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The Redifinition of Scottish Identity and the Relation Self-Other(s) in the Fiction of Brian McCabe

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Doctoral Thesis

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Identity has been one of the most important issues in art, philosophy, religion, science, criticism, etc. In the last decades, there has been a discursive explosion of the issue of identity as a consequence of the philosophical deconstruction of the autonomous Cartesian subject. However, the deconstruction of the fixed and unitary subject has not erased the notion of identity, on the contrary, it has brought to the fore the need of new approaches to the concept.

As a consequence of the decentralisation of the paradigm, a new discursive and pragmatic approach to identity —both personal and national— has arisen. The concept of identity now postulated is no longer essentialist and unitarian, but positional and relational. This change of paradigm makes it necessary to take into account historical, linguistic and cultural elements at work.

The performative and relational self is always in process, it is negotiation; therefore, the focus of attention has shifted towards the processes of identification and dialogue, which are revealed as key forces at work in identity construction. There is a historisation involved in the construction of identity, as it is subject to the changes in the dialogical processes at stake. Therefore, discourse and identity cannot be separated.

The constant re-definitions of identity affect not only individuals but also communities and nations. As we shall see, the case of Scotland is particularly prone to the questioning of essentialist and univocal identitarian myths, as its particular history and culture have highlighted the complexity and problematicity of identity construction.

Moreover, as the self is produced in a discourse which is always, by definition, dialogical, both the self and the other(s), or rather we should say the relation self-other(s), are at the core of identity. Consequently, it is in discourse that the mechanisms of identity should be analysed, and art in general and literature in particular —the discourse of imagination and dialogue— seem the ideal fields for identity explorations.

What makes art a worthy activity is that it is an exposure of the world to the world through a particular perspective. Art offers a subjective view that transcends

its subjectivity in order to offer a general insight into human existence. As the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy accurately put it:

> What counts in art, what makes art art […], is neither the "beautiful" nor the "sublime"; it is neither "purposiveness without a purpose" nor the "judgement of taste"; it is neither "sensible manifestation" nor the "putting into work of truth". Undoubtedly, it is all that, but in another way: it is access to the scattered origin in its scattering; it is the plural touching of the singular origin. (2000: 14)

Art defines itself, then, as the marriage of the particular and the universal, a relation that cannot be understood without the concept of "strangeness" —referring to the fact that "each singularity is another access to the world" (14). In art, human beings reveal and share their interest in the already-known and in the new or unexpected. In this sense, art cannot be understood without referring to identity, as it is precisely in the space between the self and the other(s) that singularity can transcend itself and reach towards the alien and unknown, what, as Emmanuel Levinas put it, is "otherwise than being" (2006: 3); and it is in this in-between space that meaning is produced and negotiated.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the notion of identity in the work of the Scottish writer Brian McCabe (b. 1951), and to see how this notion could be extrapolated to human identity in general. As we shall see, the relations between self and other(s) are crucial for the construction of identity, a central issue in McCabe's writing and in literature in general.

The analysis of McCabe's fiction will focus both on the form and contents of the corpus, since, as the Russian Formalists taught once and for all, both elements cannot be understood separately, just as discourse —a form of cultural intercourse— cannot be understood independently from the socio-cultural situation where it is engendered, that is, produced and received —since there is no meaning without reception. Therefore, before analysing the writing of Brian McCabe, it is necessary to set in context the writer and his works.

In order to understand McCabe's work more comprehensively, a brief overview of the particular socio-cultural context of Scottish literature, of the writing and reception of the stories will be offered, together with the main generic characteristics of the contemporary short-story genre and its relation to identity issues. Starting from the idea that art is a communicative activity that goes beyond the local and appeals to universal human issues, I will then focus my analysis of McCabe's work from the perspective of a dialogic, performative and interpersonal notion of identity, stressing the existing relation between self and other(s).

The analysis of the work of Brian McCabe will be divided into different sections, one for each of his books of collected short stories. It seems to me that the short stories are best analysed as published collections, since the short stories have a consistent and sustained set of images and motifs that evolve chronologically, stylistically and thematically following each of the compilations.

The establishment of the ideological stance of McCabe's work will be reached through the close reading and analysis of the structures, narrative techniques and main themes in his narrative work, as embedded in a distinctive socio-cultural context. Indeed, the thematic and stylistic elements in McCabe's work cannot be analysed independently, since they operate together in the communicative act; there is no understanding of one without the other.

Characteristically, the narrators/protagonists in McCabe's short stories are subjects who are, in a sense, undergoing some sort of personal crisis, understood as a state of being *in transition*, unfixed and in constant dialogue with others. As I hope to demonstrate, these crises are not related to the traditional notion of the Scottish fragmented or traumatised self, but rather reveal a more general identitarian position that envisions vital stability as an apparent and passing cognitive construction. The subjects in McCabe's stories must be, inevitably —forced by their particular vital circumstances— open to change and in constant growth, so that they can open to the other(s), and discover the world and themselves in an always changing and subjective context.

Identity and communication seem two of McCabe's, as well as his characters', main preoccupations. As we shall see, the contemporary short story is the perfect medium for the author to allow characters to present themselves through their actions rather than through long and meticulous descriptions by external narrators. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that his poetry also shows these same vital preoccupations, as well as his only novel —defined by critics, as he himself has noted, as "a long short story" (in Aliaga, 2008). Characteristically, McCabe's short stories develop alongside with the personal changes of autodiegetic narrators who discover the world and themselves through their interaction with the other(s). Characteristically too, the protagonists of McCabe's fictions enter into a dialogue where the self does not neutralise or absorb the position of the other(s); on the contrary, the characters themselves remain always other, uncertain, allowing a never-ending dialogic interaction and change of meaning. McCabe's interest in the fluid relation between self-other(s) is closely related to the question of language(s), the search for identity and the making of the self.

As is well known, there is a long tradition of negative artistic criticism in Scotland which has led to the belief that the Scottish cultural panorama is an "artistic wasteland". My contention is that contemporary writers like Brian McCabe have felt the need to overcome this negative outlook on Scottish art by endorsing more positive visions of identity as formulated by postmodernist thought, and focusing on the socio-cultural changes that are currently taking place in Scotland.

The critical approach I intend to employ is based, then, on dialogic accounts of both national and personal identities. This approach has two main positive elements. On the one hand, it fosters the ethical dialogue between self and other(s) in a growingly globalised world. And on the other, it is affirmative of the understanding of contemporary texts, since it attempts to overcome critical oversimplification and narrowness of perspective in the reception and understanding of artistic productions.

Chapter One

CONTEMPORARY SCOTTISH LITERATURE:
SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. Introduction to Contemporary Scottish Literature

Contemporary Scottish literature is characterised by its constant search for identity and the very questioning of the concepts of self and of nationhood as clear-cut, definable and stable entities. As Carla Sassi has noted, in the past decades: "The adjustments and the conflicts triggered by the adoption of a new supra-national citizenship have deeply affected Scotland and, as happens when things are not easy and straightforward, identity has become and "obsession" (2005: 10).[2] Needless to say, the problematics of identity are not a new interest in Scottish literature, since literary classics such as James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) or Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), just to cite the most popular, were already crucially concerned with the issues of identity.

Liminal states of mind, such as schizophrenia, trauma and other altered psychological states have been one of the fields where writers could explore identity more profoundly. There are plenty of works in contemporary Scottish fiction that present focalisers who are in a coma —as in Iain Bank's *The Bridge* (1986) or Irving Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmare* (1995)—; who are drunk —as in Hugh MacDiarmid's classic poem "A Drunk Man Looks at a Thistle" (1926) or Ron Butlin's novel *The Sound of my Voice* (1987)—; under the effects of drugs —as in Irving Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993)—; and characters who are mad and suffer crises or nervous breakdowns, or who are terrified —as in Brian McCabe's short stories "Conversation Area One" (2001), "A Breakdown" (1985), "The Lipstick Circus"

2. "A healthy one" Sassi continues stating, "insofar it has gradually encouraged a more flexible and encompassing approach to issues of identity" (2005: 10).

(1985)— ; or who live in a somewhat fantastic realm —as in Alasdair Gray's *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981), or McCabe's "The Host" (1985). However, this proliferation of transitional or liminal states where contrast and contradictions dwell is, according to Gregory Smith, essential to the Scottish literary mood. As he states:

> There is more in the Scottish antithesis of the real and the fantastic than is to be explained by the familiar rules of rhetoric. The sudden jostling of contraries seems to preclude any relationship by literary suggestion. The one invades the other without warning. They are the "polar twins" of the Scottish Muse. (1919: 20)

This "individual and alien" mood seems to have slipped into "the plain tale of experience" (22), and the fluctuating world between the fantastic and the real finds its expression in the in-between, in the contrast. As Smith remarks:

> The [Scottish] poet seems to say. "Here is fantasy strange enough; if you, drunkard of facts, must explain it, do so in the only way open to you. […] Be satisfied, if you think it is we who are drunk. As for us, let the contrast be unexplained, and let us make merry in thus clash of strange worlds and mood".[3] (1919: 23)

Among the many representations of liminal and traumatised characters in late twentieth-century Scottish fiction, we find, for example, Ian Banks' acclaimed novel *The Wasp Factory* (1984), whose protagonist, Frank, has suffered some horrific childhood accident and reveals that he has murdered several of his relatives —something which was, in the narrator's own words, "a stage [he] was going through" (Banks, 2004). Nevertheless, the novel's ending allows the protagonist to emerge "from trauma into a world —and a Scotland— with promise" (Gifford *et al.*, 2002: 929). Another example of this interest in trauma as related to identity search (Gifford *et al.*, 2002: 929) would be *Espedair Street* (1987), which has been described as Bank's "study of a traumatised and guilt-ridden Paisley rock star hiding out in a disused Glasgow church […], his concealment of his identity as the surviving member of the world-famous group, Frozen Gold". There are also characters who are not exactly traumatised, but rather semi-present, such as the main character in Banks' *The Bridge*.

In another mood, we find Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* (1994). This novel tells the story of a young Scots woman, Movern Callar,[4] who works at a supermarket, and who, one morning, finds her boyfriend dead —he has committed suicide. She hides the body,[5] empties his bank account, and submits the book he has been

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3. As Alan Bold states: "During the making of *A Drunk Man* MacDiarmid must have recalled that passage to support his plan to create a modernistic work that yet had precedents in a distinctive Scottish tradition" (1983b: 88-89).
4. Her family name means "to be quiet" in Spanish.
5. It is worth noting the metaphoric charge of her action: she tries to conceal his death and prevent the traumatic event to rise to the surface.

writing to a publisher under her own name. She flees to Spain, but she returns eventually, pregnant, and with all her unsolved problems. The work has been defined as a novel dealing with "recovery from trauma, deconstruction of the boundaries of rural and urban, and presentation by a male writer of a who challenges gender stereotypes" (Gifford *et al.*, 2002: 948).

Janice Galloway's acclaimed first novel, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), presents a autodiegetic female narrator suffering from a serious depression after the accidental death of her lover, desperately trying to find reasons to keep alive. The novel explores different graphic modes of representation of the narrator's trauma, as there are incomplete sentences written on the margins of some pages, blank spaces, and columns splitting the narrative in two.

A. L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* (1995), winner of the Encore Award, focuses on the trauma of child sexual abuse and its consequences in adulthood. Her novel *Everything You Need* (1999) tells the story of a middle-aged writer, Nathan Staples, who lives on a coastal island in permanent retreat from the world. He is obsessed by the loss of his wife, who had been strangled, and of the loss of her daughter, whom he has not seen for a long time and who thinks he is dead.

The subject of trauma is so common in Scottish literature that Douglas Gifford has even stated that "a predominant theme of current Scottish writing, [is] that of the emergence from a traumatised personal —and modern Scottish— past" (960). Gifford points to one of the key reasons for this proliferation of traumatised characters and narrators in Scottish fiction as the possible existence of a Scottish "traumatised past". This past would not only have affected the fictions of Hogg and Stevenson, but also the writing of contemporary authors. Thus, in order to understand the literary context where Brian McCabe's work is embedded, it is necessary to analyse in some detail the relationship of Scottish writers to the past and cultural tradition they belong to.

Scotland's history as a nation is quite problematic, as it has not been an independent state for more than three hundred years, Moreover, as Sassi has pointed out, Scotland "was deprived of its autonomy at the very time (the 18th century) when European nation-states were defining themselves in 'organic' terms" (2005: 3). The predicament of the Scottish post-Union culture has been fragmentary or rather, plural. Ethnic, linguistic, religious, political and geographic fractures prevented a unitary and homogenous national self-image. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the cultural movement known as "Scottish Renaissance" made an attempt at fixing or "recovering" a unified national identity, but all the attempts "led to transient formulations" (3). As Sassi further stated, the illusion of national cohesion has been unattainable in Scotland, "'doomed' to a permanent

status of ethnic and linguistic fragmentation" (4). The lack of historical and political cohesion of the many Scotlands of the past and the present also made it almost impossible to construct a neat central unifying myth.

Being this fracture indelible, the past of Scotland became fictionalised through literary falsification. As Cairns Craig states, "[t]here is a moment in Scottish cultural experience when Scottish history and Scottish literature are deeply and creatively interwoven" (1999b: 19). He means, of course, the moment when Sir Walter Scott created the historical novel. As Craig further states, the exchange between the two disciplines, history and literature, had never been so intense and productive before. Many analysts have seen this interplay of history and fiction as a potentially destructive force in Scottish culture (20). As Marinell Ash points out, the influence of Sir Walter Scott in Scotland was totally different from his influence in Europe. The origin, she explains, lies in Scotland itself:

> Many historians have remarked on the change in the middle decades of the nineteenth century from a distinctively Scottish society to one (or several) societies with a British or even imperial orientation. Yet the time that Scotland was ceasing to be distinctively and confidently herself was also the period when there grew an increasing emphasis on the emotional trappings of the Scottish past. (1980: 10)

As Craig further notes, these emotional trappings of the Scottish past "are substituted for real Scottish history, and the reality of the Scottish past is undermined by its fictional representation by generations of Scottish novelists" (1999b: 20). According to him, the "real" past and the romanticised past became confused and, because of this fact, Scottish history could not work as the medium through which the nation could rediscover and remake its identity, since Scottish history did no longer exist as such, it "had ceased" (21). This erasure has been said to have terrible consequences for the cultural production: if history had become so distorted that it could not sustain "a literature adequate to the requirements of a full national identity and, as a consequence, literature had failed to come to grips with the realities of the nation's history" (21), then, of course, Scotland would be an "artistic wasteland", as many analysts have put it (Muir, 1936: 2-3; Dunnigan, 2004: 12; Craig, 1999a: 16; Craig, 1999b: 21; Gifford, 1985: 5; Sassi, 2005: 7).

Nevertheless, belief in the possibility of a hypothetically direct access to a nation's "real" past may be too radical. It may be true that Scotland's fictionalisation of the past was stronger than that of other European countries, but the fact remains that the concept of national identity is, in a sense, already a more or less "fictional" construction. I will not use Benedict Andersons' concept of "imagined communities", since I think that the concept reduces the strength of the potential role of political agency and overlooks the forces of dissension and conflict that structure a community; instead, I prefer postmodernist conceptions of national identity, such as the one set out by W. J. M. Mackenzie, who defines it in terms

of communal action,[6] thus opening up a space for individual agency and communal negotiation.

Furthermore, national identity is not monolithic or homogenous. Rather, a nation is a dialogic entity constructed out of the tensions among its different elements. This heterogeneous community achieves symbolic cohesion through the narration of itself. But it is precisely because it is achieved through *narration* that it cannot be, by definition, natural or unchanging. Moreover, nationalistic movements are not as monolithic and homogenous as some critics have described it.[7] As we shall see when dealing with the "Scottish Renaissance", within nationalist movements there are debates about the nature of national identity; and the definition of identity is based precisely on the interplay of those conflicting and contradictory elements, rather than on the idea of consensus.

All the differing factors involved in the definition of Scotland denied the reality of national ideals and demanded the continuous rethinking of identity. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Scottishness started to be re-defined against Englishness and became "England's *alter ego*" (Sassi, 2005: 31 and 41). As Angus Calder has stated: "We define ourselves by what we are not. We are not English" (1996: 236). If we define our selves "by what we are not", then the other(s) play a central role in the construction of identity, as we shall see in Chapter Three.

Still, the fact remains that this vision of the Scottish past as being erased, and of the Scottish national identity as being "traumatic" has been very common among intellectuals. Sarah M. Dunnigan, for example, explicitly refers to the Scottish "practice of forgetting or ignoring unresolved conflicts" and "unacknowledged desires" as part of Scotland's "traumatic past" (2004: 114). In a sense, the definition of the Scottish past as "traumatic" is adequate, as trauma breaks the experience of time and distorts or even erases a difficult past event, without the possibility of simply leaving it behind. As Cathy Caruth has put it, trauma is a "wound of the mind —the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (1996: 3), a split or break.

As we shall see, the linguistic development in Scotland is also a key aspect of the cultural and intellectual tradition, since the linguistic fracture and the erasure of Scots and Gaelic has been seen as a linguistic and cultural amputation by some critics.

Finally, Scottish criticism has been as important as the historical and political events of the last centuries in the development of Scottish culture, since both

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6. Mackenzie develops this idea in his essay entitled *Political Identity* (1978).
7. Thus, for example, Ernest Gellner has stated that "[n]ationalism is a political principle which maintains that similarity of culture is the basic bound" (in Bell and Miller, 2004: 36).

contributed to the formation of a national self-identity and cannot be analysed separately.

The first piece of criticism that argued that there was in fact a literature in Scotland definable through a distinctive Scottish element —the Caledonian anti-syzygy— was G. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919). In his seminal work, Smith points out the variety of Scottish literature, which had become "under the stress of foreign influence and native division and reaction, almost a zigzag of contradictions" (1919: 4). As Smith further states:

> The antithesis need not, however, disconcert us. Perhaps in the very combination of opposites —what either of the two Sir Thomases, of Norwich and Cromarty, might have willing to call "the Caledonian antisyzygy"— we have a reflection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability, which is another way of saying that he has made allowance for new conditions, in his practical judgement, which is the admission that two sides of the matter have been considered. (4)

The oxymoronic character of the Scot could also be found in Scottish literature, Smith argued (4-5). The "Caledonian antisyzygy" or "antithetical mind" meant a sense of self-division that would be reflected in the abundance of contradictions and in the union of opposites in Scottish literary texts. This definition, rooted in the analysis of Scottish historical facts, deeply penetrated the Scottish imagination, as the analysis will show.

It was precisely this characteristic signalled by Smith that served some other critics such as T. S. Eliot to deny the very existence of a distinctive Scottish literary tradition. The Modernist poet claimed that Scottish literature was merely an appendage to "English Literature" (in McGuire, 2009: 25). As Eliot argued in is famous critical essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), the significance of an individual work of art does not reside in its unique aesthetic qualities, but rather in its place within an identifiable literary tradition. The basic foundation for such a tradition, Eliot argued, is precisely the writing in a single language. Scotland was writing in three languages at that time: Gaelic, Scots and English; and, consequently, it could not be said to have a "proper" tradition of its own. It is thus not difficult to deduce from Eliot's statement that he thought that, since every great work has to be in contact with its tradition, no great work of art could be born in Scotland. Edwin Muir's critical work best exemplifies this tendency among Scottish intellectuals to believe that the Scottish imagination was "ill" or at least deeply damaged.[8] So, not only was the national identity blurry, the very

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8. As Muir states in his poem "Scotland 1941", everything left was a sham nation narrated by sham writers: "Now smoke and dearth and money everywhere; / Mean heirlooms of each fainter generation, / And mummied housegods in their musty nichs, / Burns and Scott, sham bards of a sham nation" (1963: 97).

cultural identity vanished. This process went hand in hand with some kind of inferiority complex that literary criticism strongly endorsed until not so long ago. Many intellectuals believed in the myth of Scottish cultural illness or weakness. The critic Cairns Craig, for example, contends that the "Scottish predicament" —which refers to Smith's Caledonian antisyzygy— can be epitomised as:

> the total elision of evidence of the past, and its replacement by a novelty so radical that it is impossible for the individual to relate it to his or her personal memories; and, therefore, impossible for that environment to be 'related' as a coherent narrative. The constant erasure of one Scotland by another makes Scotland unrelatable, unnarratable: past Scotlands are not gathered into the being of modern Scotland; they are abolished. (1999a: 21)

Indeed, his description of Scottish culture seems quite traumatic. As Caruth has stated, a traumatic event fractures the very experience of time, as "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, only in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (1996: 4-5). As a consequence, for "traumatic memory", the past is undistinguishable from the present, and so past occurrences are relived (through flashbacks, nightmares, repetition of words or phrases, etc.). As Caruth has further explained, "[t]he historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (1996: 8).

Craig, who laments the sense of cultural inferiority that has traditionally characterised the historical reception of Scottish literature, recognises that this critical insecurity led to some kind of parochialism:

> Scottish culture has cowered in the consciousness of its inadequacy recognising the achievements of individual Scots simply as proof of the failure of the culture as a whole. Succeed and you are no longer Scottish (no real Scottish) —you are like David Hume or Muriel Spark, someone who has leapt beyond the bonds set by Scottishness; be Scottish and your achievement is necessarily local, you have immured yourself —as MacDiarmid said of Neil Gunn— in Scottshire. (11)

This thought has haunted Scottish culture for many centuries. Not in vain, unresolved traumatic experiences are said to be "reexperienced in repetitive, unconscious patterns" (Vickroy, 202: 13).

Nevertheless, postmodern thinking and the emergence of postcolonial studies have set into question the definition of culture as a monolithic tradition based on the stability of language, defended by Eliot almost a century ago.[9] These post-

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9. Not all twentieth-century writers believed in this. For example, the Spanish writer and thinker Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) was a strong champion of the natural "bastardness" of language. As he stated in his essay "Contra el purismo", languages thrive on heresies: "las lenguas, como las religiones, viven de herejías" (1899: 349).

modern analyses expose the traumatic reading of the past as oversimplifying, since it distorts the literary reality of the moment. Moreover, this traditional critical interpretation is damaging, since it fosters a number of historical and cultural omissions and condemns the last four decades of the Reformation to the status of an artistic wasteland. Besides, it offers no way out of such a view.

Dominick LaCapra holds that there are two fundamental forms of remembering traumatic events: "acting out" and "working through". In "acting out", the traumatised subject compulsively repeats the traumatic past event (2000: 36), whereas in "working through" the subject can gain some "critical distance" and is able to escape the circularity of traumatic memory and distinguish between past, present and future (143-44). As LaCapra further states, "it is via the working-through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical and political agent" (144). With LaCapra's definitions in mind, it might be argued that a more positive critical view of the concept of identity, both personal and social or national, would allow for a "working through" of the Scottish "trauma".

As several Scottish authors show, the old self-pitying lament of the "artistic wasteland" can transform itself into an exploration of the possibilities of the fertile field of Scottish culture in the last decades of the twentieth century.

For all this, it seems that this idea of a lack of historical, national and cultural traditions developed into some kind of haunting ghostly presence for the Scottish imagination which is difficult to overcome. Some contemporary writers still seem to believe to a greater or lesser degree in the erasure or inexistence of a Scottish literary tradition, even if this is no longer a general belief. As James Kelman explained with reference to his own experience as a writer: "There were no literary models I could look to from my own culture. There was *nothing* whatsoever" (2002: 64, emphasis added).

