm from Glasgow.'
> "Glasgow?"
> 'Uh huh. Glasgow.'
> The white face hesitates
> the eyebrows raise
> the mouth opens
> then snaps shut
> incredulous
> yet too polite to say outright
> liar
> (...) "Ah, but you are not pure"
> (...) "Well, that's not exactly what I mean,
> I mean ... you are a mulatto, just look at..."
> 'Listen. My original father was Nigerian
> to help with your confusion
> (...) I have to tell you:
> take your beady eyes offa my skin;
> don't concern yourself with
> the "dialectics of mixtures";
> don't pull that strange blood crap
> on me Great White Mother.
> Say, I'm no mating of a she-ass and a stallion
> no half this and half of that
> to put it plainly purely
> I am Black (...)

The question "Where do you come from?" far from being a naive proof of the woman's curiosity inevitably translates into the irritating assertion "You don't belong here", as Kay herself has stated in an interview: "[e]ither they mean 'Go back to where you came from,' or just have this obsessive curiosity that is all the time trying to deny the fact that you're Scottish" (Wilson 1990: 121).

The three examples that have been examined here are not intended to offer an exhaustive exploration of the many ways in which Glasgow has been imagined in contemporary literature, yet they show how the representation of the city has transcended local or national patterns to participate in more global debates. The influence of the artistic text on the city has transformed the relation of its inhabitants with the space, offering more complex and simultaneously liberating, possibilities for the definition of new identities. The adaptation of the city's signs from subjective standpoints and the legitimisation of such changes in the literary text have allowed for the reconfiguration of its specific features so that Glaswegians can find easier means to create their own cartographies of the place.

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SUMMARY

URBAN LANDSCAPES AND TEXTUAL SPACES: THREE PORTRAYALS OF GLASGOW BY A.L. KENNEDY, JANICE GALLOWAY AND JACKIE KAY

The aim of this paper is to analyse recent changes in the literary representation of the city of Glasgow. This text revises the most significant approaches to the space in Scottish culture in the twentieth century, from its highly masculinised working-class associations to more contemporary perspectives that negotiate ethnic and gender difference: The Scottish Renaissance of the inter-war period, the "Glasgow Group" of the late 1970s, and finally a younger generation of writers who began their careers in the late 1980s. In order to explore new literary cartographies of the city, this article focuses on the works of three of Scotland's most recognised writers, A. L. Kennedy, Janice Galloway and Jackie Kay. Firstly, from a Foucauldian perspective, it considers Kennedy's "The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History" and its portrayal of Glasgow as a textual space. Secondly, it studies gendered analysis of the city, such as Linda McDowell's, to interpret Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* and its incorporation of female subjectivity in the segregation of the urban. Finally, this paper considers the works of Jackie Kay and their negotiation of ethnic and sexual difference in the context.

KEYWORDS: Glasgow, contemporary Scottish fiction, A.L. Kennedy, Janice Galloway, Jackie Kay, space, gender.