Closely linked to this deeply interiorised classical view of tradition is the old obsession with language and voice. Even in contemporary fiction, writers still try to find and articulate an identifiably Scottish voice. It was maybe during the Scottish Renaissance at the beginning of the twentieth century, with figures like Hugh MacDiarmid, that the issue of language and the search for a Scottish voice started to be central preoccupations.

As stated above, the Scottish artistic corpus and artistic criticism go hand in hand, just as the artistic creation of a community and its identity are also intimately linked, since both feed on each other. It is only when critics and writers are willing to see the existence of a certain tradition that the tradition comes into being.

The Scottish Renaissance was a period of general revitalisation that went hand in hand with a growing self-confidence in Scottish culture and politics. Art, as a social product cannot be separated from the ideology and the reality of its tem-

poral and geographical context. For this reason, and before briefly overviewing the importance of the Scottish Renaissance for the Scottish letters, it is necessary to have a brief look at the languages spoken in Scotland.

During the medieval period, Gaelic and Scots were Scotland's two main languages: Gaelic in the Highlands and islands, and Scots in the Lowlands, although some members of the nobility had some knowledge of English. Scots was thus the language of politics, commerce, art and law. As McGuire points out, "[t]he official parlance of the royal court, Scots, was a separate language rather than merely a dialect of English" (2009: 45). In the subsequent centuries, the Church[10] and Monarchy[11] brought about the progressive Anglicisation of Scottish culture, reaching its peak in 1707 when Scotland renounced in Parliament its own sovereignty in order to gain access to England's expanding Empire. Voluntarily included in the British state, the Anglicisation of Scotland became much stronger. Nevertheless, the "voluntary" character of this inclusion should be taken very carefully. As Sassi has put it:

> The Union was —as we know well— promoted by an élite, which did not need, at that time, ratification for its implementation, and whose main motivation was economic. The unconditional support for the Union was guaranteed, in the following two centuries, by those social classes which most benefited from the new political order. (2005: 45)

The Union's desire for expansion was founded on the appearance of internal unity and strength, a fusion that did not allow for the existence of extreme differences such as language issues.[12]

Eighteen-century intellectuals like David Hume (1711-1776), Adam Smith (1723-1790), John Home (1722-1808) and Allan Ramsay (1713-1784), deliberately avoided Scotticisms in their writings, and even formed, in 1761, "The Society for Promoting the Reading and Speaking of the English Language" (Bold, 1983: 6). Moreover, the Scottish accent was considered embarrassing, as can be gathered from the title of the lexicographer John Walker's article "Rules to Be Observed by the Natives of Scotland for Attaining a Just Pronunciation of English", published in his famous work, *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* in 1791.

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10. The Protestant Reformation.

11. In 1603, James VI of Scotland and I of England revised his *Basilicon Doron* (1598), a testament instructing his young son, Prince Henry, in manners, morals and the ways of kingship —originally written in Scots— to make it intelligible in English (Bold, 1983: 5).

12. Of course, the discourse of political and linguistic agreement for the search of economic growth is not specifically English or British, since it has been used and is still used nowadays as the basic principle in the politics of many if not most European countries.

Middle-class Scots took speech lessons at university to "improve" their accent and sound more English, a strong tendency that marked the start of the term "English" as being equalled to the term "British".[13] This fact obviously brought about crucial cultural consequences, as "[t]he curriculum saw the enthronement of a canon of English literary texts as paradigm examples of proper language usage" (McGuire, 2009: 47). The Scottish literary tradition was indeed erased from the curricula at universities, and the English tradition started to become the tradition of the whole of Britain, thus silencing the other "minor" traditions. Of course this did not mean that Scots and Gaelic were no longer used, or that there were no writers using these two other languages, but it is true that they were rapidly disappearing from the political and intellectual life of the nation. Scots, and also Gaelic, which was even weaker, were relegated to the realm of the poetic imagination.

As we shall see in the following section, this fact is one of the core issues that have defined Scottish culture until the present: Scots, from Edwin Muir to James Kelman, characteristically state that they feel in one language —the poetic Scots— and think in another —the intellectual and political English. It seems, thus, quite clear that the linguistic developments occurring before and after 1707 are key factors in the understanding of the development of the Scottish cultural tradition and, consequently, of contemporary Scotland.

2. The Scottish Renaissance: The Cultural Revival of the Twentieth Century

An especially important period in the recuperation of a certain specifically Scottish cultural tradition was the Scottish Renaissance, a label that refers to the cultural revival that took place in Scotland during the first half of the twentieth century.[14] This movement has been considered a rebirth of Scottish national culture that would look back both to the medieval *makar* poets,[15] such as William

Dunbar (*c.*1460-*c.*1530),[16] Robert Henryson (*c.*1460-1500),[17] Gavin Douglas (*c.*1474-1522)[18] and David Lindsay (*c.* 1486-*c.* 1555), as well as to contemporary poets such as T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), and D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930).[19] Both the European-focused dimension of the literary revival and the inclusion of the Celtic Highlands in the cultural regeneration of Scotland were in their agenda, so this was not a romantic navel-gazing recuperation of the past.

George Douglas —George Douglas Brown— (1869-1902), best known for his early and highly influential realist novel, *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901),[20] is considered as one of its precursors in his exploration of more realistic portrayals of Scottish identity beyond the kailyard. The most important figures of this cultural *Renaissance* where Hugh MacDiarmid —Christopher Murray Grieve— (1892-1978); Lewis Grassic Gibbon —James Leslie Mitchell— (1901-1935); the poet, novelist and critic Edwin Muir (1887-1959); and Neil M. Gunn (1891-1973).

These writers differed from each other in their attitudes towards literature and nationalism, "but in all their different ways contributed to the interrogation of Scottish history and culture and the revival in Scottish writing during this inter-war period" (Gifford *et al.*, 2002: 506). It is necessary to take into consideration these figures that shaped the intellectual evolution at the time, since they undoubtedly had an influence on the following generations of writers.

Hugh MacDiarmid became one of its most important representatives and an active member of the movement. As Robert Crawford has put it, "his verse and often incendiary polemical prose scorched twentieth-century Scottish intellectual life" (2007: 542). MacDiarmid combined his enthusiasm for the international

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13. "Developed in the 1750s by Adam Smith at the University of Glasgow and Hugh Blair at the University of Edinburgh, classes in 'Rhetoric and Belle Lettres' were designed to teach young Scottish men how to use English correctly" (McGuire, 2009: 47).

14. The label was apparently coined by Hugh MacDiarmid in *The Scottish Chapbook* (1922) (McCulloch, 2004: 52-53), although other sources erroneously claim that it was coined firstly by Denis Saurrat (1890-1958) in his article "Le Groupe de la Renaissance Écossaise" (1924) —published two years later—, referring to a number of writers associated with MacDiarmid's *Chapbook* and the three issues of his *Northern Numbers* anthologies published between 1920 and 1922 (McGuire, 2009: 7) (Gifford *et al.*, 2002: 505).

15. The term *makar* designates a Scottish poet or bard, often thought of as a royal court poet. These court poets "wrote some of the finest European poetry of the day in Scots" (McGuire, 2009: 45).

16. Dunbar belongs, with King James I of Scotland, Robert Henryson and Gavin Douglas, to what was formerly called the Scottish Chaucerian school, although the influence of Chaucer on these writers was in fact minimal. Dunbar's chief allegorical poems are "The Goldyn Targe" and "The Thrissil and the Rois". Dunbar has the curious distinction of having been responsible for the first printed use of the word "fuck", in his 1503 poem "Brash of Wowing": "Yit be his feirris he wald haif fukkit: / Ye brek my hairt, my bony ane". Something that would start a long tradition in Scottish literature, as Tom Leonard's or James Kelman's writings confirm.

17. Henryson wrote using the Scots language of the fifteenth century. His most important poems are *The Testament of Cresseid*, which was written as a harshly moral epilogue to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and "Orpheus and Eurydice" (Anon., 2009b).

18. Douglas "translated Virgil's Roman epic *The Aeneid* into Scots, illustrating the degree to which it was a language capable of the most sophisticated and sublime poetry" (McGuire, 2009: 45).

19. C. M. Grieve, one of the writers included in the Scottish Renaissance, "reacted enthusiastically to Joyce's *Ulysses* and to T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* (Crawford, 2007: 544). Edwin Muir's book of essays, *Transition*, published in 1926, deals with Joyce, Lawrence, Woolf, Eliot and others (Crawford, 2007: 548).

20. A novel, best known for its conscious violation of the conventions of the sentimental kailyard school, that describes the struggles of a proud and taciturn carrier, Jock Gourlay, against the spiteful digs and machinations of the envious villagers of Barbie.

modern avant-garde and his radical socialist political ideas,[21] with a defense of the Scots national language and culture, and of Scottish political independence (542).[22] MacDiarmid's aim was to undo those 400 years of linguistic denigration. His defense of the Scots language started with the creation of *lallans*, an attempt to recover the Scots language, with the aid of John Jamison's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808) (McGuire, 2009: 48-9). This "new" language was called by some "synthetic Scots", since many of the words in Jamison's dictionary had long time fallen out of use, and the artificially created language was thus rather elitist, more suitable for Modernist writings than for the everyday use among common people.[23] MacDiarmid himself later recognised the contradiction between his socialistic political ideals and his linguistic and literary aims.[24]

Lewis Grassic Gibbon, author of the trilogy *A Scots Quair* —including *Sunset Song* (1932), *Cloud Howe* (1933) and *Grey Granite* (1934)—, has been praised for having "re-energised the traditional Scottish literary focus of the small rural community through a modernist aesthetic in which this community is allowed its own voice" (McGuire, 2009: 115). His combination of realist narrative and the lyrical use of dialect are considered to be defining features of the works produced during the twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance.

The Scots vernacular, promoted by MacDiarmid as the true medium of the Scottish Renaissance,[25] was viewed by Gibbon as a practical problem. In the introductory note to his *Sunset Song*, he reflects:

> If the great Dutch language disappeared from literary usage and a Dutchman wrote in German a story of the Lekside peasants, one may hazard he would ask and receive a certain latitude and forbearance in his usage of German. He might import into his pages some score or so untranslatable words and idioms —untranslatable except in their context and setting; he might mould in some fashion

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21. In 1926, MacDiarmid wrote that a "Programme for a Scottish Fascism [of the left] is the only thing that will preserve our distinctive national culture" (in Riach, 1992: 38). On the other hand, MacDiarmid defended a politics that sought to combine Scottish nationalism with radical socialist internationalism (Crawford, 2007: 548).

22. Curiously, this linking of Scots identity with socialist Internationalism was still there a century later, as Calder has stated: "To be Scots is to be prole. To be prole is to be Socialist [...]. To be Socialist is to be internationalist. So, we go far with our Scottish nationalism, join the clamour for the Scottish Parliament, mingle as Artists for Independence, then think: hell, we're Socialists, really, internationalists really" (1996: 235).

23. As announced in 1976 in the magazine *Scotia Review*, "*Lallans. The Magazine for Writing in Lowland Scots*", edited by J. K. Annand, includes "a regular feature 'Teach yourself lallans' to help those whose command of the language is limited", obviously addressed at Scottish people (Morrison, 1976: 27). The mentioned feature emphasises the artificiality of *lallans*.

24. MacDiarmid recognised this contradiction in his "Second Hymn to Lenin": "Are my poems spoken in the factories and fields, / In the streets o' the toon? / Gin they're no, then I'm fallin' to dae / What I ocht to ha'dune" (1994: 152).

25. Especially since the publication of MacDiarmid's "The Watergaw" in 1922.

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Edinburgh. Summer 2008

his German to the rhythms and cadence of the kindred speech that his peasants speak. Beyond that, in fairness to his hosts, he hardly could go: to seek effect by a spray of apostrophes would be both impertinence and mis-translation. (Gibbon, 1995: xiii)[26]

For Gibbon there was thus an underlying sense of estrangement beneath the Scottish writer's use of English that betrays the fact that he or she is translating him- or herself. Although Gibbon was no real nationalist, like MacDiarmid,[27] he published with MacDiarmid the essay *Scottish Scene or the Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (1934).

Another prominent leading figure in the Scottish Renaissance movement was Edwin Muir. He was a poet, novelist and noted translator. Among the many works he published we find *Scottish Journey* (1935), *Essays on Literature and Society* (1949), *Collected Poems 1921-1951* (1952), *Prometheus* (1954), and *The Estate of Poetry* (1962); and translations such as Franz Kafka's *The Castle* (1930) or Heinrich Mann's *The Hill of Lies* (1934). Muir's brilliant critical thought and strong cosmopolitanism were deeply appreciated by MacDiarmid and T. S. Eliot (Crawford, 2007: 564). He was also deeply preoccupied with the issue of language, and he lamented the "wedge" he clearly saw in Scottish culture between thought and feeling. As already stated, after the Union, the Scots language had been relegated to the poetic imagination, and since then English was the language used for intellectual and institutional matters.

Muir, like Gibbon, also thought that the Scots were in a sense estranged from themselves, schizophrenic, since they were condemned to "think in one language and feel in another": "Scots has survived to our time as a language for simple poetry, and the simpler kind of short story. […] [A]ll its other uses have lapsed, and it expresses therefore only a fragment of the Scottish mind" (Muir, 1984: 8). In keeping with his argumentation, Muir asserted that "its very use is proof that the Scottish consciousness is divided", and he termed this problematic issue as "the Scottish predicament" (1984: 9). It is not necessary to explain that this vision was quite pessimistic, that it did not allow much space for the search of a "real" Scottish voice, and that in fact it worked to prevent it.

Muir and MacDiarmid strongly disagreed about the use of the Scots tongue in modern verse (Crawford, 2007: 563 and 540). Muir, clearly influenced by Eliot's

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26. I think it is worth stressing Gibbon's explanation that the words and idioms were "untranslatable except in their context and setting". James Kelman's experimental novel, *Translated Accounts* (2001) seems to give another turn of the screw to this idea of the dispossession-reappropriation of language and of the importance of context when dealing with languages, as already pointed out by Gibbon.

27. As Crawford notes: "Gibbon was no nationalist; yet like all other Scottish writers and intellectuals of the period, they were quickened by an engagement with nationalist arguments" (2007: 569).

notion of tradition, stated in his essay *Scott and Scotland* (1936) that Scotland could only create a national literature by writing in English: "If we are to have a complete and homogenous Scottish literature it is necessary that we should have a complete and homogenous language" (1936: 178).

Something that —with some exceptions— has not been questioned until the last decades of the twentieth century is that perhaps a homogeneous culture was not needed to build up a Scottish tradition. The debate on the language to be used in literature showed a wide range of possibilities that continues to be explored in the present. As we shall see, there is in fact a tradition of Scottish writing, but it is not a *unified* tradition. Rather, we find a dialectic of traditions, and this is not a symptom of weakness but of plurality. In fact, even the Scottish Renaissance was not a homogenous movement, since it included many and very varied writers.

Another important figure in the Scottish Renaissance was Neil Miller Gunn (1891-1973). Gunn, spurred by his friend Hugh MacDiarmid, wrote short stories for the *Northerns Review*, edited by McDiarmid. He also published some novels set in the Scottish past, like *Sun Circle* (1933). His research on the fiction of the Highlands became prominent, just as his landscapes and descriptions of the Highlanders and his mixing of myth and reality made him one of "the most important Scottish novelists of the twentieth century" (Royle, 1984: 133).

The list of writers included under the label of "Scottish Renaissance" is long. Some of them spent many years as expatriates. In contemporary literature there are also many Scottish writers who do not live in Scotland or who were raised abroad, a fact that problematises the concept of Scottishness as being essentialist or monolithic. Charles Murray (1864-1941), who wrote in the Doric dialect of Scots, was born and raised in Alford (north-east Scotland). He wrote much of his poetry while living in South Africa. Murray was best known for his collection of poems *Hamewith* (1900).[28] Another example of hybrid Scottishness would be the poet Will H. Ogilvie (1869-1963), born at Holefield Farm (Scotland), who spent twelve years in the Australian Outback. He wrote poems about the Borderlands when he returned to Scotland in 1901, like the ballad entitled "Whaup o' the Rede" (1909). *Over The Grass* (1925) is one of his best known works.

There were also some female writers, such as Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999), Catherine Carswell —Catherine MacFarlane— (1879-1946), Helen Cruickshank (1886-1975); Marion Angus (1865-1946), Violet Jacob (1863-1946), and Dot Allan (1886-1964)—, although not as many as men since, like many movements at the time, the Scottish Renaissance was considered to be a masculine movement. Scottish literature has often been defined as male-focused; nevertheless, this generalised impression may hide a slight oversimplification due to the times,

as there were in fact many women writers. It is true, however, that their significance may be underrated at that time; but, as Gifford comments when talking about the Scottish Renaissance, "these women writers were also innovators, presenting from the inside female experience in the cities, small towns and rural areas of Scotland in a way that was strikingly and confidently new in Scottish writing" (Gifford *et al.*, 2002: 508).

In the present, the common belief that contemporary Scottish women writers have generally been ignored, will reveal itself as a generalistic overview if one takes into consideration the number of works published and the literary awards won by them. There are also several critical studies devoted to female writers, without making any gender distinction under an "only-women-writers" label. Indeed, women are very much present in the cultural life of Scotland, and it can be stated that the contemporary literary world is not as sexist as some critics claim.[29]

The Scottish Renaissance dealt mainly with the written medium, although it was no monolithic movement but a broad cultural movement that included other arts. In the visual arts, artists such as the painter and illustrator John Duncan (1866-1945) —influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, and Celtic imagery and symbolism—, and John Duncan Fergusson (1874-1961) —who explored the Impressionist and Fauvist techniques that would lead eventually to the founding of the "Scottish Colourists Group"[30]— were among the most influential artists. The bond between the visual and the written in the artistic creation in Scotland has also a strong tradition.[31]

The list could grow and grow, but it is beyond the scope of this essay to carry out an exhaustive analysis of the Scottish Renaissance. My aim has been to offer a brief overview of the twentieth-century literary movement in both its social and cultural context, as an important antecedent to the literary context of the so-called "Second Scottish Renaissance" of the last decades of the twentieth century where Brian McCabe belongs.

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28. Meaning "homewards" in English.

29. It is evident, however, that there has been a general tendency to relegate women to the more "private" spheres and that this tendency lasted for many centuries all over Europe. One could even discern a universal sexist force, which is slowly being broken down in the twenty-first century. But, in my opinion, writing of the existence of present-day sexism in contemporary arts in Scotland would be at least exaggerated, if not unfair.

30. Francis Cadell, Samuel Peploe and Leslie Hunter were some of the painters among the "colourists". The Colourists group was a group of painters that continued the work of previous broader artistic movement developed by the *Glasgow School*. The members of *Glasgow School* expanded the canon of Impressionist and Post-impressionist painting through colorful rural depictions that attempted to capture the many facets of the character of Scotland. As Gifford *et al.* comment in the chapter included in their volume on Scottish Literature devoted to the Scottish Renaissance, "all of these visual artists were international in their orientation and exhibited to acclaim on the continent" (2002: 505).

31. The most relevant contemporary example of this tie could be the work by Alasdair Gray, who combines drawings and words, or that by Ian Hamilton Finlay.

Besides its influence on the literary and cultural scene, the Scottish Renaissance also had a profound effect on the Scottish independence movement, and the Scottish National Party may be said to be firmly rooted in it. Arguably, Scottish devolution came about partly because of it. Hugh MacDiarmid, who became a founding member of the National Party of Scotland —the later Scottish National Party—, has stated that he wanted to "enter heart and body and soul into a new Scots Nationalist propaganda" (in Kerrigan, 1988: 13). But the argument can be turned upside down: the active participation or implication of many intellectuals in the political sphere brought about a self-confidence that extended to the cultural sphere, which, spurred by the growing importance of specifically Scottish issues, started to put more energy on the artistic exploration of the representations of these ascending feelings and forces. This was especially important for the reconstruction of a Scottish tradition.

As the Scottish Renaissance became more and more popular and the National Party made an impact, publications on Scottish culture and essays and articles on Scottish/English differences started to arise.[32] As McGuire has stated, "[o]ne of the defining features of this movement was a desire to recover and resituate the place of Scottish culture", a culture they considered to be "in a moribund state, having endured centuries of marginalization within the Anglo-centric system of cultural value embedded within the British state" (2009: 8). These writers were, thus, mainly concerned with the representation of specifically Scottish voices and values, an aspiration they intimately linked with nationalist politics.

Even though the aims of the revival movement were quite international, the concept of Scottish identity was still quite narrow at the time. As we have seen, MacDiarmid and Gibbon struggled for a distinctively Scottish cultural identity. Both of them used the phrase "the new Scotland" to refer to a modern Scotland whose identity should be clearly distinct from that of England. As we shall see, this obsession with the recovery of the Scottish past has been a haunting presence in the literary production until the present, although it is true that the postmodern conception of identity has made it change quite a lot. However, it cannot be ignored that it is still argued, as MacDiarmid and Gibbon have pointed out , that "Modern Scotland will never be understood until its desire to resume an identity distinct from that of England is appreciated" (1934: 43). Or rather maybe we should state that Scottish identity will not be fully understood until criticism recognises the Scottish tradition as something valid and rich in itself.

As mentioned above, social pessimism and traumatic readings of the Scottish arts have been quite abundant, until "Scottish fiction began in the closing decades of the century to move from bleakness and trauma to regeneration" (Gifford *et al.*, 2002: 933-4). According to critics such as Gifford, Scottish writing became more optimistic and self-assured after the nineteen-nineties, when "the moods and possibilities of the fiction had changed profoundly" (933).

As the lack of unity in Scotland's languages and literary production started to be envisioned not as a failure, as Eliot's concept of tradition suggested, but rather as the sign of an enriching multiplicity of traditions that constituted the very pluralistic matter of intellectual and artistic space, Scottish art in the last decades of the twentieth century started to revitalise and look at itself in a new positive light.

3. The Nineteen Eighties: The Second Scottish Renaissance?

In the nineteen eighties, the literary production in Scotland saw such an important revitalisation that some critics have spoken of the coming of a "Second Scottish Renaissance". Alasdair Gray, baptised by *The Guardian* as the "Founding Father of the Scottish renaissance" (Anon., 2001), is nevertheless quite sceptical about such a labelling:

> Rather than a sudden explosion of literary creativity in the early eighties, the 'Scottish Renaissance' in truth denoted a change in publication policy and adjusted critical view of Scottish writers: the proliferation of Scottish works on the literary market had more to do with changes in the market than with a sudden emergence of literary talent and/or cultural self-awareness. (in Toremans, 2003: 570)

Concurring with Gray, other writers, like Tom Leonard (in Toremans, 2003: 569) and Brian McCabe (in Aliaga, 2008), think that the health of Scottish literature is quite good, but consider the expression "renaissance" as somewhat exaggerated. Nevertheless, critics such as Gawin Wallace, Randall Stevenson,[33] and Douglas Gifford,[34] have indeed used the term "renaissance" to refer to this proliferation of Scottish literary works since the eighties. As Gifford claimed, "something […] changed in contemporary Scottish literature. Somewhere in the 80s a new mood, a new perspective, entered into the work of novelists, poets and dramatists" (2002: 732). And he further stated: "[b]y the 90s the moods and

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32. These include William Power's *My Scotland* (1934); A. G. Macdonnell's novel with the same title, (1937); Edwin Muir's *Scottish Journey* (1935); MacDiarmid and Gibbon's *Scottish Scene* (1934), etc.

33. In the critical work they edited and symptomatically entitled *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Vision, Old Dreams* (1993).

34. In 1990 Gifford published a seminal essay entitled "At Last the Real Scottish Renaissance?".

possibilities of the fiction had changed profoundly. An eclectic restlessness was linked to the need to find a fresh starting point, or to find different aspects of Scottish tradition as inspiration" (973).

For all this, even though he writes about a "new mood", Gifford adopts a broad historical perspective and recognises that this "new" vitality is not exactly "new", nor is the cultural panorama from the last decades a *second* revival, since before the Scottish Renaissance of the nineteen twenties there was a revival of a different kind, of Celtic awareness, in the eighteen nineties; and before that in the eighteen fifties; and previous to that in the eighteen twenties, and so on (Gifford, 1990: 1). In short, here have been periods of literary renovation since the birth of literature.

Still, there is a difference that distinguishes this later revival from any others: in its multiplicity of styles and forms it speaks for a "whole Scotland", in contrast to the previous movements that were not so global or inclusive. The image of Scotland that is being portrayed nowadays is much more fluid and plural, since it is engaged in a dialogue between Scottish tradition and the rest of the world (4). This fact is obviously linked to the historic, economic, social and even technological developments that have taken place, and continue taking place in the last decades.

This vitality and self-confidence, critics argue, "have also been possible through equally major achievements in literary criticism, scholarship and Scottish cultural studies" (Stevenson and Wallace, 1993: 1). So, in the end, those who defend the use of the term "renaissance", and those who refrain from using it indiscriminately, equally recognise the same facts, although they use different terms to refer to them.[35] The growing number of young writers and the international impact of their works are undeniable.

The issue of language and voice is again a main preoccupation in this period of revitalisation of the artistic life or Second Renaissance, as writers continue exploring through language and voice the different representations of Scottishness. As Donny O'Rourke explained:

> The 1980s saw poem after poem present and represent this new Scotland.[36] Or (more exactly) *Scotlands*. For the poetry was characterised by a vigorous pluralism as ideas and ideals of nation and nationhood were explored, and Scots and Gaelic took on new impetus. (1994: 281)

Even though O'Rourke refers just to the poetic production, this statement can also be applied to the fiction in general.

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35. On the whole, it seems that writers prefer to be more cautious with the use of the word "renaissance", and that critics tend to enthusiastically embrace the grand term.

36. It is worth remarking that this contemporary critic and poet, O'Rourke, also uses the term "new Scotland", as writers such as MacDiarmid or Gibbon had already done in the early twentieth century.

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It is undeniable that during the twentieth century something had changed with respect to language. As we have seen, during the Scottish Renaissance the language issue was mostly addressed in binary terms: Scots *vs*. English. By contrast, the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties saw Scottish literature embrace and celebrate its status as a linguistic melting pot as never before: "Regional accents and local dialects stepped out of the wings and increasingly took centre stage in the literary life of the nation" (McGuire, 2009: 43). The nation thus became polyphonic, so to say. We will return to this linguistic issue later, when dealing with the dialogic accounts on identity.

In the nineteen eighties, Scotland's post-industrial cities also became extensive melting pots of various cultures. The German critic Berthold Schoene highlights in this respect the diversity of Scotland's population: "The idea of a uniform Scottish identity is an illusion: Glaswegians are as different from people of Edinburgh as Shetlanders or Orcadians are from Highlanders and insular Scotland as a whole is from Scotland's cosmopolitan centres" (1998: 54). The globalising drive of contemporary socio-political forces operate, as we shall see, a drastic change in Scottish identity.

In summary, in the last decades of the twentieth century, intellectuals could no longer believe in a monolithic Scotland, and writers no longer yearned for a Scotland of kilts and kailyards. As Schoene states, "[i]n late twentieth century Scottish literature the patriotic pathos of the rural myth-makers has been replaced by the cosmopolitan realism of a new avant-garde" (1995: 119). Contemporary representations of those rural kilt myths tend to bear a patina of parodic irony, as in McCabe's fiction. According to Craig, "Scottish thought has moved from the desire to find its true history behind the myths of tartan and kailyard to a more confidential attempt to reconstruct an identity that is particular to Scotland" (1996: 200).

Indeed, postmodern theories of power question the modern concept of nation-state. As Richard Kearney has pointed out, postmodernism "points towards a decentralising and disseminating of sovereignty" which signals, especially in the European context, "the possibility of new configurations of federal-regional government" (1997: 61). This may be the case of Scotland's future as a nation, but it cannot be conceived of as an isolated self-contained nation in the contemporary social and political context.

The reality is that Scottish identity can no longer be viewed in essentialist or homogenous terms. The search for a unique and monolithic Scottish identity is rapidly becoming invalid. As McCrone puts it, what is offered is a "'pick 'n mix' identity, in which we wear our identities lightly, and change them accordingly to circumstances" (1992: 170). Globalisation brings forth an awareness of the boundedness of the planet. National identity becomes more global and more local at

the same time. The paradoxical consequence of the process of globalisation is not to produce homogeneity, but to familiarise us with the greater diversity of the different local cultures (Featherstone, 1993: 169). In keeping with this, we see in contemporary Scottish literature a growing preoccupation with the search for specific and local cultures rather than a longing for a homogenous ideal Scottish nation, as the age of globalisation brings to the fore new concepts of nationhood and of subjectivity. Thus, Robert Crawford celebrates the emergence of multiple Scotlands in the following terms:

> So we have catholic Scotland […], we have Gaelic Scotland, whose vision is constructed through and by the Gaelic language, we have Scots Scotland, Urdu-speaking Scotland, English-speaking Scotland. And there are Scotlands beyond our national boundaries, yet which construct their own Scotland that turns influences our state. (1998: 56-57)

Scotland has multiplied into a variety of Scotlands. Whereas the search for a recognisable national identity used to be the predominant creative impulse in the Scottish Renaissance, "the emphasis is now on the differences between various individual and group identities" (Schoene, 1995: 119). As Schoene concludes:

> The main issue is not any more the status of the Scottish nation as a minority within the United Kingdom but rather the status of minority communities within Scottish society; not essential Scottishness but rather the differences and the similarities between different kinds and ways of Scottishness. (1995: 119)

In a conference on "The End of Britain?" held at Winsor in 2002, Alastair Nivel explained that the Scottish academician and historian Angus Calder (1942-2008) spoke of how Scotland, for all that it has one of the most stable borders in Europe, has a population which is "a diverse mix of Scots, Gael, Pict, Welsh […] Anglo-Saxon" and, Niven added, "Irish, Norse, Flemish, Galwegian, Norman, Jewish, Italian, Polish, South Asian, African, Caribbean and Chinese" to the list (2007: 320). Indeed, as Niven further stated,

> Scottish identity has always been constructed through processes of intercultural exchange arising from the interchange of diverse cultures, through both diaspora and immigration, and the integration of immigrant communities into an essentially civic and cultural […] conception of Scottishness. (320)

As Calder has put it:

> Sane Scots know that we were always mongrels. And we are exogamus with it. A typical present-day Scot will have one Highland granny and one English one, with two Lowland granddads and a lot of Canadian cousins. His Dad will have converted to Catholicism on marrying an Italian- or Polish-Scot. (1996: 236)

The recognition of this cultural plurality has had positive consequences, since, as Crawford further states, hybridism allows Scots to get away "from the pressure

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for pure Scottish canons and for the one essentialist Scotland that have tended to plague us" (1998: 57).

At this stage, the earlier complaints about the lack of a homogenous language that seemed to doom Scottish literature started giving way to a much more positive perspective, where linguistic diversity was pictured as an ideal tool for the development of a plural and rich literature. Nowadays we no longer find Scots and English, but rather a variety of different voices unfolding and competing with each other in dialogic texts. Aspects such as class, race and gender have come to the fore, and many different groups are set on the exploration of the representation of their own voices and languages from a non-nationalistic centred perspective.

What is more, Scottish vernacular dialects are no longer viewed as an issue exclusively related to Scottishness, since Scottishness no longer exists as that which defines a pure, native-born Scottish person, or as some mystical nation culture. As the critic Laurence Nicoll has stated, "[n]either of these entities has ever existed in the past and cannot conceivably exist in the future" (2000: 81). Writers such as James Kelman show an awareness of these different kinds of Scottishness and the immense plurality of voices that can be found in the use of the vernacular. As he contends:

> There is nothing about the language as used by folk in and around Glasgow or London or Ramsgate or Liverpool or Belfast or Swansea that makes it generally distinct from any other city in the sense that it is a language composed of all sorts of particular influences, the usual industrial or post industrial situation where different cultures have intermingled for a great number of years. (1992: 84)

Still, an eclectic restlessness has been associated with the need to employ different aspects of Scottish tradition as sources of inspiration. Thus, for example, the work of Alasdair Gray and Ian Banks present a totally new perspective, moving as they do "from social pessimism and personal trauma" to the rethinking of what it means to be Scottish and the presentation of a wide range of possibilities of contemporary Scotland (Gifford *et al.*, 2002: 933).

This evolution is good proof that the new anti-essentialist notions of identity are positive for the antidogmatic rethinking of identity. In this respect, it might seem paradoxical that it should be precisely now, at the age of globalisation, that the value of Scottish literature should start to be recognised in its own terms. However, this is quite a logical fact if we think of this recognition in the context of a community that has gained some self-confidence after getting rid of the traditional visions that relegated Scottish culture to non-existence. As McGuire has noted, Scottish literature "has begun to assume the appearance of a truly international discipline" (2009: 8).

This evolution of national identity towards more plural and nomadic conceptualisations goes hand in hand with the diversification of the postmodern definition

of personal identity. Under the new paradigm, the self "is no longer plausibly understood as a unitary entity but appears instead as one fragile moment [caught up in the flux of] dialogic circuits" (Gilroy, 2000: 109). At this stage, the monomythic self or a stable and coherent single identity reveal themselves as constructs.

It is within this context of change that the question of identity in McCabe's writing should be inscribed.

Although it came to fruition in the postmodernist period, the conception of the self (or rather we should say "selves") as artificial constructions was already formulated by the Scottish philosopher David Hume in the eighteenth century. Hume famously argued that the "identity which we ascribe to the mind of man, is a fictitious one", since identity depends on the relations of resemblance, contiguity and causation and, "as the very essence of these relations consists in their producing an easy transition of ideas, it follows that our notions of personal identity proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of thought along a train of connected ideas" (1888: 260). Similarly, postmodern sociological and philosophical accounts of a heterocentric and polyglot self postulate that "[h]uman behaviour is comprehensible only in terms of dynamic social reference; the isolated, purely individual self is a fiction" (MacMurray, 1961: 38). This dialogical turn harbours a strong ethical concern. As MacMurray contends,

> the centre of interest and attention is in the other, not in himself. The other is the centre of value [...]. But this is mutual [...]. [Each subject] acts, and therefore thinks and feels for the other. [...] [T]heir unity is no fusion of selves, neither is it a functional unity of difference —neither an organic nor a mechanical unity— it is a unity of persons. Each remains a distinct individual; the other remains really other. Each realises himself in and through the other. (158)

For the time being, suffice it to say that the previous considerations on the national cultural context are of key importance to understand the socio-cultural context of the writers who began publishing in the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties.

As M. McGuire points out, the vigour of contemporary Scottish literature coincided with its consolidation as a formal subject in the Academy (2009: 6). In 1971, the University of Glasgow established the Department of Scottish Literature and, consequently, in the following decades much material on Scottish literature was brought to the fore (6).

The "International Book Festival", which takes place in Edinburgh every August, originally took place in a tent in 1983. At first a biannual event, the Festival became yearly in 1997 and has been growing in popularity ever since. As a result

of all these efforts, in 2004 Edinburgh was appointed as the first Unesco City of Literature.[37] In 2004 and 2006 an event called "Thirsty Lunch" promoted itself as an alternative free festival (Anon., 2007i). The festival was accompanied by the publication of a literary magazine, entitled *Deliberately Thirsty*, financed by The Scottish Arts Council. Its editor, Seán Bradley, explained that his "aim in producing the magazine was to reclaim Scottish Literature from the opium den and to restore it to its true home, the public bar" (Anon., 2008f). In 2008, two separate festivals ran at the same time as the main official international festival: the "Edinburgh Book Fringe", which holds its events at an alternative bookshop,[38] and the "West Port Book Festival",[39] which is centered around several second-hand bookshops in the West Port area of the city. Both fringe festivals provide free events and are seen as a less formal alternative to the main festival.

The good state of contemporary literature is in part due to the fact that, since its establishment in 1999, "the new Scottish Parliament has supported the development of literature —from its imaginative use of poetry in its various opening ceremonies to its backing for the national Theatre of Scotland, launched across the land in 2006" (Crawford, 2007: 659-660). The State-supported Scottish Arts Council greatly contributes to the financing of cultural events, and the budget destined to artists and culture seems to increase progressively, even now during the international economic recession.[40] Although with some slight economical problems these last two years,[41] the Official Book Festival continues to be one of the most important international literary events in Europe, giving many authors the possibility of sharing their work with other writers and the general public.

In my opinion, although, of course, it helps quite a lot, Government support would not be enough to create this hive of cultural activity —if it were enough, then all Governments would follow the Scottish example. The economic factor cannot be ignored, but it is not only related to state funding. As some critics and writers have pointed out, the local publishing industry has been a key driving force in the growing popularity of Scottish literature from the nineteen eighties onwards (McGuire, 2009: 9). So, in the nineteen nineties, Canongate Classics

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37. Later Melbourne and Iowa City followed (2008). For further information visit the webpage of Edinburgh Unesco city of Literature (Anon., 2009t).

38. The Word Power Bookshop, which organises plenty of readings and book launches (Anon., 2007g).

39. Throughout the year The West Port Book Festival runs free events, which take place in an intriguing assortment of local venues, from singular second-hand bookshops to pubs (Anon., 2007h).

40. For detailed information about the Scottish Arts Council budget in the years 2007-2008, and 2008-2009, visit the webpage of the Scottish Arts Council publishing of their Investment Plans: www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/latestnews/1005395.aspx

41. In 2008, the central box-office takings dropped by 10%, but the Fringe still sold 1.5 m tickets (Fisher, 2008). For 2009, the Edinburgh Fringe asks the Scottish Arts Council for more funds, due to the economic recession (Carrell, 2009).

began republishing hundreds of Scottish works, making those titles available to the general public (Crawford, 2007: 662). No doubt, the publication of the works is essential for their consumption. Needles to say, State support and education would achieve nothing without individual talent, and there are many talented writers in contemporary Scotland. I think it is worth having a look at them, as they belong in the literary context where Brian McCabe's works are produced and received.

Alasdair Gray (b. 1934, Glasgow) is considered to be "one of the landmarks of 20th-century fiction" (Anon., 2008c). His most acclaimed novel is *Lanark*, published in 1981 and written over a period of almost 30 years. *Lanark* is a highly experimental novel set in Glasgow that combines both dystopian fantasy and realist description. As stated on Gray's unofficial web page: "The country's resurgence of literature as something to be proud of can almost be dated from the moment this novel hit the bookshops" (Anon., 2009b). Even *The New Yorker* called Gray "the grand old man of the Scottish renaissance" in 1996 (Anon., 2009b).[42] The book continues to be considered as one of the best Scottish novels. On its twentieth anniversary, Canongate re-issued the four-book novel, as it had become tremendously popular.

Other published novels by Alasdair Gray are *1982, Janine* (1984), *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* (1985), *Something Leather* (1990), *McGrotty and Ludmilla* (1990), *Poor Things* (1992), *A History Maker* (1994), *Mavis Belfrage* (1996), and *Old Men In Love* (2007). He has also published some short stories: *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* (1983), *Lean Tales* (1985) —in collaboration with James Kelman and Agnes Owens—, *Ten Tales Tall & True* (1993), *Mavis Belfrage* (1996), and *The Ends of Our Tethers* (2003); two poetic collections: *Old Negatives* (1989) and *Sixteen Occasional Poems* (2000); and some essays, like *The Book of Prefaces* (2000) or *How We Should Rule Ourselves* (2005). Gray is also a magnificent painter, and he produced the ceiling mural for The Auditorium of the Oran Mor in Glasgow, one of the largest pieces of art in Scotland.

As stated in *The Guardian, Lanark* "changed the landscape of Scottish fiction, opening up the imaginative territory inhabited today by writers such as A. L. Kennedy, James Kelman and Irvine Welsh" (Anon., 2008c). It seems, thus, as if Gray had been taken as the hallmark of the literary revival that is currently taking place in Scotland. As Crawford states, "[t]he strength and diversity of contemporary literature is astonishing" (2007: 661). The number of internationally recognised writers who started publishing in the last decades of the twentieth century is very high.

James Kelman (b. 1946, Glasgow) is another central figure of the movement for fictional innovation in Glasgow. As McGuire states, "Alasdair Gray and

Alasdair Gray
Edinburgh, February 2009

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42. Meaning, naturally, the "Second Scottish Renaissance".

James Kelman, suddenly emerged, indebted to the parameters of working-class urban realism established in the preceding decades, but simultaneously transcending them" (2009: 94). As he further notes, the nineteen eighties witnessed the emergence of Scottish writers coming from and seeking to write about their own working-class experience (95). A non-exhaustive list would include John Byrne, Janice Galloway, Alasdair Gray, James Kelman, A. L. Kennedy, Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead, Brian McCabe, Tom McGrath, William McIlvanney, Agnes Owens, Jeff Torrington, Irving Welsh, among others.

The critic Matt McGuire points to an important factor that would explain this upsurge of working-class writing in the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties: the post-war welfare state, particularly the establishment of free secondary education through the Butler Education Act (1944). The educational improvement brought about by the new legislation allowed working-class youths of talent to become the first generation to receive an external formal education (McGuire, 2009: 96). This is clearly the case of Brian McCabe, who grew up in a small mining community, and who was the first member of his family given the opportunity to go to university.

Kelman's fiction is characterised by the use of a strong working-class Glaswegian vernacular. As he has stated: "it is a language composed of all sorts of particular influences, the usual […] post industrial situation where different cultures have intermingled for a great number of years" (1992: 84). Some of his published works are *An Old Pub Near the Angel and Other Stories* (1973), *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), *A Disaffection* (1989), Man Booker Prize winning *How Late it Was, How Late* (1994), and *Translated Accounts* (2002) (Walker, 1996: 415). He was the first Scottish writer to win the Booker Prize. But the fact is that the reception of his writings has been quite polemical: for certain critics his work "signals an affront to the very institution of literature and culture; for others it belongs alongside the work of iconic figures like Joyce, Beckett and Kafka" (McGuire, 2009: 102).

Tom Leonard (b. 1944, Glasgow) is another important figure writing in a strong Glaswegian dialect. Some of his work openly deals with the political nature of language in Britain, as in his poem "The Six O'Clock News" (1976). In 1990 he published a compilation of poems entitled *Radical Renfrew: Poetry from the French Revolution to the First World War*. The anthology resurrected the work of long forgotten poets from the West of Scotland and proved erroneous the widespread belief that Scotland was a cultural wasteland. *Radical Renfrew* denounces the conception of tradition as defended by Eliot, and also suggests that in denying the existence of a native Scottish culture, the Scottish people have been denied the right to equality of dialogue with those in possession of normative English.

In 1984, Leonard published *Intimate Voices*, a selection of his work from 1965 onwards that included poems and essays on William Carlos Williams and on "The

Nature of Hierarchical Diction in Britain".[43] In his essay "The Proof of the Mince Pie" (1973), Leonard harshly criticises culture and the institution of university:[44]

> the university (and here I speak specifically about the arts faculties) is a reification of the notion that culture is synonymous with property. And the essentially acquisitive attitude to culture, "education", and "a good accent" is simply an aspect of the competitive, status-conscious class structure of the society as a whole. (1984: 65)

Leonard goes on to state that to him, language, accent, is a key to the issues of class and power:

> The "beauty" of a lot of English poetry (particularly the Romantics) for many, is that the softness of its vowel-enunciation reinforces their class status in society as the possessors of a desirable mode of speaking. And of course Keats' "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" goes down a bomb with the "Any Answers" brigade; where beauty in language is recognised as the property of a particular class, then naturally truth is assumed to be the property of that class also.[45] (65)

According to Leonard, the consequence of attacking the more classical views on tradition and language[46] is that "a person who doesn't 'speak right' is therefore characterised as an ignoramus; it's not simply that he doesn't know how to speak right, but that this 'inability' shows that he has no claim to knowledge of truth" (65).

Among his other main publications we find: *Places of the Mind* (1993), *Reports from the Present: Essays, Political Satires and Poems 1982-1994* (1995), and *Access to the Silence. Poems 1984-2004* (Anon., 2009r).

James Kelman recommended to Peter Kravitz, the publisher of Polygon, the novel *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1990) by Janice Galloway (b. 1956, Salt-coates). The success of the book was immediate. The novel was shortlisted for both the Whitebread First Novel Award and the Irish Times International Fiction Prize, and won the Mind Book of the Year Award. The international impact of her work has led Metzstein to describe her as a writer "'nurtured' in Scotland", who has however become "important in the context of a wider history of women's writing, one which resists definition by mainstream culture" (1993: 136). As Bernand Sellin points out, Galloway "is aware of her position as a female writer and especially shows interest for the most innovative techniques of presentation, techniques which become appropriate to render the sense of fragmentation and the difficulties of adjusting to the modern world" (2007: 234). As Sellin further states,

Tom Leonard
Edinburgh, February 2009

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43. The volume shared the 1984 Scottish Book of the Year Award and was almost immediately banned from Scottish Central Region school libraries (Anon., 2009r).
44. This article was published for the first time in *Scottish International*.
45. "Any answers" was a radio programme at the time, where people sent letters to complain about diverse things.

"[h]er originality is another sign of the current richness of Scottish literature, moving confidently towards unknown territory and unfettered by national identity" (234). Galloway has also published *Foreign Parts* (1994), a novel that won the McVitie's Prize, and *Clara* (2002), as well as some collections of short stories: *Blood* (1991), and *Where you Find It* (1996). Also a poetry book, *Boy Book See* (2002), and an autobiography, *This is Not About Me* (2008). In recognition of her growing popularity, in 2004, the Edinburgh Review —at present edited by Brian McCabe— published a special edition devoted to her work.

Galloway is one of several writers who have explored the graphical aspects of writing. From Alasdair Gray to Irvine Welsh, many Scottish writers have used the appearance of the book page —drawings, typography, font, etc., which, no doubt, is a very important part of the work— as an expressive means. Both Galloway and Welsh experimented with the typography as a means of trying to convey subsidiary narratives that are hidden in the main text.[47]

Irving Welsh (b. 1958, Leith) is maybe one of the most popular writers among the younger European and American readers; even those who have not read him know his most popular work: *Trainspotting* (1993). The novel tells the story of a drug addict, Mark Renton, and his friends in "the AIDS/HIV capital of Europe", Edinburgh (Anon., 2009n). It was adapted to film by Danny Boyle in 1996 and became an immediate success. In 1997 it was nominated to the Academy Award for Best Writing and has won several awards including the BAFTA Scotland Award (1997), the Boston Society of Film Critics Award (1996), the Brit Award (1997), the Seattle International Film Festival Award (1996), and the Warsaw International Film Festival Award (1996), among others.

Welsh's writing is the inheritor of the work of other great writers who were publishing in the nineteen eighties in Scotland. As Welsh admits, he feels "really lucky living at this time cause I've got McIlvanney, Kelman, Gray and Janice Galloway (in Kelly, 2004: 9). As he further notes:

> William McIlvanney, the author of *Laidlaw* and other books set in Glasgow, was a revelation. He wrote about people I could identify with, and there were the central characters […], not token villains or comedians. James Kelman and Alasdair Gray, in their different ways, took McIlvanney's approach to a new level. Kelman's insistence on an authentic voice was particularly liberating. Then I looked further back, to James Hogg, Robert Louis Stevenson, Walter Scott, Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Robert Burns. (2009: 20)

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46. Leonard attacks the view defended by T. S. Eliot, and also the one that assumes that the "workin-class rubbish, with all its bad pronunciation and dreadful swear words, is only really fit for draining away out of the sight", and he contends that, "the really great artists […], will recycle even this, to provide some 'comic relief' to offset the noble emotions up top" (1984: 65).

47. Two highly popular examples of this are Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* and Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*.

But Welsh's literary influences are by no means only Scottish; as he explains: "then I looked further afield, to Beckett and Tolstoi and so on. But wherever I travelled, a more surprising writer —a Chicagoen called Iceberg Slim— remained one of my biggest influences" (20).[48] He further states: "[i]f I hadn't picked up *Pimp* [Slim's most successful novel],[49] I doubt I could have gone on to write *Trainspotting* or *Glue*" (20). He has also published other novels, such as *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995), *Filth* (1998), *Porno* (2002); and some short-story collections, such as *The Acid House* (1994) and *If You Liked School You'll Love Work* (2007).

Welsh has been considered, together with Alan Warner (b. 1964, Connel), one of the godfathers of what has been called the "Repetitive Beat Generation".[50] Another member of this generation is Alan Warner, the author of the acclaimed *Morvern Callar* (1995).[51] This novel depicts a fictionalised Oban "every bit as dysfunctional as the Edinburgh of Welsh's fiction" (McGuire, 2009: 135). He has also written some short stories,[52] and published *These Demented Lands* (1997),[53] *The Sopranos* (1998),[54] *The Man Who Walks* (2002), and *The Worms Can Carry Me to Heaven* (2006).

Warner has been considered to be "one of the most exciting voices in contemporary Scottish literature", together with Irvine Welsh and A. L. Kennedy (Anon., 2009i). In his fiction, Warner turns his attention to life in the rural areas, particularly on the coast and islands. "His work shows an intimate knowledge and appreciation of landscape, climate and the changing of the seasons" (Anon., 2009i), and how this affects the persons who inhabit the Scottish rural landscape; but, of course, the Highlands are not idealised or cut off from the postmodern urban world.

A. L. Kennedy —Alison Louise Kennedy— (b. 1965, Dundee) is another key figure in the contemporary Scottish literary panorama. In 1991 she appeared in *Granta* magazine's "Twenty Best Young Novelists" (McGuire, 2009: 162). She has published several novels: *Looking for the Possible Dance* (1993), *Everything You Need* (1999), and the already mentioned *So I am Glad* (1995), among others; and

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48. Iceberg Slim is the pseudonym of Robert Lee Maupin *aka* Robert Beck (1918-1992).

49. By 1973, it was reprinted 19 times and sold nearly 2 million copies. The novel, largely ignored by white America, has been translated into German, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, and Swedish.

50. Stephen Redhead published a series of interviews in 2000 to "big-name" nineteen-nineties authors such as Nicholas Blincoe, Sarah Champion, Toni Davidson, Roddy Doyle, John King, Gordon Legge, Emer Martin, Mike McCormack, Duncan McLean, Jeff Noon, Elaine Palmer, Alan Warner, Irvine Welsh and Kevin Williamson.

51. Winner of a Somerset Maugham Award, and adapted to film (Anon., 2009i).

52. "After the Vision", included in the anthology *Children of Albion Rovers* (1997), and "Bitter Salvage", included in *Disco Biscuits* (1997).

53. Winner of the Encore Award (Anon., 2009i).

54. Winner of the Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year Award (Anon., 2009i).

also several collections of short stories, such as *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990), which has won several awards including the Saltire Award for the Best First Book (Walker 1996: 415), *Now that You're Back* (1994), *Original Bliss* (1997) and *Indecible Acts* (2002). Her style is both dark and humorous and blends realism and fantasy in a way that brings to mind Jeanette Winterson.

She has been published into more than a dozen languages, a fact that yet again emphasises the international dimension of contemporary Scottish writing (Anon., 2008e). When asked about her inclusion in a Glasgow school of writing, alongside Gay and Kelman, she commented:

> I don't think I got so much tacked on with Jim and Alasdair but with the younger Scottish authors, but that's really because they're all published by the same publisher and it's easier for them to market five people all at once. But it is about marketing. [...] Basically we all know each other, but there isn't that much of a scene where everybody meets. And you know, I suppose we read each other but not that much. (1999: 112)

As she further states, "[t]he thing that would tie most Scottish writers together is that they all read American authors and they all read European authors" (112). The concept of Scottishness thus goes hand in hand with internationalism, or rather trans-nationalism and globalisation. We will see this influence of North-American culture in several of McCabe's stories.

Jackie Kay (b. 1961, Edinburgh) is another great Scottish writer who is currently contributing to the questioning of square and essentialist conceptions of identity. Her particular upbringing —she was born to a Scottish mother and a Nigerian father, and was later adopted by a white family—, and her homosexual orientation have inspired and influenced her writing, strongly focused on the search for cultural identity.[55] She has written poetry: *The Adoption Papers* (1991), *Other Lovers* (1993); the novel *Trumpet* (1998), that was awarded The *Guardian* Fiction Prize and was shortlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (Anon., 2009o); some fiction and poetry for children: *Strawgirl* (2002), and *Red, Cherry Red* (2007), which won the 2008 CLPE Poetry Award (Anon., 2009o); and collections of short stories: *Why Don't You Stop Talking* (2002), and *Wish I Was Here* (2006).

It is worth noting that some decades ago there were not many gay or lesbian public voices in Scotland, since homosexuality was not legalised in Scotland until 1980 (McGuire, 2009: 71). Edwin Morgan, for example, did not come out as a gay man until 1990, at his seventieth birthday (71). As expressed in one of McCabe's

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55. Her short story "Milk", included in the collection *Why Don't You Stop Talking* (2002), is quite autobiographical. It tells the story of a dark lesbian woman who imagines starting a search for her biological mother.

stories, entitled, "Out" (2001), coming out as a homosexual must not have been easy in a Scottish village in the nineteen eighties.

Another writer who has contributed to the growing plurality of contemporary Scottish voices is Ali Smith (b. 1962, Iverness). She has published several successful collections, such as *Free Love and Other Stories* (1995) —winner of the Saltire Society Scottish First Book of the Year Award and a Scottish Arts Council Award—, *Other Stories and Other Stories* (1999), and *The Whole Story and Other Stories* (2003). She has also published some novels: *Like* (1997), *Hotel World* (2001) —winner of the Encore Award, a Scottish Arts Council Book Award and the inaugural Scottish Arts Council Book of the Year Award—, *The Accidental* (2004) —winner of the 2005 Whitbread Novel Award—, and *Girl Meets Boy* (2007) (Anon., 2009p). As stated in *The Guardian*,

> Her fondness for the grandscale and her employment of shifting perspectives, formal risk-taking and rich language all mark Smith out as a "literary" writer, but her confident, inventive tales also display a humor which lightens the ambitious themes she covers. (Anon., 2008d)

It is worth noting that her writing has received a lot of attention by public and critics alike, as her awards illustrate. This fact, that is not an isolated occurrence, provides evidence for the contemporary success of several Scottish writers with very different styles.

One of the most prolific writers in Scotland is Iain Banks —signing as Iain M(enzies) Banks in his science fiction writing— (b. 1954, Dunfermline, Fife). Among his work we find the stunning and quite experimental novels *The Wasp Factory* (1984), *Walking on Glass* (1985), *The Bridge* (1986), *Espedair Street* (1987), and a very long *etcetera*, since he has published more than twenty five pieces of fiction. His works can be found on any bookshop in Glasgow or Edinburgh, and even in many bookshops of many European main cities, since he has been widely translated.

Another quite prolific writer is Ian Rankin (b. 1960, Cardenden, Fife), the creator of the famous Scottish inspector Rebus.[56] His first Rebus novel, *Knots and Crosses,* was published in 1987, and then other sixteen inspector Rebus novels followed, such as *Let it Bleed* (1995) or *Exit Music* (2007). These detective novels are mainly set in Edinburgh and focus on its main character. The stories have been labeled as belonging to a "Tartan Noir" genre.[57] He has also written other pieces of fiction such as the novel *The Flood* (1986), and the short-story collections *A Good Hanging and Other Stories* (1992), and *Beggars Banquet* (2002).

The list of Scottish writers who are nowadays publishing novels, short stories, poems and plays is immense, but it is worth having a closer look at some writers

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56. The name of the Police Inspector, Rebus, means hieroglyph.
57. A term coined by the North-American writer James Ellroy.

who have had an especially close relation to Brian McCabe and who, consequently, may have influenced him in his writing.

Dilys Rose (b. 1954, Glasgow), married to Brian McCabe, is a very active figure in the literary life of Edinburgh. She has published several short-story collections, *Our Lady of the Pickpockets* (1989), *Red Tides* (1993), *Dolls Lord of Illusions* (2005); a novel, *Pest Maiden* (1999); and several poetry collections: *Madame Doubtfire's Dilemma* (1989), *When I Wear my Leopard Hat: Poems for Young Children* (1997), and *Lure* (2003). She has also been involved in collaborations with musicians and visual artists (Anon., 2009d). It is worth noting that there seem to be some slight similarities between her and her husband's works, noticeable for example in the similarity of two of their titles: McCabe's poetry collection *Body Parts* (1999) and Rose's *Bodywork* (2007). Nevertheless their writing is quite different.

Andrew Greig, Ron Butlin, Liz Lochhead and Brian McCabe, were "The Lost Poets", a group of writers temporarily inserted in the Second Renaissance we have overviewed above. Thematically and stylistically, the authors publishing in Scotland in the last decades do not belong to a homogeneous group or generation, as their work shows many differences, as we have just seen. The Second Renaissance refers to a general tendency of flourishing among the Scottish Contemporary Arts, rather than to some shared stylistic conventions. "The Lost Poets" also show this heterogeneity that seems to abound in the present panorama.

Andrew Greig (b. 1951, Bannockburn), winner of an Eric Gregory Award in 1972, has published several poetry collections, such as *White Boats* (1973), *Men On Ice* (1977), *The Order of the Day* (1989), *Western Swing* (1993), *Into You* (2000) or *This Life, This Life* (2006). He has also written an account of the successful ascent of the Mustagh Tower, entitled *Summit Fever: The Story of an Armchair Climber*, which was shortlisted for the Boardman Tasker Prize, and some novels: *Electric Brae: A Modern Romance* (1992) —shortlisted for the McVitie's Prize for Scottish Writer of the Year—, *The Return of John MacNab* (1996) —shortlisted for the Romantic Novelists' Association Award—, or *In Another Light* (2004) —winner of Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year Award, in 2004.

Ron Butlin (b. 1949, Edinburgh) is another well-known figure in Edinburgh. His writings include the poetry collections *Creatures Tamed by Cruelty: Poems in English and Scots and Translations* (1979), *Ragtime in Unfamiliar Bars* (1985) —awarded with the Scottish Arts Council Book Award —; plays; journalism, writing for the *Sunday Herald*; and short stories: *The Tilting Room* (1983), *Vivaldi and the Number 3* (2004) —which received the Scottish Arts Council Book Award (Anon., 2009h). He is also the author of three novels: *The Sound of My Voice* (1987), *Night Visits* (1997), and *Belonging* (2006). Butlin and McCabe are friends since they went together to university, and have often read and commented on each other's works.

Liz Lochhead (b. 1947, Newarthill) is one of the strongest poets and dramatists in Scotland. After attending the Glasgow School of Art, she lectured in Fine Arts for eight years before becoming a professional writer. In the early nineteen seventies she joined Philip Hobsbaum's writers' group,[58] and also "The Lost Poets", as we shall see. Her plays include *Blood and Ice, Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1987), *Perfect Days* (2000) and a highly acclaimed adaptation into Scots of Molière's *Tartuffe* (1985). Her adaptation of Euripides' *Medea* won the Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year Award in 2001. Like her work for the theatre, her poetry is alive with vigorous speech idioms. Her poetry collections include *True Confessions and New Clichés* (1985), *Bagpipe Muzak* (1991), and *Dreaming Frankenstein and Collected Poems* (1984).

The other contemporary Scottish writer remaining to be mentioned is, of course, Brian McCabe (b. 1951, Easthouses), whom we will analyse in depth in the main body of this thesis.

Remarkably enough, many of these poets and novelists work at university, teach creative writing,[59] and are deeply involved in the formation of new young writers. Some of them have even taught outside Scotland, at English universities,[60] including Brian McCabe, who was a Lecturer in Creative Writing during the course 2008-2009 at Lancaster University's Department of English and Creative Writing, in a distance learning MA. Limits and territorial boundaries are dissolved, as we can see, in the age of computers and distance learning. Some writers of this generation have been teaching even in other continents, like Alan Riach, who has lectured in English, Scottish and post-colonial literatures at the University of Waikato in New Zealand (Walker, 1996: 428-9).

Indeed, as we have already pointed out, Scottish novelists such as James Kelman, Alasdair Gray, William McIlvanney, Iain Banks and Irvine Welsh "en-

joyed enormous international success with works grounded on the gritty realities of urban Scotland often written in the working-class vernacular" (Devine, 1999: 608). Characteristically, the fact that these writers deal with "issues to do with globalisation have led to a wish for Scottish identities that are at once internationally-oriented and yet distinctive in their local accent" (Crawford, 2007: 659).

Criticism could no longer sustain the idea that Scotland is a cultural wasteland; facts could not be ignored any longer. Roderick Watson's *The Literature of Scotland* (1984) and Duncan MacMillan's *Scottish Art 1460-1990* (1990) were among the first to defend the idea that Scottish culture is at present very vital, together with the four-volume essay, *History of Scottish Literature* (1987-88) edited by Cairns Craig. *A History of Scottish Women Writing* (1997), edited by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan, and the three-volume *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* (2007), edited by Murray Pittock, confirmed the news: the health of Scottish literature was excellent. With this new confidence, "Scottish fiction approached the millennium as a standard bearer for Scottish culture, arguably even supplying the most successful explorations of changing Scottish identities, in a rich variety of voices and genres" (Gifford, 2007: 250). Such a flourishing heterogeneous literary panorama inevitably led to a plurality of Scottish voices.

A recently published anthology entitled Cleave. *New Writing by Women in Scotland* (2008), edited by Sharon Blackie, shows that many of the writers included in it are not living in Scotland or were not even born in Scotland,[61] a fact that enhances the view that the concept of national identity is much broader than the traditional definitions would allow for. As Anne Macleod, included in the anthology, expressed:

> We are living through an age of rapid and increasing change. Our cities expand in multi-cultural diversity. The way we live, the way we work, is daily more complex, more dependant on technology, on distant communication. Not that any of this is entirely new. History offers evidence of tide after tide of change beating on the shores of Scottish nationhood with the certainty and inevitably of time. (in Blackie, 2008: 79)

Another example of this process would be Suhayl Saadi's novel *Psychoraag* (2004), a narrative —set in contemporary Glasgow— that includes demotic Glaswegian, Urdu and late twentieth-century street-slang. As McGuire has stated, more than any time in its history, Scottish fiction is seen to be undeniably global, "both in its frame of reference and in its ideological significance" (2009: 17). As he further states, "reflecting the globalised nature of late twentieth century

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58. The poet and critic Philip Dennis Hobsbaum (1932-2005) became the nucleus of a group of new and distinctive authors, including Alasdair Gray, James Kelman, Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead, Aonghas MacNeacail and Jeff Torrington, who met in Glasgow at the beginning of the nineteen seventies. As an encore, Hobsbaum was instrumental in setting up, in 1995, the successful MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow.

59. The poets John Burnside, Robert Crawford, Douglas Dunn, Kathleen Jamie and Don Paterson, along with prose writers such as Meaghan Delahunt and A. L. Kennedy work at the School of English at St Andrews. The poets Tom Leonard and Alan Riach teach at Glasgow Univeristy. David Kinloch and the novelist Margaret Elphinstone at Strathclyde; Alan Spence at Aberdeeen University, and he also directs the World Literary Festival. Valerie Gillies, [Dilys Rose —who had formerly been creative writing consultant at Glasgow University—, Brian McCabe] and the novelist Robert Alan Jamieson have also taught at Edinburgh University (Crawford, 2007: 713). David Kinloch teaches creative writing and Scottish literature at the English Studies Department of the University of Strathclyde (Anon., 2009c).

60. Such as Carol Ann Duffy, in Manchester; W. N. Herbert and Jackie Kay in Newcastle; and Drew Milne at Cambridge (Crawford, 2007: 713).

61. Meaghan Delahunt was born in Melbourne; Celaen Chapman in Birminham; Mandy Haggith in Northumbria; Patricia Ace in Cleethorpes; etc.

experience, Scottish writing is more ethnically and culturally diverse than ever before" (8).

The fact is that most of the mentioned writers write from an awareness of the multiplicity and complexity of identity, something that becomes obvious in the diversity of perspectives in their writings. The socio-cultural changes that are taking place in the age of globalisation have problematised the classical notion of national identities as conventional state-entities, opening up new anxieties as well as new possibilities. The plurality and diversity of the Scottish literary panorama reveals the strong needs to remap the structures of identity and belonging in contemporary Scotland. It is within this complex literary context of positive reworkings of tradition and renewal of personal and national questioning, that the work of the Scottish poet and fiction writer Brian McCabe should be placed.[62]

Chapter Two

BRIAN MCCABE

1. Background and Context

Brian McCabe was born on September 3, 1951 in Easthouses,[1] a small town next to a coal mining area near Edinburgh. He grew up as the youngest of four children, in Bonnyrigg, Bonnybridge, Kink's Lynn and later in Falkirk. Some of these places appear in his fiction, especially in those short stories focalised through the perspectives of children and teenagers, the same life-span McCabe himself spent in those Scottish towns. These short stories focalised through children are sometimes set in Scottish mining towns, and the language is more Scottish than in other short stories set in Edinburgh and rendered from the perspective of more mature characters.

McCabe's father, James —Jimmy—, was a miner and a "great reader", and his mother, Jean —Jeannie—, a cook and cleaner, so their economic situation was not very flamboyant (Anon., 2005a). As a child, Brian McCabe never imagined that he would become a writer, but he was curious enough about his father's books to try reading some of them. In 1966 the family moved to Norfolk, where he started writing poetry, while attending King Edward VII Grammar School for Boys. Then they moved on to Falkirk, where he continued to write poetry at Falkirk High School. One of the poems he wrote at Falkirk High School won a Scotsman's School Magazine Award (McCabe, 1998: 49). Encouraged by a particular teacher of English as well as by his father, he started reading a great deal more, gaining "a sense of literature as another world which reflected the real one in a magical way", as he put it in an article published on line as part of the project

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62. Not in vain, the anthology of the Canongate Prize for New Writing where McCabe's short story "Something New" was included after winning the prize, is entitled "Scotland into the New Era".

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1. Primarily based on public housing, Easthouses developed in the nineteen twenties in order to accommodate miners for the nearby colliery.

called "Crossing Borders. New Writing from Africa".[2] At that time, McCabe read books by Byron, Shelley, Shakespeare, Upton Sinclair, Robert Tressal, Robert Burns, John Steinbeck, Edgar Allan Poe, and other canonical writers that were at home (Anon., 2005a). Then, as a teenager, and very concerned about how to best spend the pay for his Saturday job in Halfords, he discovered the Penguin Modern Poets Series, "getting three poets in one book", and read "a lot of European —such as Miroslav Holub— and American poets —such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti—, as well as British, [… and,] closer to home: Edwin Muir, Edwin Morgan, Alan Bold and Alan Jackson" (McCabe, 1996a: 74). As a schoolboy, McCabe attended a few readings in Edinburgh, "some at the Traverse Theatre in the High Street, organised by Alan Jackson and Pete Morgan", places where he would later read his own poetry (74).

Both Jackson and Morgan inspired and helped him, as McCabe himself acknowledges: "Pete Morgan showed me the ropes about the poetry business, invited me to take part in readings, patted me on the back to quell my nerves" (75). He also mentions certain characteristics or preoccupations of their poetry that would be present in McCabe's own writing: "Above all, his [Pete Morgan's] poems were about the struggle to come to terms with the self", as exemplified in these lines from Pete Morgan's "The Rainbow Knight's Confession" chosen by McCabe:

> I change my colour for my company—
> a purple knight sees purple in my cloth
> a yellow knight sees yellow/blue knight blue
> the blackest knights I raise my visor to.
> (in McCabe, 1996a: 75)

Pete Morgan also emphasised the importance of rhythm in poetry, and he was an extraordinary performing reader. It was not histrionic at all; listening to him was like witnessing a personal drama act itself out in front of one's eyes. Alan Jackson's figure also struck him, especially his "great belief in the power of poetry" as part of a radically changing world (76). MacCaig was a powerful influence on younger writers in general. McCabe especially liked his lucidity, reflected in his piece of advice: "say what you mean as clearly and simply as you can" (76). And Morgan's poetry showed him how "anything is possible in a poem, there is absolutely nothing a poem can't deal with" (76). Garioch's use of the speaking voice, "in a very engaging and humorous way", and his concerns with the recent

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2. This project, supported by Lancaster University and The British Council, created a section, entitled "Writers on Writing", where more than 107 authors from different nationalities —UK, Uganda, South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Zambia, etc.— talked about their writing. Brian McCabe, being one of the mentors, became very much involved in this project (Anon., 2005a).
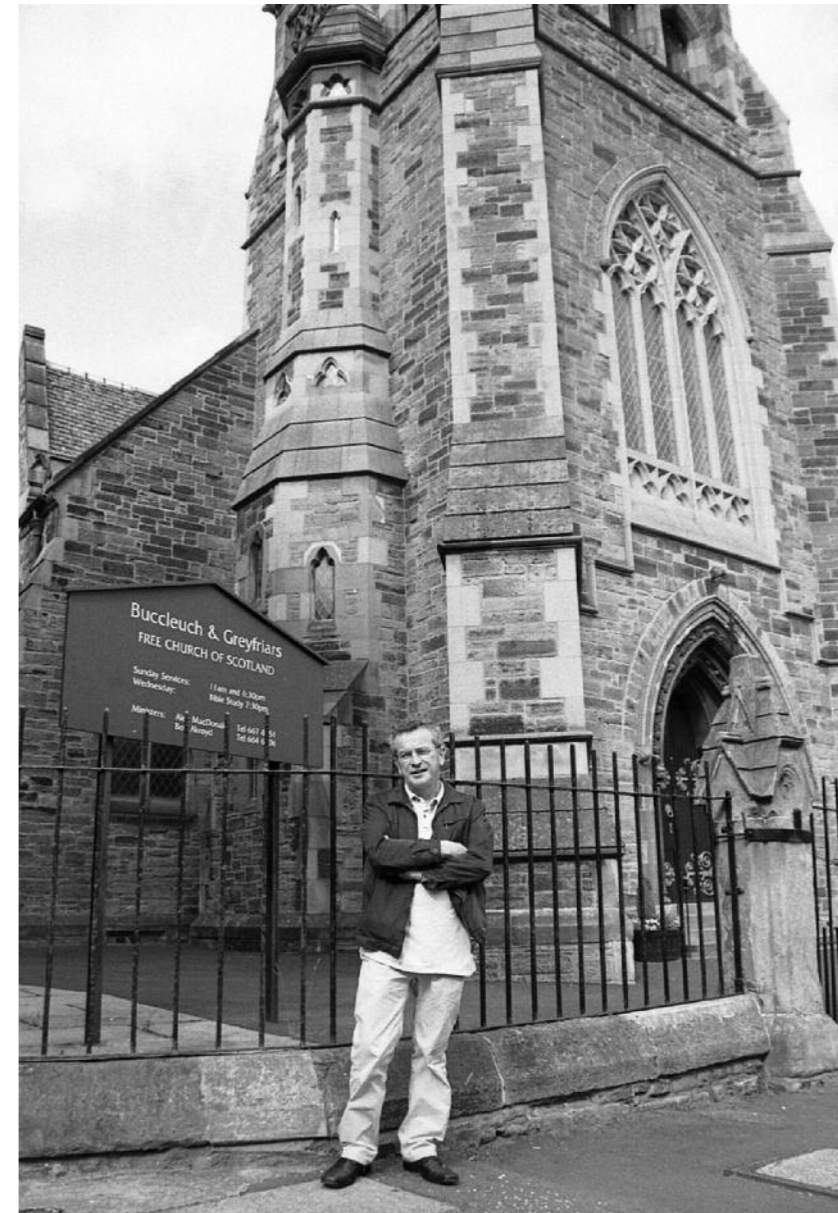
Brian McCabe
Edinburgh, July 2008

developments in the world made him very attractive to the younger generation of writers (76). As McCabe himself has commented,

> I went to see him as a student at Edinburgh University, when he was the Writer in Residence. I took him my surrealist student verse and he corrected the spelling, but he picked out one poem which used a colloquial speaking voice as the speaker and told me "This is interesting. This is what you should do". (2009c)

When asked about his writing, McCabe explained that he "didn't wake up one morning and decide to be a writer" (in Thomas, 1990: 3). As he further remarked: "It was just something I found myself doing more and more. I stated when I was very young. My mother used to sew books together for me to write in, and I filled them up —God knows with what!" (3). McCabe also liked drawing very much: "as a teenager I think I was more talented at painting […]. My painting carries into writing, though, in the images I use" (3). As the author himself explained to me in an interview, he studied Arts and has continued drawing until the present day (in Aliaga, 2009). Good proof of this is the cover of this thesis that he kindly drew for me, or the cover of *Spring's Witch*, which also shows a drawing by the author himself. As we shall see, the visual is very much present both in his poetry and in his fiction.

After two years in Norfolk, McCabe and his family returned to Scotland, and in 1969 he won the Scotsman's School Award for "Best Poet" (McCabe, 1972). Since he was doing well at school, his family made an economic effort to send his youngest son to University (Anon., 2005a). By then he was already a young poet, publishing poems at the age of sixteen; short stories came later, when he went to study Philosophy and English Literature at Edinburgh University. There he started writing stories and formed a Poetry Society with other aspiring writers, such as Andrew Greig, Ian Rankin and Ron Butlin.

As mentioned in Chapter One, McCabe, along with Andrew Greig, Ron Butlin and Liz Lochhead, became one of "The Lost Poets",[3] a rough collective which organised readings and other events in Edinburgh and other cities in the early nineteen seventies. In the following pages, I will offer a short overview of what these writers remember from that period when they started doing public readings and publishing.

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3. Andrew Greig has explained that the name of the poetic group came as they were driving a white Beetle in the West Highland, in April 1975, and a van nearly knocked them down, and McCabe coughed "[w]e were nearly the Lost Generation of poets there"; so they took "Lost Poets" as their name, mocking at their mortality and their ambitions (1996: 66).

The Lost Poets

Andrew Greig, commenting on *Poem 72*, the first festival where they read poems together, which took place at the University of Edinburgh in 1972, has said that it consisted of

> a one day happening running at three venues simultaneously at Edinburgh University with 22 Scottish poets, a lecture-performance on concrete poetry by Edwin Morgan, a multimedia event from his "Warhol period" that still makes Ron Butlin blush, an exhibition of Ian Hamilton Finlay,[4] and an audience of a thousand. (1996: 59)

As he further explains,

> Ron [Butler] and I, now old comrades-at-arms, went on to see Brian in action. In baggy black breeks, vivid red braces, wire-rimmed glasses and a lot of Dylan hair, he ran to the front of the room and jumped directly onto the stage, cracked two jokes and three short surreal poems (or perhaps it was the other way round, it was hard to tell the difference in those days) and had the audience in his hand. He finished, shouted "Thank you—and good night! Good morning! Goodbye!" and ran out the door ([Brian McCabe adds:] "I don't remember doing this, but it may be true"). (62)

Greig nostalgically remembers that those were good times for social and cultural agitation:

> a golden age, though we didn't recognize it at the time: a time when the NHS and the education system more or less worked and were free, when Election manifestoes tried to outbid each other on the number of Council houses they were going to build, when unemployment was thought to be scandalous and society-threatening at half a million. When student grants (though we never admitted it) were adequate and you could sign on through the holidays. (62)

The economic element was indeed an important factor for this generation of writers, from Alasdair Gray, James Kelman and Tom Leonard to The Lost Poets. Unlike them, the earlier generation did not live on their writing, with the exceptions of MacDiarmid and Mackay Brown (65). As Greig put it: "[t]his was the period of Literature on the DHSS", that is to say, the generation of the Wellfare State (65).[5] This does not mean, of course, that they were swimming in abundance; they were living short-term, carrying a student lifestyle, sharing flats and walking everywhere (65). They did not expect either to earn a living from their writing,

since *Lanark* (1982) had not been published yet, and Scottish Literature had not reached the university curricula. Likewise, reading circuits, awards and bursaries were only to come in the future.

After its initial success "the Happening" was repeated the following year. Named "Poem 73", it drew a larger audience, "of some 1500 and MacDiarmid pack[ed] out the 600 seater George Square" (63). It was at George Square that "The Lost Poets" did their first readings, and met as performers; and out of it came the book *7 New Voices*, with contributions by Greig, Lochhead and McCabe, according to Greig (63).[6]

Ron Butlin remembers these gatherings as the source of a long-term, fruitful relationship:

> For five years or so we read regularly in the three-week stints in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (The Traverse, Theatre Workshop, Netherbow Theatre, etc.) plus twice-a-month winter shows at various venues in Edinburgh and else where (i.e. one in Dumfries). (1996: 86)

Nevertheless they all agree that there was no "Lost Poets' School", as every one of them wrote differently:

> Andrew: hip, slick, with his philosophical and pop-music background; Brian: an anarchic humour that disclosed fundamental and disturbing truths; Liz: strongly into monologue, character and drama. And me [Butlin] still reading Shelley and marking out stresses. (88)

This young generation of writers had relations with the previous one, the "Grand Old Men", as Greig calls them: "I felt like listening to the Grand Old Men talk and flyte and reminisce, that we were being subtly initiated, that there was a constituency, an evolving tradition and an attitude, that we were open to add to" (1996: 63). McCabe has also commented that when he went to Canada, people were surprised by the fact that poets of his generation in Scotland knew and read and were in touch with the older generation of Scottish writers (1996a: 78). As he further states,

> Edwin Morgan, Crichton Smith, Sorley MacLean, Alasdair Gray, George Mackay Brown —the list could go on for a shortlist paragraph— they have always been equally interested in and concerned about the future of Scottish literature. There is a communication and appreciation between the generations of writers here, and that is an invaluable thing. (78-9)

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4. Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925-2006) is a Scottish poet, writer, artist and gardener. He published *Rapel*, his first collection of concrete poetry in 1963. Eventually he began to inscribe his poems into stone, incorporating these sculptures into the natural environment.

5. DHSS is the acronym for the Department of Health & Human Services.

6. Actually *Seven New Voices* was published in 1972, so it probably would have come out before the Happening in 1973, after *Poem 72*, but as Andrew Greig's subtitle to the essay on the Lost Poets states, these are "[f]aily reliable memories to 'The Lost Poets'", not accurate accounts (Greig, 1996: 58).

The Lost Poets invited Robert Garioch (1909–1981), Edwin Morgan (b. 1920), Alan Jackson (b. 1938), Alan Spence (b. 1947), MacCaig and Pete Brown to some of their shows.

Readings or performing were the most important thing for them, since on these occasions they could see the audience's reactions, experience at first hand what worked and what did not. As Creig explains,

> We took on (emphasised by the ethos of the Beat and Liverpool Poets) the assumption that a poetry reading was a performance, not a lecture illustrated by a few poems. It was part entertainment. This attitude may have come from ceilidh rather than the academic tradition. And if your poetry was serious, then at last you make the introduction light, crack a few jokes. (1996: 64)

Some of their shows were accompanied by the music of Jim Hutchison, who also designed some of their books (68). Jim Hutchison and his band, which changed its name "more frequently than its underwear", provided a tempering bohemianism to the readings (Butlin, 1996: 87). As Ron Butlin explains, "[t]he show usually concluded with the company letting go with a few rousing choruses of Brian's 'With my Horns and my Wings and my Stabiliser Things' (a piece from his Early-Nihilist phase)" (87). McCabe has stated that, "it was all enormously enjoyable": "I loved the readings, and hearing the others read their work —and the music was actually of a very high standard compared to what you often heard at readings in those days" (1996a: 78).

Even if their respective writings were, and still are, very different, The Lost Poets shared certain things, as, for example, their early tendency to avoid Scots in their writing, something they would try later on. As Greig points out,

> At that time I think Brian, Liz and myself instinctively felt that writing in Scots was awkward, backward-looking, confining. It was, in a word, square. It certainly wasn't for people who had come to consciousness in the Sixties and were probably more excited by music than poetry in any case. (1996: 64)

As he further explains, they had varying degrees of Scots in conversation, although not a real dense Scots, but did not use it in writing (64).

Greig admits to occasionally writing a word in Scots "that came naturally", and then finding that "it looked gey queer / very strange when typed up, surrounded by English", and dropped it, not seeing how it could fit (64). It was not so much a question of them wanting to be considered English, or feeling ashamed or disadvantaged, they just seemed to think Scots was not equipped to convey the perceptions of the present or the future, "it wasn't part of rock 'n roll, and it didn't fit" (64). After all, they had grown up with TV, films, rock music, where Scots was absent. Moreover, these young poets were reading mostly American and European poets: "Zbiebnew Herbert, Cavafy, Apollinaire, Ed[ward] Don, the

Beats, Miroslav Holub, Eliot, Carlos Williams", although they also liked MacDiarmid and Edwin Morgan, whom they considered definitively "modern" (65).[7] So Scottish poetry was not their main influence at the time.

However, Liz Lochhead, who also belonged in the Hobsbaum-Kelman-Leonard group, "started to find ways of using and writing Glaswegian", and even if her early poems were written in English, she read them with a Glaswegian accent (65). McCabe loved Lochhead's "dense, clever, rhythmic stretching and bending of language", and was really impressed by the emotional depth in her poetry: "[a]lthough Liz was very much exploring a woman's point of view in her work, there was nothing by a male writer which dealt with relationships so honestly and so thoroughly" (McCabe, 1996a: 77). Gender differences were thus of no importance to them. In fact, McCabe is not at all sexist, as has been suggested in some reviews.[8] As we shall see when analysing his work, McCabe's characters show simple and generically human essence with complex and unique personality traits, and the writer's interest is both in the particular —the individual— and the general —the human.

The Lost Poets obviously started as a poetic group, but every one of its members also progressively developed into writing fiction. As Greig remembers it, it was McCabe who first wrote a short story. It was not something they had been thinking about, and when McCabe told his writing colleagues that he had written a short story, Ron Butlin just asked him: "Why?", to which McCabe retorted: "Don't worry, it's short enough for readings and it's funny" (in Greig, 1996: 69). That was the beginning of the change, as Greig puts it.

McCabe went on writing prose and eventually published *The Lipstick Circus* (1985). Ron Butlin also wrote some short stories, which were collected in *The Tilting Room* (1983), and Liz Lochhead started writing drama. Greig wrote some books on the expeditions to the Himalayas, but he tried to stick to poetry.

Writing was, and is, mainly, a communicative act. At present, McCabe's desire to share the writing act with other people persists. He ran a writer's workshop at Edinburgh University, in 2008,[9] and at Lancaster in 2009.

As a student, McCabe soon began publishing poems and stories in magazines and anthologies, but, as he explains: "of course it took many years before I began to publish my own books and earn my living as a freelance writer" (in

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7. As Greig states, Morgan "was the only one of those senior poets one could imagine having head of The Doors or The Velvet Underground" (1996: 65).

8. See, for example, the remark of an anonymous contributor to *The Edinburgh Review*: "Like an onanist or a feminist, Mr McCabe sees each woman, not as a complex human, as unique, and as ordinary, as himself, but as the purely generic expression of a tritely mysterious gender. [… W]omen exist in McCabe's fictional world only as reflections of male desire" (138).

9. McCabe ran this workshop together with his wife Dilys Rose, Nicola McCartney and Robert Alan Jamieson until 2008. For a detailed description of this Master in Creative writing see: Anon., 2006.

Anon., 2005a). This happened in 1980, when he was awarded a bursary by the Scottish Arts Council (Rancourt, 2001: 153).

After having spent two years as the Scottish partner in a Scottish/Canadian Exchange Fellowship (1988-89), McCabe was awarded a writing fellowship as "Novelist in Residence" at St Andrew's University. Later on, he also held "Writer in Residence" posts at Perth (2000-2004), Kinross Council, where he was based in the William Soutar House, and, then, until 2008, at Edinburgh University. In 2009 he continued teaching creative writing at Lancaster University. He is currently the Royal Literary Fellow at Glasgow University.

As a Writer in Residence at Perth, he was very active and organised many meetings and readings —the Soutar House meetings— with younger writers (McCabe, 2004f: xiii). He also organised *The Word's Out Festival* competition, encouraging new writers to participate. Some the texts written by them were included in the anthology entitled *The Lie of the Land: Stories and Poems from Perth and Kinross* (2004), co-edited by McCabe, Margaret Gillies Brown and Patricia Ace.

McCabe received a writer's bursary from the Scottish Arts Council in 1998, and a fellowship in 2000 from the Hawthornden Foundation (McCabe, 2001: vii). Still, until he became a full-time writer, he had to do various odd jobs —in psychiatric hospitals, museums, restaurants, picking grapes in France, etc.— while he kept developing his writing (Anon., 2005a). His familiarity with some of the places where he worked is in some way reflected in the spaces presented in many of his short stories, as the analysis will show.

McCabe has also translated poetry from the French for the Scottish Poetry Library, and at the Festival Franco-Anglaise de Poesie in Paris. At the Scottish Poetry Library's web page we can find different translations of some French poems by several Scottish writers that show interesting differences in style and interpretation, not as writers, but as translators.[10] McCabe published the translation of several poems in issue no. 19 of the French poetry magazine, *La traductière. Revue franco-anglaise de poésie*.[11] All these collaborations suggest that writing is for McCabe something to share with others, to comment on, and to play with.

Reading his work for the audience seems to have been, and still continues to be, a very positive experience for McCabe. He has given many public readings of his own work at "The Fringe", the Edinburgh Festival, as well as in various

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10. In 2002, in an effort to popularise French poetry, the Scottish Poetry Library and the Institut Français d'Ecosse invited the director of the annual Festivale franco-anglaise de poésie and editor of *La traductière*, Jacques Rancourt, to choose about twenty poems from the last twenty years and give them to four Scottish poets, who would then translate twelve of these poems. The four Scottish poets were Magi Gibson, David Kinloch, Brian McCabe and Donny O'Rourke. See the web page of the Scottish Poetry Library on this.

11. In Rancourt, 2001: 101, 104, 107, 108, 110, 113, 125, 128, 132 and 135.

Buccleuch Place, 18. Here The *Edinburgh Review* was founded. Winter of 2009

parts of England, Canada, Denmark, and Germany (Rancourt, 2001: 153). As the writer himself has noted:

> The readings emphasised to me the importance of communication as literature's primary purpose. A strong sense of this also came from hearing older, established writers read their works before I read it in books, and the older Scottish writers in question (Edwin Morgan, Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Garioch, Storey MacLean and others) were extremely powerful readers of their own work. (McCabe, 2005b)

McCabe's interest in other writers' work is also made patent in his labours as an editor, a task which allows him to promote the works of other less-known writers. But he also publishes well-known writers such as Wislawa Szymborska and Orhan Pamuk, both Nobel Prize winners for literature. As we shall see, the topic of communication is a permanent preoccupation palpable both in his poetry and fiction, as well as in his own life. He studied English literature at university, he is in contact with other writers in the Poetry Society, and he teaches creative writing; he continues to participate in many readings and other literary activities, and is, above all, a keen reader.

During the academic year 2009-2010, McCabe is teaching a Distance Learning MA in Creative Writing at the Department of English and Creative Writing of Lancaster University. Besides, he continues being the editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, where he can research the literature of many different countries. The magazine was founded in 1802 by Francis Jeffrey[12] as a cultural magazine with a strong Scottish focus; now it has become a four-monthly magazine on international matters,[13] fiction, poetry, photography and literary reviews, supported by the Scottish Arts Council.

He published his latest poetry collection, Zero in 2009, and is at present writing narrative, some short stories loosely based on the idea of illness. Brian McCabe's short story, "A Simple Thing", published on the webpage of the Scottish Arts Council Archive in 2007, is based on his experience of having had a heart

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12. At Buccleuch Place, 18 (Edinburgh). See picture on pag 73.

13. Under Brian McCabe's editorship we find very varied topics in *Edinburgh Review*. For example, Issue no. 128 *Czech*, pursues themes of self-knowledge and alienation, home and exile. Issue no. 127, devoted to *Irak*, pursues themes of home and exile, natural beauty and the desecration of war. Issue no. 126, *Passing Place*, focuses on Scottish fiction; and Issue no. 125 is devoted to Turkish writing. In issue no. 124, Chinese fiction, poetry and photography are addressed. Issue no. 123, entitled *Caribbean Logic*, explores Scottish-Caribbean relationships; Issue no. 122, *Belonging Place*, is devoted to new writing from Australia; Issue no. 121 deals with Polish new writing; Issue no. 120 is entitled *New Writing from Northern Ireland*; Issue no. 119, *Calcutta Connects*, deals with various themes as the theatres of Calcutta or Bengali cinema, among other; Issue no. 118, *Voices of Africa*, deals obviously with the African Continent; in Issue no. 117, *El Otro Lado*, Chicana and Latin writers are presented together with Scottish writers. Forthcoming issues will be devoted to Japan (issue no. 129), and to Scotland (issue no. 130).

attack and his stay at hospital, among people of all sorts. As McCabe himself has commented, in this short story he wanted to write about "the ways in which it [illness] can change your perspective on life, making you realise what is really important to you and what isn't" (McCabe, 2007). In a personal interview, the author commented that he continued writing on this subject.

2. Influences

When asked about his literary influences, McCabe admits to feeling a certain "anxiety of influence" and recognises the importance of a certain sense of heritage and communication. As he stated in the introduction to his *Selected Stories*:

> Norman MacCaig had a neat rejoinder —"I prefer the word theft". I've felt unwilling to cite my influences ever since I heard him say that, but of course influence does happen and sometimes it is important. However, it's always been a complicated issue for me [...], because at different periods in their development, writers come under different sorts of influence— not all of them necessarily good. (2003: 13)

McCabe recognises that he learned a lot about the craft by reading the work of other writers. As he explained to me in a conversation held in Edinburgh in 2008, he read Anton Chekov's short stories when he was quite young and realised that his insight into human motivation and human relationships were unique. The uniqueness, of course, cannot be imitated but, in a sense, Chekov's stories were an influence, since, as McCabe said: "it showed me the great thing that a story could be, that a short story could be just as much a great work of art as a novel; and that made me want to write my own stories as well" (in Aliaga, 2008).

As we will see in Chapter Three, McCabe's short stories belong to the tradition of the modern short-story genre inaugurated by Chekhov, among others. One of the key characteristics of the modern short story is its distancing from allegory and its connection with realism. Thus, Chekhov's narrative has been defined by its accurate and realistic style,[14] which has been imitated by many short-story writers afterwards. As McCabe himself has stated: "I remember reading Chekhov's short stories when I was quite young, and in a way I was trying to copy them; but there was nothing, there was nothing to copy, there was nothing to imitate, there was no style that I could see" (in Aliaga, 2008).

Chekhov's writing influences McCabe and other writers,[15] and it could be argued that Chekhov's stories marked a new beginning in the short-story genre. According to Ford, his main talent lay in his capacity to grasp the diversity of life, with its ambiguities, strange pleasures and sorrows (2006: 18). According to McCabe,

> what makes Chekov so good is his insight into human psychology and motivation, which you can't imitate, so that was a kind of lesson. I suppose though, that it was a kind of influence, because it showed me the great thing that a story could be, that a short story could be just as much a great work of art as a novel, and that made me want to write my own stories as well. (in Aliaga, 2008)

Characteristically, as Ford explains, in Chekhov's short stories the dark territories of mankind, or better said, of the particular man and the particular woman, are indirectly revealed in normality, without epiphanic moments or dramatic outcomes (2006: 20). So that, in many of his stories, there is a hidden truth that can be perceived through the everyday. Apart from the undeniable beauty and strength of his stories, what may have attracted so many contemporary writers, especially when they started writing short stories, is probably his technical mastery. The economy and accuracy of his stories, the hidden complexity revealed in minimalist images has been a source of inspiration for practitioners of the modern and contemporary, from Hemingway to McCabe. At their time of publication, Chekhov's stories were seen as tremendously innovative. Ford, for example, has praised the way Chekhov gave form to the more modest or discrete aspects of life (21), something which has often been highlighted as one of the defining characteristics of contemporary short stories, as opposed to the more traditional novel form. I will return to this in more detail in Chapter Three.

Chekhov was indeed very much concerned with the craft of storytelling, as he explained in a letter about the construction of short stories: stories should be realistic in the sense that they should deal with common human experiences. As Chekhov put it: in everyday life, people do not go to the North Pole to fall from an iceberg; they go to their offices instead, quarrel with their wives and eat some soup or go to bed (in Mauham, 1958: 171). Contemporary short stories tend to deal with this kind of everyday settings, something which, obviously, was not the rule in Poe's or Hawthorne's works. According to Chekhov, stories should look for truth in the everyday, eschewing the dramatic. Therefore, stories should be kept simple and deal with conceivable or realistic things, while the writer should know the "reality", that is, the realistic details surrounding the narrated events.

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14. Chekhov description of events was given "an extraordinary reality" (Maugham, 1958: 172). As Koteliansky put it, "[i]n his wonderful objectivity, standing above personal sorrows and joys, Chekhov knew and saw everything" (in Maugham, 1958: 172).

15. Richard Ford mentions other writers beside himself, who have also been influenced by Chekhov's writing: Sherwood Anderson, Isaac Babel, Hemingway, Cheever, Welty and Carver (2006: 9).

In keeping with this, both Chekhov and McCabe, although distant in time and place, try to avoid any superfluous element in their stories.[16] As Chekhov stated, "[e]verything that has no relation to [a short story] must be ruthlessly thrown away" (in Maugham, 1958: 170). McCabe is also a friend of minimalism, sticking to just a few characters in a concrete and delimited space. Both authors reject Romantic excess, but while Chekhov moved to nineteenth-century realism, McCabe includes fantastic elements in his realistic narratives.

McCabe has praised, as many other have, Chekhov's ability to get into the human psyche.[17] Both authors' works share a deep interest in common people and their everyday life, in what makes us human and what makes us individuals. This makes the stories particular, since they deal with a concrete person's story, as well as universal, since the events could happen to anybody, or anybody could react in a certain way. As Collin Nicholson has remarked, McCabe's writing has a down-to-earth element, "a refreshingly 'let's be clear about this' aspect that is a recurrent tactic for initially engaging the reader's attention (Nicholson, 2008).

Being the son of a well-read lower-class miner interested in politics[18] —who had to make a great effort to send his son to university—, it seems reasonable to think that McCabe should have a great concern for the responsibility and the ethical implications of being a writer, both on a personal level —his writing should be good— and on a social level —tying to convey something, an event, a detail, a sensation or a thought, that, even if it resists being pinned down in words, should be expressed and made to transcend the writer's sphere.[19]

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16. Chekhov criticised in a letter the tendency towards the personification of nature in literature: "The sea doesn't laugh or cry, it roars, flashes, glistens. Just look how Tolstoy does it: "The sun rises and sets, the birds sing". No one laughs or sobs. And that's the chief thing —simplicity (in Maugham, 1958: 170).

17. Chekhov would have acquired an invaluable knowledge of human nature through his job as a doctor (Maugham, 1958: 167). As Sherwood Anderson put it, the training that a student of medicine has to undergo can be an excellent instruction for a writer, since doctors acquire a deep knowledge of human nature, of the human being in its best and worst moments, when sickness and fear pulverise the socio-cultural masks (1995: 100).

18. As McCabe himself stated in an interview with Nicholson, his father "was a quite political animal, an activist who read Left-wing novels by writers like Upton Sinclair, Emile Zola and John Steinbeck. He would sometimes give me a book and say 'you have to read this': Robert Tressell's *Ragged Trousered Philantropist* was an example of that. He also read some poetry: Shelley he read, and Byron was a favourite, particularly the satirical Byron. He didn't spend his days reading poetry of course, but his books were there, in the house" (in Nicholson, 2008).

19. Thus, the narrator in "The Beginning of Something" (2001), who is a writer, feels a certain anxiety about the notions of truth and fiction or representation —quite abundant in Calvinist thought: "It was that Magritte thing of the pipe, under it the words: *Ceci n'est pas une pipe.*' […] He thought he understood what Magritte was saying: this is not a pipe, this is *the representation* of a pipe. But it was why Mason had chosen it that got him: Mason dealt in duplicity, so he liked having a neat reminder on his wall that truth did exist, though it might not at first look like the truth. There was a motto-like quality to the picture in the context of a tax inspector's office […]. At the same time, the simple contradiction of the Magritte picture seemed at times like an accusation, at times a reproach" (2001: 139).

Yet another important influence on McCabe as a short-story writer is the shorter fiction of Bernard Malamud (1914-1986),[20] the US writer from whom he learned such technical aspects of the short-story form, as the different ways of presenting the characters' point of view in the texture of the narrative (McCabe, 2003: 14). McCabe himself has commented that he used to read Malamud's stories because he was so good, and then read them again to see how he had done something, what strategy he had used.[21] As an example, McCabe mentioned a story called "My Son the Murderer" (1973). As he explained,

> it had two narrators, and the father narrated some of the story and then the son narrated some of it, and then the father and the son; so there are two different narrators, and I thought I've never seen this done before and I thought, well, I could use that. (in Aliaga, 2008)

And he used it, indeed, as we shall see when analysing his work. As we will see in Chapter Four, McCabe's longest story to date, the short novel *The Other McCoy*, shows this shift in focalisation, since the story —full of gaps and breaks— is told by the alternating voices of the main characters Patrick McCoy and his girlfriend Yvonne, and is full of subjective impressions gained through their points of view.

McCabe's short story "Strange Fare" (2006)[22] seems to pay homage to Malamud's "The Man in the Drawer" (1968), or at least both short stories seem to share certain characteristics. Malamud's story begins with a man in a taxi who feels a bit uncomfortable with the unknown taxi driver: "A soft shalom I thought I heard, but considering the Slavic cast of the driver's face, it seemed unlikely. He had been eying me in his rear-view mirror since I had stepped into the taxi, and to tell the truth, I had momentary apprehensions" (Malamud, 1976: 31). McCabe's story begins with a taxi driver thinking of picking up a stranger —"It was beginning to get dark and he was thinking of packing it in for the day when he saw the guy standing outside Sandy Bell's" (2006: 168)—, but then the point of view changes, and it becomes a story about a stranger in a taxi. Both the fare in the first story, and the taxi driver in the second start wondering about the possible identity of the stranger they are riding with. "Strange Fare" could be considered

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20. Saul Bellow wrote in his eulogy to Malamud: "Malamud in his novels and stories discovered a sort of communicative genius in the impoverished, harsh jargon of immigrant New York. He was a myth maker, a fabulist, a writer of exquisite parables" (in Shimada, 1997).

21. Remarkably, in his beginnings Chekhov also imitated other great realist writers such as Tolstoi, Flaubert and Maupassant (Maugham, 1958: 169-171). As Maugham relates, as a friend of Chekhov's discovered him copying a story of Tolstoi, he replied "I'm rewriting it", and he explained he was trying to learn the methods of the greats (169-179).

22. This story, together with Janice Galloway's "Sea Angel" and Duncan McLean's "Coastal Business", was commissioned by *The Scotsman* for a short-story anthology addressing the topic of "work". They were included in it with other twenty stories, submitted for "*The Scotsman* and Orange Short Story Awards". All the writers had to adjust their stories to this topic (MacLaverty, 2006: vii-xiii).

as the reversal of "The Man in the Drawer", since the former story is narrated in the first person, a homodiegetic narration, with internal focalisation, and the later is narrated in the second person, thus, a heterodiegetic narration with internal focalisation too. In both, it is the main character who is the focaliser, so we get the fare's perspective in the first story and the taxi driver's in the second. Therefore, it could argued that a kind of dialogue is established between the two stories, and, giving the argument a further turn, it could be stated that McCabe-the-writer establishes a dialogical relationship with a writer who had influenced him. Maybe McCabe, after reading Malamud's story, felt tempted to explore the "other" side of the story, a story about strangers, about others, about the other, in fact.

Indeed, McCabe especially liked the way Malamud expressed subjectivity, as, for example, in "My Son the Murderer": "It's an extensively third-person narrator but we are getting subjective impressions, characters' points of view and, to some extent, character speech pattern through the narration, not just in the dialogue, but in the narration" (in Aliaga, 2008).

Apart from focalisation, there is something else in Malamud's fiction that interests McCabe, something to do with the syntax, the sentences, a kind of vernacular style present in the narrative. As the author himself commented to me in an interview:

> [Malamud] was very good at working in a kind of Jewish-American speech pattern into his narrative. Not just the dialogue but the narrative. So you had a lot of things as in brackets, in parentheses, like asides, and this reflected a kind of speech pattern. [...] I think I learned a lot about doing that from him and I have used that a lot in my own writing. (in Aliaga, 2008)

McCabe may be said to have tried to do the same by incorporating a Scots speech pattern or a certain vernacular style into a story, both in the dialogue and in the narration.

As has already been pointed out in Chapter One, language is a very important issue in Scottish literature. After the Union, English became Scotland's official language and, consequently, literature was written in a tongue that some writers felt as alien and imposed. As commented, Hume the philosopher, deliberately avoided Scotticisms in his writings, because it was considered improper for philosophical works. However, some fictional writers such as Sir Walter Scott used the linguistic conflict to sustain creative tension (Bold, 1983: 101). Thus, for example, in Scott's "Wandering Willie's Tale" (1824), the vernacular Scots becomes the absolute protagonist of the tale.[23] This type of paradoxical prose, which emphasises

contrast through the use of different voices, started to become popular after Scott. As Kenneth Simpson has observed:

> the need for the assumption of voices [is] most apparent in Scottish writing from roughly 1740 onwards, precisely the years when the social and cultural effects of the Union were beginning to catalyse a crisis of identity among the Scots. (1988: 3)

This crisis led to the creative use of linguistic duality and to a later revival of the vernacular characterised by the search for a Scottish voice, the voice of the people, so to say. As Alan Bold states: "Since then Scottish writers have been able to follow Scott's example by using literary English for their narrative and stimulating oral Scots for dialogue" (1983: 102). Many writers who were looking for a voice that they could feel as their own decided to follow Scott's use of English for narration and of vernacular Scots for dialogue. This use of the two languages gave the Scottish readers a sense of authenticity in the characters' voices, as well as a more accurate taste of provinciality. As Hart succinctly puts it, "[i]f local realities and affiliations matter, then authentic local speech matters" (1978: 407).

But twentieth-century writers did not stick to Sir Walter Scott's binary use: English for narration and Scots for dialogue. Instead, they started experimenting with the possibilities afforded by both languages within a wider range of narrative possibilities. As Craig has noted,

> for all Scottish writers, [...] the issue of language has an overwhelming significance that sets their writing quite different problems from those posed to the English writers. [...] The language of literature, for every Scottish writer, is a matter of choice, and those choices form an integral part of the act of writing. (1987: 4)

Since Sir Walter Scott, Scottish writers have been experimenting with both languages in various and different ways, ranging from the most closed Scots dialect to English. Writers such as Tom Leonard or James Kelman have gone well beyond the traditional use of Scots for dialogue and English for narration. As March has stated, Kelman's linguistic experiments "break both from a middle-class English novel tradition and from a Scottish urban novel tradition which uses the same English as a narrative framework to explain and contain the working-class dialogue (2002: 5). Alan Freeman recognises in Kelman's experimentation an example of the postmodern conception of language, in the sense that it is "a mixing of the registers of which real speech consists" (in March, 2002: 5). This hybrid nature of speech leads us inevitably to Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) —the first to apply the term "dialogism" to literature[24]— and his ideas on polyphony

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23. See, for example, the following description by the external narrator: "Men thought [Sir Robert Redgauntlet] had a direct compact with Satan —that he was proof against steel— and that bullets happened aff his buff-coat like hailstanes from a hearth —that he had a mear that would

turn a hare on the side of Crriffa-gawns— and muckle to the same purpose, of whilk mair anon. The best blessing they awred on him was, 'Deil scowp wi' Redgauntlet!'" (qt. in Bold, 1983: 101).

24. In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1975), written in the nineteen thirties, Bakhtin contrasts the dialogic and monologic work of literature.

and dialogism, which have been widely used in Scottish studies. Just as Scotland is not a homogenous entity, and the social strata are nothing but abstract generalizations of a heterogeneous reality, speech is not a uniform and containable unit, but rather a polyphonic and mutable structure.

As Bakhtin stated, each individualised utterance, however unique, necessarily employs one or more speech genres, understood as the different modes of speaking or writing that human beings learn to mimic, weave together, and manipulate. Genres are extraordinarily diverse and "boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible" (1986: 60). Boundless does not, of course, mean that there actually exists an unlimited number of genres, since that would erase their coherence and significance, but rather that, since they are continuously evolving and changing, these genres are just temporarily fixed.

Bakhtin also argued that every national language is heteroglosic, that is to say, that it contains a diversity of speech styles or speech genres (60). The plurality of national languages increases in those nations where immigration has been a strong force. In addition, as Sampson, among others, has pointed out, the postmodern era has witnessed the emergence of a variety of quite heterogeneous social movements on behalf of the silenced seeking to make themselves heard (1993: 14). These social and ideological changes had also important consequences for the understanding of the nature of language as flexible and mutable, and based on active socio-historical and cultural elements, as well as for the understanding of the self, as we will see in Chapter Three.

We have seen that the multicultural turn that has taken place in contemporary Scotland has had strong linguistic implications. Thus, as Wilson McLeod and Jeremy Smith have stated: "[a] wide range of languages is now to be found in the great conurbations of the central belt, brought by different group of immigrants over the last century, from Italian to Urdu to Cantonese to Kurdish" (2007: 21).

Moreover, as Voloshinov explained long before, when talking about the nature of language, the very development of language is intimately related to the hybridization of the population: language would not have evolved "in its fully developed form, unless with the passing of time there had not appeared in the evolution of economic activity a new phenomenon which was to be decisive in the fate of human language —the process of hybridization" (in Shukman, 1983: 99). As Voloshinov further stated, "[r]ight at the very basis of man's cultural development, in his work, lies the need to unite into a group, […] which is initially created by hybridization" (99).

Nevertheless, as McLeod and Smith state, for all the importance of multiculturalism, the most salient linguistic varieties currently existing in Scotland derive from Anglo-Saxon languages: Scots —traditional urban and rural dialects of Lowland Scotland and Caithness, Orkney and Shetland, with "distinctive charac-

teristics in all levels of language: accent, grammar and vocabulary"—; Scottish Standard English (SSE) —seen as "a 'refined' form of Scottish speech, purged of allegedly crude Scotticisms", also defined as "Standard English with a Scottish accent"—; and "English as the kinds spoken in England" —spoken by English immigrants, on the UK radio and television (2007: 21-22).[25] As they further explain, many Scottish speakers "will switch from Scots to Scottish English depending on the social situations in which they find themselves" (22). Thus, in a sense, the different languages spoken in Scotland function as Bakhtin's genres, since speakers adjust their speech to the addressee and the situation involved. As McLeod and Smith have observed,

> it is notable that middle-class speakers in particular, a group notoriously mobile in social terms, feel the centripetal pull of overtly prestigious "polite" SSE and covertly prestigious broad Scots, and often "code-shift" between the two, becoming more or less "broad" in the use of Scots. (22)

If, as Bakhtin stated, any speech genre is also a manner of viewing and experiencing the world, then, when we shift genres we do in fact shift perspectives too. No doubt genres shape our experience and, in that sense, constrain it, but this is clearly counteracted by the dialogic movement in the very shifting of genres generated by the mutability of subject/observer-positions. As stated above, if we have the ability of shifting our ways of speaking, and thus of seeing, knowing and understanding, then it could we argued that we have indeed different selves, and that, as Bakhtin put it, we are "the voices that inhabit us" (in Morson and Emerson, 1990: 213). And contemporary Scottish writers seem to be well aware of this fact.

Thus, the work of Alasdair Gray, also very much engaged in linguistic experimenting, "problematis[es] the whole process of authoritative story-telling" (Bell, 1996: 227). In the light of his literary production, the previous literary activism as promoted by Sir Walter Scott reveals itself as old-fashioned and conservative, revealing English as the central —authorial— language that framed the vernacular —peripheral— Scots. In summary, contemporary Scottish writers are conscious of the inherent polyphony in every speech act and in writing, and also of the power relationships at work in any linguistic act, and overtly play with it.

In the light of this, it could be stated that most Scottish writers oscillate between languages and use them naturally, choosing what fits the text best. Actually it is not so much a matter of language —English or Scots— but a matter of register. Language should adapt to characters and settings, and not the other way round.

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25. As McLeod and Smith state, "[t]his electronic presence within the speech community is now known to have a greater effect on the other varieties that has perhaps been recognised hitherto by linguists" (2007: 21).

In McCabe's writing, the distinction between the language of narration and the language of dialogue is not abrupt, it oscillates, and the text moves in an unbroken flow from speech, to thought, to narrative, as we will see in the analysis. Moreover, there are many voices inside a single character which struggle to come to the surface, as happens, for example, to the protagonist in *The Other McCoy*, Patrick McCoy, who feels various voices coming out of his mouth when he is impersonating. Other times, the other voices take control of the narrative and the focalization. This polyphony of voices should be read under the light of a dialogic construction of identity, as developed in Chapter Three. Indeed, what Craig has said about James Kelman's narrators could easily be applied to some of McCabe's narrators:

> The "self as other" has been internalised as an other self, other selves, the other voices […]. The self has become the space of voices uncontrolled by the "I": voices can erupt into the self because it is already the space of the Other. (1999: 102)

In my view, the plurality of voices hosted by these narrators offers a way to overcome the Scottish writers' traditional dilemma in the use of English and Scots. Indeed, a growing tendency may be observed in contemporary Scottish fiction to break the polar differentiation of English *vs*. Scots in a subtle mingling of narration, dialogue and flow of consciousness. It seems as if these options where now much more flexible in contemporary fiction than they were before.

McCabe uses Scottish vocabulary and rhythms both in his poetry and in his fiction. As he has explained,

> Sometimes when I'm writing a poem a Scots word will come up that I used to use more when I was a boy, so there is a choice whether to use "the door *squeaked* on its hinges" or "the door *grind* on its hinges"; "grind" is a Scots word, and I often choose the Scots word because it's a bit more expressive or something in terms of sound. (in Aliaga, 2008)

The range of words to choose from is larger in a bilingual society, so the possibilities are also greater. This dual perspective, as defended by McCabe and other contemporary authors, who deliberately mix up Scots and English vocabulary for the desired expressiveness, contrasts with the more pessimistic view of some Scottish Renaissance intellectuals who where debating in the first decades of the twentieth century whether they should use just Scots or using just English. As McCabe comments:

> The use of a speaker and the attempt to render dialect accurately have long been central concerns in Scottish poetry and perhaps the work of James Kelman and the renewal of interest in the work of James Hogg has done something to encourage fiction writers to explore this territory as well. In any case, it seems a healthy development. (McCabe, 1991b: viii)

Still, there is a certain danger in the use of Scots, as McCabe himself acknowledges: "[t]here is of course, the possibility of wallowing in the localized, a kind of linguistic parochialism. The universal mustn't get lost in the particular, but be revealed by it" (McCabe, 1991b: viii). These words point to a characteristic that could already be found in Chekhov's writing and that is being emphasised by "evocriticism",[26] namely the universal or representative nature of fiction. McCabe has commented in this respect:

> To ignore the patterns of speech which surround us in Scotland is to run the risk of jettisoning the social fabric from which it springs, and this is something Flannery O'Connor also emphasized in her essay 'Writing Short Stories': 'You can't say anything meaningful about the mystery of a personality unless you put that personality in a believable and significant social context. And the best way to do this is through the character's own language. (McCabe 1991b, viii-ix)

Language says something about the characters and their lives, about the world they live in and, by extension, about our own selves and worlds. For McCabe, then, language is a key tool in the construction of a story, rather than a political statement.

As McCabe has explained, the loss of the Gaelic language and the imposition of English gave the Scots a differentiated use of English:

> Norman MacCaig used to say we wrote in English with a Scottish accent. And I think a Scots writer's use of English is usually different from an English writer's use of English. It has no so much to do with using particular Scots words, although there is a bit of that, but it has much to do with the syntax, the order, and the rhythm of speech. (in Aliaga, 2008)

Not just the words, which in fact do add a particular sonority or connotation, but also the rhythms reveal themselves as key elements in contemporary Scottish literature.

It could be argued that Scottish literature, in its use of the vernacular Scots and of English, is closer to the vernacular than English literature. This fact would be related to the Scottish linguistic and literary traditions, which differ from the English ones, as commented in Chapter One. With the relegation of Scots to the imagination, the Scottish language became associated with oral storytelling and poetry rather than with non-fictional genres, which were written in English. Con-

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26. This twenty-first century critical theory, also known as Darwinian literary criticism, is strongly based on neuroscience, cognitive theory and evolutionary biology, and it tries to answer the questions: Why are we narrative-loving animals? and How does fiction appeal to us? As Brian Boyd has pointed out: "Evocriticism lets us link literature with the whole of life, with other human activities and capacities, and their relation to those of other animals as they compete, cooperate, and play, as they observe, understand, and empathize with others" (2009: 384-5).

sequently, Scots became associated with the vernacular. Hart comments on the importance of the vernacular and the oral in Scottish literature:

> The later eighteenth century had discovered in memoir, diary and anecdote the evocative power of recorded talk. The Scottish novel, beginning then, seems in its beginnings more markedly oral, more "talky" than English eighteenth century fiction, with its epic or confessional conventions. There are possible explanations for this in Scottish culture. The three dominant professional options left after the Union —preacher, pleader, dominie— all tie vocational identity to styles and powers of speech. (1978: 44)

I would add to his account the fact that it seems logical to think that Scottish fiction, or rather fiction in a Scottish setting or background would be written with that specific vernacular Scots, particularly when dealing with the local and the representations of lived experiences. As Hart further states,

> The novelist in Scotland is closer than novelists in other cultures to the storyteller and to the storyteller's relation to his audience. The folkteller establishes history of the collective imagination to which it pertains —the family, locality, class, or nation. Tradition is [...] recreated by the teller. (146)

Language and tradition are thus closely linked, although not in the way endorsed by T. S. Eliot.

The fact that fiction is tied to a community through language should not lead us to assume that the use of dialect makes Scottish fiction nationalistic. As contemporary writers have shown, vernacular dialects contribute to the construction of characters, who, through their speech, reveal themselves as belonging to a given class —working-class, middle-class, privately educated, etc.—, place —urban, rural, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Highland, Borders—, age, or gender. Thus, it could be argued that short stories that present characters through their speech and their actions rather than through description are, in a sense, closer to the vernacular than novels.

Continuing with those elements which influenced the writing of McCabe's short stories, it should be noted that not all the influences have to do with Scottish issues or with the influence of Chekhov and Malamud, as Ernest Hemingway's short stories have also been an influence for McCabe's writing. This influence can be sensed, for example, in McCabe's short story "Say Something", which shows striking resemblances with Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants" (1927). Both stories deal with the delicate issue of abortion, but their approach is very different, even if they share some similarities: the characters in both short stories avoid mentioning the taboo word, the silenced issue, but Hemingway's story, set close to "the hills across the valley of the Ebro", in Aragón, portrays a quite naïve girl —Jig— who seems to be more preoccupied with drinking than

with thinking about personal responsibility, and a man who tries to convince her to undergo a "really [...] awful simple operation", which he defines as "just letting the air in" (Hemingway, 2004: 404). This girl, a rather immature character, seems not very much convinced by herself but rather simply believes what she is told about the issue. McCabe's story shows a totally different approach: the woman —Izzy— is very angry with her partner, who had already convinced her in the past that having a baby was not a good idea —maybe when she was a younger girl, like the one in Hemingway's story. In the end she decides to leave her selfish partner and have the baby she is now expecting. The male characters in both stories are somewhat similar, since they both see pregnancy as a problem to be drastically solved, but their role is totally different, since the strong male adult presence in Hemingway's story has become a muted and paralysed male character in McCabe's story.

McCabe's story could, then, be interpreted as an answer to Hemingway's story. This view is enhanced by the writer's statement in a conversation held in Edinburgh in the summer of 2008, that as a young writer he "would write stories that were some kind of pastiches of Ernest Hemingway" (see Appendix). In both stories we get a drinking/drunk couple talking/not-talking about a taboo issue which is never mentioned: abortion. Moreover there are certain sentences in Hemingway's story,[27] which also appear several times in that of McCabe.[28] This repetition and the insistence on the need of speaking up, listening and caring, suggest an unavoidable ethical demand, that is not present in Hemingway's short story.

Another echo of Hemingway's writing can be found in an explicit reference to the American writer in "The Hunter of Dryburn", a story inspired by the real small town of Bonnybridge, where McCabe lived as a child for some years and, thus, perfectly familiar to him. In this short story, the issue of context, of the local, is raised. A man in a bar explains to a young couple who are visiting Dryburn that he likes reading about the things he knows and likes, like hunting, for example:

> Ah've been reading a bitty this Ernest Hemingway masel ken, story boot shootna lion: [...] Aye he's a great writer right enuff. An thirz a helluva loata good advice aboot hunting an that in this story. Course it's aa aboot a place in Africa or somewhere like that, jungle an aa that ken, no a place like Dryburn. (McCabe, 1985: 132)

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27. "'[...] I don't care about me.'/ 'What do you mean?'/ 'Well I care about you'/ 'Oh, yes. But I don't care about me. And I'll do it and then everything will be fine'" (Hemingway, 2004: 405, emphasis added).

28. "A little girl's gone and has lost her dolly, but you don't care, do you, Pete?" (McCabe, 2003: 268). "I want you to care. Everybody has to care. I want to care for it. I don't want to lose it. Not this time, Pete. I want to keep it, to hold it, to care" (269).

But there is something that this character cannot not fully empathise with in Hemingway's story, namely, the fact that "there's no very much tae hunt roon aboot here. Nae lions an tigers, ken? But there's a helluva loata rats up there at the canal. Hundredsa big dirty great rats" (133). The character complains, thus, because he cannot fully identify with the action and setting; there are certain elements that are utterly remote and strange to that Scotsman. He cannot imagine the lion in Hemingway's story, so identification and empathy with the character's motivation become almost impossible to him:

> Tell me something before ye go, friend. What's yer honest opinion o Ernest Hemingway as a writer? A ken he's a great writer an aa that, but earlier the night Ah was reading that story aboot shootn the lion, and Ah donno. Ah couldnae be bothert feenishin it. Ah come doon here for a coupla pints instead. It's no Hemingway's fault ken, it's ma fault. Ah wis enjoying the story an everythin, till it gets tae the bit aboot the kill ken. Cause the trouble is ye see, Ah jist cannae imagine the lion. Ah jist cannae picture the lion in my mind, know whit Ah mean? Aa Ah can imagine's a rat, a dirty hairy great rat. A rat's no the same thing as a lion, somehow. (135)

As the character explains, the problem is that what seems familiar and common to a writer who travelled to Africa was totally strange and unimaginable to a reader living in a small town in Scotland. As a man interested in the craft of writing, McCabe believes that a writer should deal with what he knows best, what is closer to his own experience, but there should be something universal behind the anecdotal, so that any reader will understand. However, the influences on McCabe's writing cannot be located in the literature of one single country or continent but are quite diverse in their origins and forms.

McCabe has recognised other present-day influences, like that of Scottish writers "that you know and work with" as, for example, Ron Butlin (in Aliaga, 2008). Butlin is one of McCabe's friends from youth, with one or two more, they "used to read each others' work a lot, and sometimes still do" (2008). So friendship and influence continue as years pass by.

His relationship with other writers became especially close in the case of his wife-to-be, the writer Dilys Rose (b. 1954, Glasgow). Rose is a very well-known writer in Scotland and she is also in close relation with younger writers, as she teaches creative writing and organises public readings. McCabe and his wife, who have two daughters, live and write at present in Edinburgh, which is a very active city, culturally speaking. Both have won The Canongate Prize for New Writing (in 2000),[29] and have also published together.[30]

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29. McCabe with his short story "Something New" and Rose with her short story "Out of Touch".

30. For example in the French literary magazine *Brèves*, in a special issue on Scottish literature (*Écosse* no. 32, 1989), prepared and translated by Serge Baudot.

3. Works

Brian McCabe has been writing for more than thirty years and is at present a fully recognised creative writer in Scotland. He has published four collections of short stories. His first collection, published in 1985, is entitled *The Lipstick Circus*. The quality of his first and second short-story collection, *In a Dark Room with a Stranger* (1993), has been widely acknowledged by critics as well as the general public. Thus, for example, Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunningham and Alan McGillivray included the following reference to these two works in their volume *Scottish Literature* (2002):

> McCabe's short stories in *The Lipstick Circus* (1985) and *In a Dark Room with a Stranger* (1993), (in which life is the dark room, and the stranger oneself as well as partners and other people) have an impressive range of empathy, and are particularly sensitive in evoking the perspective of children and the most vulnerable. (Gifford *et al.*, 2002: 942)

After these, McCabe published his third collection, *A Date with my Wife* (2001) and, in 2003, *Selected Stories*. These collections will be analysed in the following chapters, together with McCabe's only novel to date, *The Other McCoy* (1990) —which has been defined as a long short story by some critics.

Besides the mentioned collections McCabe has published many uncollected poems. Some have appeared in *Scotland on Sunday*, *Scotsman*, *The Scotsman Weekend*, in *New Edinburgh Review Anthology*, *Edinburgh Review*, etc. Actually his poetic activity has been so diverse and productive that there are many dispersed poems published in Scottish magazines, postcards, and pamphlets. McCabe has also written some articles[31] and the introductions to two collections of short stories, *The Devil and Dr Tuberose: Scottish Short Stories* (1991), and *Scottish Short Stories: Laughing Playmate* (1992).

His short stories have even exceeded the printed page and conquered stages and screens, as well as the radio. The general public has had the opportunity to listen to some of his fiction, since some of his short stories have been broadcast by BBC, Radio 3 — for example, "The End of Something"[32] —; by BBC Radio 4 —"A New Alliance" was broadcast as two radio plays produced by Gaynor Mac-Farlane in 1998—; Radio Four and BBC Radio Scotland —"Storyline" and "Say Something", there entitled "Talkie Dolly".[33] Other stories have been adapted for

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31. For example "No Real City", an article on Glaswegian fiction published in *The New Edinburgh Review* in 1981.

32. Produced by Patrick Rayner.

33. As McCabe himself explained me personally, "Talkie Dolly" was a broadcast version made out of three different stories which had to do with the same theme: three different characters find a lost doll in the street.

television ("Anima"), and for the stage ("Conversation Area One"[34]). McCabe's story "The Host"[35] was adapted to film in 2003 by the director Simon Hynd. This is a quite unsettling short film which emphasises the uncanny and oppressive elements in the story.[36]

For all this, however, McCabe's work has not been widely translated. His short-story collection *A Date with my Wife*, translated into French in 2004 as *Bienvenue sur Knoxland*, and his short story "Full Moon"[37] are the only translated works so far.[38] This may be due to the regional flavour of some of his works, or to the difficulty in translating his mixture of vernacular Scots and Standard English. Nevertheless, his stories can be perfectly understood by non-British readers, since the topics, the preoccupations and the questions which appear in McCabe's fiction are quite universal, as I will try to show.

Although this dissertation is devoted to McCabe's fiction, I think it is worthwhile briefly summarising some of the elements that are present in his poetry, since they are a central part of his writing and poetry and fiction feed each other.

In 2009, *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Poetry*, included Brian McCabe —among other writers, such as Ron Butlin, Tom Pow, Alan Riach, Maud Sulter, etc.— in a chapter entitled "A Democracy of Voices" (Matthews, 2009: 65-79). As Kristen Matthews points out, these writers deliberately eschew preoccupation with the national question in their poetry, and seek to transcend national boundaries in order to speak to a global audience (65). Indeed, there is a cosmopolitan and democratic spirit in the poetry of Brian McCabe. The vocabulary and syntax are relatively undemanding and simple, something that seems to be deliberate, as McCabe believes that simplicity is a key element for the success of a poem. His minimalist style is by no means accidental: "I'd eschew a thick language stew / —too many wordy ingredients /

fighting to be the flavour" (1987: 74), and as these lines suggest, situate him in the tradition of Movement poetry associated with Philip Larkin. McCabe's nutritional images echo Philip Larkin's description of the effect of the young lady's photograph album:

> […] Which,
> Once opened, sent me distracted. All your ages
> Matt and glossy on the thick black pages!
> Too much confectionary, too rich:
> I choke on such nutritious images. […]
> ("Lines on a young Lady's Photograph Album", 1953)

At the same time, McCabe's advocacy of linguistic simplicity is strongly reminiscent of Larkin's rejection of Dylan Thomas' linguistic excess and his defence of a "modest" poetry:

> Words as plain as hen-birds' wings
> Do not lie,
> Do not over-broider things—
> Are too shy. […]
> ("Modesties", 13 May 1949)

Besides, McCabe seems to share key traits with Modernism, especially his preoccupation with finding the exact word. Indeed, it seems as if he wanted to distil language in order to extract its highest purity and truth. This dry clarity is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and the Imagists' aim at clarity of expression through the use of precise visual images. As Amy Lowell stated in *The Imagist Manifesto* (1917), the imagist poets chose to use the language of common speech, to employ always the exact word, and to avoid the superfluous. Besides, these poets defended an absolute freedom in the choice of subject and rhythm (Lowell, 1917).

Moreover, this minimalist and concentrated style, McCabe's poetry shows a strong interest in the relationship self-other(s) and in the complex and changing connection between self and world, as the self is defined in relational and non-essentialist terms. This non-essentialism is sometimes linked to a form of existentialism. The self in McCabe's poetic as well as fictional work is often self-estranged, discovering new meanings of the world and his or her relation to it. Often, the poetical I in McCabe's poems, like the Modernists and the Romantic poets before them, seeks to find a solution to the problem of alienation in the power of imagination. The poetic vision allows for a transformation of world and self, and the most quotidian objects and events are estranged and scrutinised in various ways.

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34. Produced for the Traverse Theatre's *Sharp Shots* (1996)

35. The short story was published for the first time in the literary magazine *New Writing Scotland 15: Some Sort of Embrace* in 1997, then it was included in a popular collection of short stories, *Damage Land: New Scottish Gothic Fiction* (2001), edited by Alan Bissett, and was also included in McCabe's collection, *Selected Stories*, published in 2003.

36. The short on 16mm was shown at popular film festivals such as the Edinburgh Film Festival and the Milano Film Festival in 2004. It won the Best Fiction Prize and The Audience Award of the Scottish Students on Screen 2004.

37. Translated by Serge Baudot as "La pleine lune" in the French literary magazine *Brèves* no. 32; in "Écosse", a monograph on Scotland dedicated to the short stories of Ron Butlin, Ronald Frame, Alasdair Gray, Brian McCabe, Dilys Rose, and Iain Crichton Smith, among others.

38. A collection of translations into Spanish of some of McCabe's poems and short stories, around the topic of strangeness and human relations, is going to be published in Spain in 2010 (Aliaga, 2010).

McCabe has published five poetry collections, but before that, some poems of his were also included in a poetry collection entitled *Seven New Voices*,[39] edited by John Schofield, when McCabe was at university in 1972, just before the publication of his first collection, *Goodbye Schooltie* (1972). This first poetry book was written as he was a very young man. Therefore it has been ignored by most critics, maybe because it was not considered serious or mature enough. As Brian McCabe himself has stated: "[t]his title embarrasses me now" (in Greig, 1996: 59). Nevertheless, in this early collection we can already glimpse some elements that will be present in his more mature poetry, such as the combination of common-experience topics —as in "Schoolpoem 2", where a boy goes to "the school library" and finds that this time "there where no books" for him because he "was overdue" (McCabe, 1972: 11)— with fantastic ones —as in "Closing Sale" (23), a poem set in the future where twentieth-century humans are only relics to be studied—, together with dark-humour —as in "Dad": "CAMBODIA—50,000 dead gee whizz pass the / salt" (8)—, and the preoccupation with representation, language and their relation to the world —as in "The Cage":

Out of some old shoe strings
& bits & pieces of bed springs
i build a bird.
[…]
But once inside its cage
my bird began singing old wartime
sentimental songs,
before breaking into the bits & pieces
it was made of at the beginning of the poem.

Now
how can i build a new bird?
For whenever I try
to make odds & ends fly
i find myself building the cage—
all around me, the cage. (25)

Here the poetic I worries about artistic creation, about how to catch the essence of things by means of language, coming as he does at the tail end of a millennia, that allows only for a recombination of elements in earlier poems. The gulf between self and world is primarily the gulf between language and

things; both are separated, but can relate to each other by a strenuous effort of the imagination on certain occasions.

Spring's Witch (1984) is McCabe's first serious collection of poetry. It contains poems dealing with classic topics such as life and death, as, for example, in "The deceased":

And so at your "resting place",
a living tree that stands
beside your stone, open-armed,
offers me a dark embrace:
[…]. (21)

or love, as in "The Cartographer", a Petrarchan sonnet where the desired body is inscribed in a symbolic system of lines and measurements while, at the same time, it escapes language:

How to map the imaginary country
where distance between us is dissembling
with the needle of my compass trembling
turning more to the north than north can be
[…]
I know my measurements will be endless
My maps unfinished. There will be colours
Labelled crudely—with a word, with an arrow. (14)

The sonnet, with its strong intertextual echo of John Donne's metaphysical poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning",[40] neatly follows the rhyme scheme ABBA ABBA CDE CDE of the Petrarchan form. The young poet seems to be playing with classic poetic forms and ideas on love in order to become familiar with the possibilities of the genre. In other more mature poems McCabe will have recourse to organic verse, adjusting the poems' structure to the particular subject matter, like the Imagists.

From the thematic point of view, the collection's main concerns are representation —as in "A Photograph" (16), and "And his Model" (25)—, and the relation self-world:

I compare the room to a cell
and claim we've locked the world out
[…]
But now I need help with something:
how to look into the literal mirror,

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39. The titles of the poems are: "Scoolpoem", "The Being Highly Intelligent", "Are you Lonesome Tonight Elvis Presley", "It ain't Nothin' but a Houn'dog", "The Bird Cupboard Lament", "Identikit", "Cocoa", "Sex Education", "Now Gimme a Big …" and "Sunfall Nightset Cumbernauld". Other writers who appear in the collection are Derek Bowman, Catherine Lucy Czerkawska, Andrew Greig, Liz Lochhead, Mario Relich and David Walls.

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40. See especially the lines: "If they be two, they are two so / As stiffe twin compasses are two / […] Yet when the other far doth rome / It leans, and hearkens after it, / And grows erect, as it comes home" (Donne, 1896: 51-52).

nailed above the shelf-like self,
and find a way not to compare
that half-smiling, human error
to this cracked, but shining self. (17)
("Comparisons", 1984)

Although the relationship art-world is a main preoccupation in McCabe's work, the symbol of the mirror does not indicate that the poet shares the traditional realist belief in mimetic art. On the contrary, it seems to allude to the mirror of James Joyce —the "cracked lookinglass" in *Ulysses*[41] (Joyce, 1993: 7)—, a personal and fractured mirror where world and self are reflected as having multiple and fragmented images or voices. This allusion brings to the fore his allegiance with the modernist tradition. In the poem, the poetical I ponders on the tricks and mechanisms of perception and thought and wonders about how one could access to one's own self (and to the world). As is made evident in the above quotation, the poetic I needs the other's help to perceive himself and construct a self-image. This early interest in representation, self and world will become a constant in McCabe's fiction.

Three years later, McCabe published *One Atom to Another* (1987), the collection that made him a well-known writer, especially in Scotland. *One Atom to Another* is, until the present, the poetic work that most attention has received from the critics. As Hart put it, it was McCabe's "[s]econd book of poems, but it could fairly be described as his first mayor collection" (1988: 44). The collection —whose subject matter was "attractively varied" (Hutchison, 1987: 171)— was said to incorporate the best of *Spring's Witch* and offer "a more complete view of his imaginative range" (Mangan, 1987: 33). Some of the poems included in *Spring's Witch* reappear in *One Atom to Another*, such as "And the Maiden", "And his Model", "Stripper", "What we are" and "The Blind".

The next verses from the poem "Cat" illustrate the questions and processes of a "[m]an, in his undergrowth of words" (1987: 27):

Looking up from what I'm doing
(looking up a word, to find out
if it means what I want it to . . .)
I find out it's me who's been
looked up—by the unexpected:
outside my window, looking in,
is a striped Astonishment. (27)

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41. James Joyce smashed Proust's mirror —the mirror of nineteenth-century realism—, which was taken up from the Romantic belief in mimetic art, into a thousand shards. The Modernist cracked mirror released a multiplicity of voices in the self, which thus became selves.

An everyday event, such as the apparition of a cat outside the window, is portrayed as an encounter with an unexpected other, which seems to come to question the poet's sense of self. This presence of animals in some of McCabe's poems —"Grey Squirrel" (1987: 28) and the twelve poems in "Low Life", included in *Body Parts* (1999)— is reminiscent of Ted Hughes' animal poems and also of Hughes' awareness of the world' continuum outside himself, of the mystery embodied over against him in the universe (Sagar, 1972: 10). The gap between the human I and the cat is the gap between self and other(s), between language and non-rational reality. This gap is further explored in some of McCabe's short stories, as we shall see.

The mechanisms of the mind and of the process of writing poems are explored in the collection through the fluidity of consciousness of the poetic I, where words, sounds and images overlap and curl:

I return with my seaweed of ideas—
all those sea-smoothed smithereens
poets search among for meanings
with words honed down to pure sound
by a wind that's keen on "keening".
(McCabe, 1987: 26)

The poet searches for meanings after his own personal view, a style that resembles that of a child's vision. As Mangham has pointed out:

His romantic envy of the child's-eye-view is more of a strength than it may sound, and his evocation of betrayed innocence can be seen as part of a more serious ontological concerns: "All I know is I must: try again, / With a mind that's frozen over, / To thaw each thing from its name". (1987: 34)

McCabe writes poems in order to capture and explain the essence and meaning of subjective worlds, even though this, obscured by changing experience, is extremely difficult to achieve.

McCabe's fiction and poetry are very visual, something which could again be linked to the above-mentioned influence of Imagist poetry. The weight of the use of images might be more observable in his poetry than in his fiction. Hart takes the lines: "Drawers lean on drawers as if / their crazy staircase could recall / the time it was a kitchen cabinet" (McCabe, 1987: 14) from "In the Skip" as representative of the way in which he transforms the ordinary into visual poetry. These lines make the reader clearly visualise the disposition of the drawers, into a "crazy staircase". Other times, static images become animated, as in a film: "A mattress, doubled up, yearns / to yawn, stretch, turn over and / scratch itself where it's ripped" (14).

However, in this collection, it is the condition of human beings, of the individual, that catches most attention. Poems like "Ulterior Man", "Inner Man", "A Sur-

vivor", "An Individual" or "Six Masks" deeply reflect on the nature of being. In the nineteen eighties, the author seems to be very much interested in disguise and the question of reality and unreality, truth and appearances. In "Post Festival" the lyrical I reflects: "The Castle has disappeared— who has unplugged the projector?",[42] thus evidencing a Platonic distrust of reality in the human world. However, this concern with appearances is more commonly related to human identity itself, to the persona —mask in Greek—, as the poems in "Six Masks" suggest. The poetical I deals with six different aspects of his personality: "Narcissus", "Demon", "Reversible", "Sincere" and "Metaphysical" (39-43). The last one, "Metaphysical", ends with the poet suspecting "that behind this mask I'll find / no one there" (1987: 43). Thus, the poem endorses a dialogic conception of the self as an impersonator, a topos which McCabe fully explores in his novel The Other McCoy, as we shall see in Chapter Eight. In the poem, as well as in The Other McCoy, the protagonist relates to others through different selves, different masks, something that does not reflect on the world-as-stage, but rather on the mutability and dynamics of the codes human beings use to apprehend the world.

Refering to "Ulterior Man" (1987), Hart significantly distinguishes between McCabe's interest in the description of the self and the association of this interest with unhealthy self absorption and neurosis: "[a] hostile critic might point out that interest in the self can be a prime symptom of neurosis, but the feeling of these poems ["Ulterior Man", "Six Masks" and "Inner Man"] is one of detached interest rather than unhealthy self-absorption" (1988: 46). The aim of this thesis is precisely to show that behind a multiple self there need be no neurosis or schizophrenia, that there is no splitting but rather a multiplicity, and that a dialogical account of self and society can be very positive, since the mechanisms of the mind, both genetically determined and culturally flexible, are very complex.

After postulating the complexity of the self,[43] McCabe relates it to the world it inhabits. As Hart has remarked, this question is directly addressed in the poems "Canal in Winter", "Making Senses" and, most notably, "To Make" (1988: 47). In these poems, the medium of interpreting and translating the experiences of the world is problematic in the sense that the world has lost its innocence and purity. As McCabe beautifully puts it in his poem "To Make", the subject helplessly projects itself onto the world it inhabits and tries to pin

down its "pure" essence with his or her "impure senses", removing the trash from language so as to make it capable of conjuring up the stage of primordial chaos antedating the creation of the cosmos:

> To sift the trash of the word
> to use our impure senses
> to find the elements
> to make
>
> something pure maybe this time
> it will be pure as pure
> as chaos was before
> we made our order of it. (1987: 13)

These moments of purity and crisis, which call into question the certainty of everyday reality, bring to mind Ted Hughes' sense of mystery and vital awareness in "Wind" —"The fields quivering, the skyline a grimace, / At any second to bang and vanish with a flap" (Hughes, 2010). And in some way, these instants could also be related to the "threshold periods" in McCabe's short stories. As we shall see in the following chapters, these periods of crises question the fixity of the self and of the *status quo*. For McCabe, the self is not a self-contained entity that observes a fixed and well-defined world, neither is the world an objective thing to be analysed like an etherised patient. Rather both self and world interact with each other and are mutually dependent, and everything can change and be played on.

As Matthews argues, the status of the portrayed animals, objects and, even, the parts of the human body, are continually played on in *Body Parts*. They can also be part of political critique —as in "Coal"— or lay bare the frailty of human experience, and the human capacity for wonder and joy —as happens in "Other Life" (Matthews, 2009: 73). As Matthews further explains, in most of McCabe's poems, perception is approached "as a process, a slowly realised object of revelation" (73), as can be seen in these lines:

> I lie in the darkness and listen
> to some threadbare life in our room,
> some fretful other life in our room
> —it isn't me it isn't you—
> at times like a breathless trust
> or the spatter of a hesitant rain;
> [...]
> In my cupped hand it is
> some scarce yearning grown restless:
> a desire searching for a gesture;
> a love looking for its word. (McCabe, 1999: 35)

The poets' wonder towards the unknown or strange and the familiar is received with an astonishment that calls for a way of expressing it, while, at the same time, denying clear-cut categorisations.

McCabe's next collection, *Body Parts* (1999) —defined as "an inventive and witty series of projections into human and animal life" (Gifford *et al.*, 2002: 787)— is divided into four sections: "Low Life", "The Savage Object", "Other Life" and "Body Parts". The first presents twelve poems on the vicissitudes of animals, such as the simple worm, who curls

> from the arsehole of the world
> to be your prototype: begin
> with the fingerprint frets on my skin;
> end with the naked question mark
> of my clever flesh. (McCabe, 1999: 3)

Or a spider, who denies any relation with Athene, as in her "mythology / there are no goddesses: / just me and my mate and prey" (7), in words that bring to mind the hawk's rejection of sophistry in Ted Hughes' poem, "Hawk Roosting".

The next section in the collection is devoted to vivid objects, which sometimes seem to clash with human preoccupations, living a life on their own —as in "Turnip": "The prize turnip does its best / to ignore this controversy [on the exploitation of turnips]. / It concentrates on being a turnip" (18)—, or which seem to transform themselves into humanised symbols —as in "Kite": "So what if I'm fragile" (21). As in Hughes' *Hawk in the Rain* collection,[44] there is a gulf between the poem's subject and the human, which demands readers an ethical movement towards the other while at the same time suggesting proximity through the empathic forces at work.

The third section, "Other Life", contains poems such as "Buddha"[45] or "Roy Orbison", which brings to mind McCabe's earlier poem "Are You Lonesome Tonight Elvis Presley" (1972: 13). In "Buddha" the doubleness and contradictions of the city of Edinburgh are brought to the fore:[46]

> I met the Buddha in Edinburgh:
> hunkered in a doorway in the West Bow,

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44. Hughes' first collection, entitled *Hawk in the Rain* (1957), contains several poems, such as "Hawk Roosting", focalised from the perspective of the consciousness of an animal. These alien first-person perspectives, demand the readers' ethical recategorisation of received assumptions about self and other.

45. Included in the anthology entitled *Luckenbooth. An Anthology of Edinburgh Poetry* (MacGregor, 2007: 110).

46. McCabe's poem is actually included in a section entitled: Double City", under the following quotation by Norman MacCaig, from his "Drop-Out in Edinburgh": "City of everywhere, broken necklace in the sun, / You are caves of guilt, you are pinnacles of jubilation" (McCabe, 2007c: 105).

> a can of Carlsberg in his hand.
> Around him shops, cops and dogs. (McCabe, 2007c: 110)

The problem of homelessness, poverty and capitalism is tackled through the figure of a particular "Buddha", who watches the poetical I, "in that inelegant, Scottish half-lotus" (110).

The last section in the collection gives the title to the entire collection, "Body Parts". In it, McCabe tells the kind of truth which is the truth of many, as Sarah Bryant commented in her review of *Body Parts* (2000: 177), since the poems are devoted to the different parts of different bodies in a great variety of tones, registers and voices.

McCabe's taste for the palpable and the witty is reminiscent of Miroslav Holub's poetry, especially "Bones" —"We lay aside / useless bones, / ribs of reptiles / jawbones of cats" (Holub, 1996: 13)—, a poem which shows some resemblances in voice and tone to McCabe's "We" —"[We] are tired of appearing as diagrams / in medical encyclopaedias"— and, in topic, to "Scapula" (64) and "Skull" (76). In theme, the collection also echoes the importance attributed by feminist critics to the body as opposed to the phallus in the definition of the self.[47]

In June 2009 McCabe launched his latest poetry collection *Zero* (2009), which was received with a very warm welcome in Edinburgh. In *Zero*, Brian McCabe gives form and sound to the ungraspable, unattainable mysteries of everyday reality, with wit, economy and accuracy. All the poems in *Zero* are devoted to numbers and other numerological issues, such as their shape, colour, taste and distaste.

Literature and mathematics, as different ways of approaching and understanding reality, intertwine in this work so as to deal with the problem of knowledge and representation. In the author's own words: "though founded on certainty, mathematics is essentially just another way of probing the uncertain, the many —though not necessarily infinite— mysteries of the universe" (McCabe, 2009). Drawing on this, McCabe pictures human understanding as a quest to impose patterns and forms over chaos by means of the continuous and rhythmic play with the infinite combination of finite elements in the English language: 10 figures, 26 letters.

McCabe connects the ethereal abstraction of figures with the graspable reality, which is, at the same time, an evasive entity, "as a dream put into words, / a notion put into dogma" (21). Zero explores the mystic fetish of ciphers from a startling variety of perspectives: from ancient counters, who must organize chaos and who secretly long for the taste of "the thinness of 1" (9); to a child who is learning the

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47. Jeanette Winterson fictionalises this issue in her novel, *Written on the Body* (1992).

figures through diverse forms of arranged dots, that disobediently "hatch into commas / and grow legs to catapult them / over the next page" (13-4). From a maths teacher, who asks their students to "reinvent / the computer from first principles" —since they do not have one—, in order "to extend the digits of pi" (15-6), to a Maltec runner (39-40). From Pyhtagoras (42-45) and Ludolf van Ceulen (49-50) to August Ferdinand Möbius (55) or Alan Turing (63), among others.

Containing the infinite list of whole numbers, twin primes, fractions, irrational numbers, and pi, *Zero* is divided into 3 sections: "Counters", "Perspectives", and "Zero". The first section contains twenty one poems that explore not only the unimagined charm of certain ciphers, but also the geometry of the body, the stability of the bottles on the top of a wall, or the cohabitation with Chaos, when, "determined to be free", Chaos insists on behaving illogically (29).

The second section, including sixteen poems, is somewhat intimate gallery dedicated to precise historical and anonymous figures and their important developments in the field of science. Among them we can find a rude Roman lecturer teaching the obvious simplicity of his numeral system; the fortuitous creation of Möbius' never-ending strip; the falsification of some letters in order to prove that it was Pascal who first proposed the law of gravitation; or Riemann's revision of the concept of hypersphere.

The final section, *Zero*, with just one poem, is devoted to "the unnumber", "nameless in its nothingness" (69). At the denouement, the poetic voice returns to the primordial origin, to "the primal womb of all things / before light before life before number" (69). Afterwards, zero, which had "remained unseeable, uncountable, unacceptable", is given its names and its forms (69). Nevertheless, despite becoming commonly used by men, the cipher, like the word, shows an always elusive nature: "appearing then disappearing" (70). The final poem, thus, summarises one of the collection's main *Leitmotifs*: our experience of the world resists absolute categorization, and languages —ciphers and letters, numerals and words, doctrines and beliefs— defy definite and stable meaning.

Poems such as "Throur", "Eleven", "The Fifth Season", "The Seventh Sense" or "Twin Primes" overtly show precisely McCabe's interest in the resistance in representation itself, leading to the necessity of constant re-questioning of our dogmas. But this unavoidable undecidability —whose doubting face is forever "stamped with the same question mark" (27)— shows its most ironic and nihilist side. Even if the infinity of a meadow defeats the men who are trying to mow it —as in "Mow"—, in the end, the abstract and oblivious zero always reappears, mockingly, unnoticed and inscrutable, in the grass.

After this brief overview of some of the characteristics presents in the poetry of Brian McCabe, and before the analysis of McCabe's fiction in the following chapters, it is necessary to explain the characteristics of the literary tradition in which McCabe's fictional work belongs, which in the case of the short stories, is that of the contemporary as opposed to the traditional short-story genre. Together with this, Chapter Three will be devoted to establishing the various perspectives on identity. These theoretical approaches to identity are indispensable for the analysis of the representation of identity in the fiction of McCabe, and also for the understanding of the redefinition of identity in general, and Scottish identity in particular, which is taking place in these texts and in contemporary thought and criticism.

Chapter Three

THE SHORT-STORY AND IDENTITY

1. The Birth and Characteristics of the Contemporary Short-Story Genre

The contemporary and the modern short story are quite different in form and function from the genre of the tale, which includes any short piece of fiction, such as the tale in all its variants —the folktale, the classical tale,[1] the detective tale, the ghost tale, etc.—, myth, the fable, the anecdote, the sketch, etc.[2]

The evolution of the short story is intimately linked to the genre's growing emphasis on identity and character construction. Consequently, the contemporary short story is closely linked to present-day notions of identity, and suits McCabe's interests particularly well. Before analysing these elements in the fiction of the author, it is necessary to explain the characteristics that are specific to the contemporary short story in relation to the growing interest in identity issues of the postmodernist period.

In his path-breaking essay, "From Tale to Short Story: The Emergence of a New Genre in the 1850's", published in 1974, the critic Robert Marler stated that there are many substantial differences between the old tale —which includes all the above mentioned shorter forms— and the modern short story. The history of the short story as we know it today is in fact quite short, as pointed out by H. E. Bates, A. J. J. Ratoliff and Elizabeth Bowen (in Zavala, 1997: 134).

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1. According to Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) classical tales are characterised by their essential unity, as well as by formal compression and stylistic intensity.

2. A new term may be needed to distinguish the modern and postmodern short-story genre from the ancient pre-modern short genres —all of which are referred to as short stories—; but since this is not a thesis on literary theory where the issue could be discussed at length, the later specifically modern and postmodern variations on the genre will be plainly referred to as examples of the "contemporary short story".

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that there is a long tradition of previous short forms that influenced, in one way or another, the modern genre.

The mythic basis of the old short story or tale, as mentioned by Cassirer (2007), continued during the Middle Ages almost until the fifteenth century, when short narratives started to move from verse towards prose as their intentions became less moralising, less didactic, and more recreational or entertainment-oriented. The religious and folktale elements in these narratives surfaced in their use of the supernatural, which now began to coexist with the more realistic elements, based on everyday individual experience.

In the seventeenth century, the natural started gradually to be privileged over the supernatural in the progressive move of occidental literature towards realism. This shift towards realism was, according to the critic Charles May, the result of the French emphasis on verisimilitude —*vraisemblance*— and an increasing interest on psychological analysis (2002: 3). It must be said, however, that the presence of the fantastic was not wholly erased. Especially in Scotland, where the picturesque ran "imperceptibly into he fantastical and the grotesque" (Smith, 1919: 34). As Smith further states,

> it does not show mere sensitiveness to fact, with or without the art of intensifying and completing the impression by the heaping-up of details. Scottish literature is not so placid. [...] If a formula is to be found it must explain this strange combination of things unlike, of things seen in everyday world and things which, like the elf-queen herself, neither earth nor heaven will claim. (35)

The Scottish "double mood" (36), with its easy alternation of the fantastic and the realistic did not, however, undermine the credibility in construction of characters. In fact, the psychological depth of characters became one of the hallmarks of the evolution of the short story in the direction of realism: characters were no longer just allegoric or functional elements, rather, they started to become much more realistic, complex and "round" —to put it in E. M. Forster's popular term (1956: 47). The original emphasis on plot and sequencing of events slowly shifted towards an emphasis on character building and the description of the characters' reactions to the occurring events. This early tendency towards impressionism became an essential feature of the nineteenth-century short story, which will be preserved in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as we shall see in the analysis of McCabe's short stories.

The evolution from tale to short story was cut short by the overwhelming rise of the novel in the eighteenth century. However, the importance of the genre was recovered thanks to rise of the German Gothic *Novelle*, which became very popular in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. Its main distinctive writers —J. W. Goethe (1749-1832), E. T. A. Hoffman (1776-1822), J. F. von Eichendorff (1788-1857), H. Kleist (1777-1811), A. W. Schlegel (1767-1845), etc.— charac-

teristically combined the primitive supernatural element of the folktale with the more modern realist element. This combination of the fantastic and the realistic has continued to exist until the present in many short stories that have adopted many different forms, from oral story-telling to science fiction.

This combination of the supernatural and the realistic has been said to constitute an essential trait of Scottish fiction and of the Scottish sense of self in general, as stated above. As Alan Bold has put it, "Scotland is a divided and broken nation, the imperfect setting for Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde, for Byron's Antithetical mind, for Gregory Smith's Caledonian antisyzygy, R. D. Laing's Divided Self" (1990: 5). One of the halves of the Caledonian antisyzygy would correspond to down-to-earth realism; and, the other, to high-flown imagination and fantasy. Nevertheless, these strict dichotomies —which come from the *a priori* certainty that Scotland presents its self/selves in counterpoints— are not accurate, in the sense that, even if there was an element of truth in them, they reveal themselves as highly simplistic. As I will try to demonstrate, the realistic and the fantastic or supernatural are not elements present in Scottish literature in oppositional terms. They are rather an amalgam that reflects the many shades of meaning they convey, a flux which fits the changing processes of experience. Moreover, this blending of elements is a general tendency easily found beyond the Scottish borders, since the supernatural and the realistic have always coexisted in the literatures of many cultural traditions and ages all over the world.

Looking at the evolution of the short story in retrospect, it can be argued that shorter forms allowed for a greater autonomy of characterisation and plotting, and that this fact favours the presence of fantastic elements in realistic contexts, characteristic of the nineteenth-century novella, from which they were transmitted to the modern short story. Thus, in the modern genre, the characters and their actions are not fixed or determined by the presentation of an extensive and exhaustively detailed fictional context. This flexibility of the character's world permits a greater freedom in the re-imagining of characters or individuals and their doings. But this does not mean that short-story characters have no social context —whether fantastic or realistic—, since factors such as voice can tell much about the characters' cultural background, especially in the case of Scottish fiction, where the use of language(s) is of key importance. As we shall see in the analysis of McCabe's stories, the vernacular can offer a very precise socio-cultural context for the characters' actions.

There are two other factors that make the modern short story very suitable for the exploration of individual identity: its function and its reception. The traditional tale was created as a community based activity aiming at the transmission of secular traditions and values. By contrast, the modern short story is much more interested in the exploration of the individual psyche, and is meant

to be consumed by readers in the solitude of an armchair or train seat. Logically, the move from the communal to the individual addressee was due to complex socio-cultural developments that gave increasing importance to anthropo-centric preoccupations.

The growing focus on identity and identity formation characteristic of the short-story genre was initiated in the Romantic period and became more and more important in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The fact that Romanticism envisioned the individual as an isolated figure bound to confront the conflicts of being, ensured the centrality of this topos in the short story. In keeping with this, most critics agree that the short story came to fruition as a literary genre in the work of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), Herman Melville (1819-1891), and later with Henry James (1843-1916). Hawthorne's and Poe's skilful development of the Romantic impulse has been said to constitute the fuse that triggered off the birth of its earliest form of national American art: the short story (May, 2002: 7). Romanticism, as is well known, was the age of the individual hero and heroine, a fact that inevitably conditioned the literary works produced at that age.

Hawthorne's stories are immersed in the space between allegorical romance and realism. The writer was conscious of the importance of building a story on the active relationship between characters and circumstances. By so doing, he established the link between the future importance of character(s) and action in the more modern forms of the short story (7). As a consequence, characterisation —through description or the characters' actions— became a vital element in the construction of a story.

As is well known, Edgar Allan Poe defended that a piece of short fiction should be contemplated as a whole. As he maintained in his key essay, *The Philosophy of Composition* (1846),[3] everything in the plot should be carefully arranged from the very beginning in order to create a single effect. Brander Matthews also high-lighted the importance of the short story's essential unity of impression (1901: 15). And Henry James developed this into his theory of the "figure in the carpet".[4]

Undoubtedly, Poe's unforgettable contribution to the development of the short story is this "unity of impression"—derived from German Romanticism—, but it is the psychological depth of his characters, as well as a certain realism when

dealing with the construction of characters, that we now consider as definitively pre-modern. Modernist and postmodernist short stories further developed this tendency towards introspection, going deeply into the smallest chambers of the mind. However, it was Herman Melville who has been said to lead the shift towards realism that steered late nineteenth-century short fiction. Thus, Robert Marler has asserted that, with Melville, the traditional allegorical tale declined in favour of the more realistic modern short story, a change especially dis-cernible in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853)[5] (1974: 14). Still, Melville's well-known story does not seem to be the best example of the realist shift with respect to plot, since it is best described as an un-story, in the sense that, in keeping with his own uttered formula —"I would prefer not"—, Bartleby's actions lead to absolute inaction. Nevertheless, Melville's long short story or novella was very modern in its lack of superfluous plotting elements, and its focus on the enigmatic inaccessibility of personal motivations —and lack of motivations—, an inacces-sibility that brought to the fore the psychic complexity of the character.

As already stated, the growing importance of the individual psyche was not a swift literary change but a steady socio-cultural development that affected not just the writing of short stories, but also their reception, thus changing the func-tion of the works. The antique forms of the short story were conceived of as nar-ratives to be told to a community. Their creation, transmission and, consequently, their never-ending transformations, were based on the fact that they were oral genres. On the contrary, modern and contemporary short stories are essentially a written genre —although some short stories are performed at literary readings and broadcast on the radio, the great majority are non-performative works, but printed stories for the individual reader.[6]

The new short stories were, thus, addressed at the solitary readers, to the creatures of more modern and ubiquitous times. Indeed, the emergence of the new genre is inseparable from the emergence of the age of individuality. As Frank O'Connor puts it, the new short story started and continued to function "as a private art intended to satisfy the standards of the individual, solitary critical reader" (1985: 14). Nevertheless, it has taken a while for literary criticism to recognise the new short-story form as an independent genre with its own distinc-tive particularities.

The short story has been considered as a secondary genre for many years. Thus, we discover in early Formalist theories a tendency towards the identification of

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3. Published for the first time in *Graham's Magazine*. Poe worked a couple of years as critic and editor at Graham's, where he published some short stories and reviews.

4. "For himself, beyond doubt, the thing we were all so blank about was vividly there. It was something, I guessed, in the primal plan, something like a complex figure in a Persian carpet. […] 'We knew the change would do it —that the difference of thought, of scene, would give the needed touch, the magic shake. We had perfectly, we had admirably calculated. The elements were all in his mind, and in the secousse of a new and intense experience they just struck light'" (James, 2002).

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5. Melville's story appeared for the first time in *Putnam's Magazine*, in two parts —the first part appeared in November 1853, and the second in December 1853. Then it was reprinted in his collec-tion *The Piazza Tales* (1856).

6. Several of McCabe's short stories have been broadcast, but they were originally conceived as printed stories.

length as the most important and intrinsic criterion for the definition of the modern short story; but in fact length was not so much a sought-for artistic quality as an imposed commercial requisite. Indeed, the short story's length is profoundly linked with historic circumstances. As Somerset Maugham stated, the short story did not gain enough currency until de nineteenth century with the birth of the annual (1958: 147-8). The requirements of periodicity and physical length of the publications were the ideal ground for the flourishing of short narratives and poems. The exigencies of the editors inevitably influenced the kind of writing: if newspapers offered a small space for some pieces of short fiction, writers had to adapt to these exigencies and adjust to the required and expected length. Similarly, readers grew accustomed to this length and demanded the continuation of these incipient conventions.

Length is indeed an important factor, but only because it conditions the stylistic features of a literary work. As Shaw has commented following Benjamin Boyce (1968: 110), it was the limited space that determined style and narration:

> The size of the Tattler sheet, not artistic choice, was set at 2,000 words as a maximum for short fiction in that periodical; it was available space that determined features like the amount of dialogue or the use of a first-person narrator who could compress information and provide retrospective summaries of narrative action. (Shaw, 1992: 7)

Nevertheless, debates on length seem to have given place to other discussions; some contemporary critics like Frank O'Connor,[7] Suzanne Ferguson, Graham Good, or Mary Louise Pratt have recognised that shortness is not an intrinsic feature of the short story —no wonder that the label "short story" should reveal itself as quite ambiguous—,[8] and that critics should have started to focus on the analysis of other more flexible elements, such as structure, voice, ideology, etc.

Even if length is not sufficient for the definition of the genre it is a feature that critics should bear in mind, since both form and content are affected by it. In contrast to the novel, the short story is free from having to show the effects of action and the passing of time, or from having "to trace the gradual 'diminution of the character's alternatives'" (218). However, generally speaking, this does not automatically imply a greater or lesser "freedom" with respect to the novel, since the

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7. "I am afraid that the modern short story is being seriously affected by editorial ideas of what its length should be" (O'Connor, 1985: 27).

8. The critic Brander Matthews, author of the famous essay, *The Philosophy of the Short-story*, published in 1901, set the basis for the definition of the short story as a modern genre independent from other longer narratives such as the novel. In order to differentiate this modern genre from the other previous shorter stories such as the tale, the anecdote, the sketch, etc., Matthews spelled it "Short-Story" with a hyphen, but, regrettably, his term has not been adopted by other critics, since it adds to the ambiguity and terminological confusion of the term.

choice of subject is inevitably restricted by the impossibility of patterning a short story according to a slow progress from youth to maturity as in the *Bildungsroman*; nor can the complex processes which lead, say, a Jane Austen heroine to eventual self-knowledge be compacted easily into the story's abbreviated form. (194-5)

As Shaw's words suggest, the novel and the short story focus on different aspects. Since the length of a short story does not allow for the character's progressive maturation or acquisition of a complex self-knowledge, it tends to portray the loneliness of characters, as Frank O'Connor contends in his well-known essay, *The Lonely Voice*:

> Always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society, superimposed sometimes on symbolic figures whom they caricature and echo —Christ, Socrates, Moses. [...] As a result there is in the short story at its most characteristic something we do not often find in the novel —an intense awareness of human loneliness. (1985: 19)

This "awareness of human loneliness" and feeling of remoteness "from the community" (21), seems to be the legacy of the Romantic period. As O'Connor further states, characteristically, too, the short-story reader tends to identify with lonely characters, such as "tramps, artists, lonely idealists, dreamers, and spoiled priests" (20-21). However, this identification with isolated characters invariably involves some sort of relationship with society as a whole (17).

2. The Representation of Identity in the Short Story

In the earlier section we saw how restrictions in length precluded the representation of the characters' maturation process in the short story. According to Shaw, this limitation in character representation may lead to the appearance of "frontier subjects", that is, marginal subjects who are in "threshold periods" which are entire unto themselves, such as childhood and old age (1992: 195), or also, I would add, in periods of crisis. The individual confronts her or his situation at a particular stage, and has to act in response to it. Thus, as Shaw further states: "Instead of investigating responsible action, the storyteller can emphasize stages in which physical circumstances largely determine what can be expected of a character in the way of action and individual choice" (195).

These "frontier subjects" are clearly observable in Brian McCabe's short stories, since most of the focalisers we find are either children, adults with altered mind states —whether mad or suffering from a nervous breakdown—, or individuals who encounter or are forced to face the other(s) in different ways —as a stranger on the street, as witness to a peculiar event, etc.

Another difference, also motivated by length, is that, where the novel describes, the short story has to present directly, with no beating about the bush. Consequently, short stories have been compared to snapshots, since they often show a single moment, or an isolated place. But this is not always the case. Characters can also present themselves through action, which is the short-story's initial aim. As we will see when dealing with identity in McCabe's short stories, this makes the contemporary short-story form an excellent medium for the exploration of postmodern identities that conceive the self as a relational and mutable entity, as self-in-action, since the characters are constructed through their actions rather than through omniscient descriptions.

The fact that the vernacular and non-standard speeches frequently appear in many short stories is related to this form of character presentation. The function of the vernacular here is one of characterisation and contextualization —still following the old principle of *vraimblesance*—; and sometimes ideological or political, in that they contribute to the depiction of popular and regional culture and the narration of marginal experiences (May, 1995: 108). We will come back to the importance of the vernacular when dealing with the particularities of Scottish short stories written in English and Scots.

O'Connor has stated that, in its earlier phases, storytelling, like poetry and drama, was a public art, lacking rigorous technique (1985: 13). I would not put it as a lack of rigour, but it is a fact that technical strategies developed *pari passu* with the written genre of the modern short story. Still retaining a certain amount of the sonority of oral short stories, the written genre experimented with its content: narrative structures could be twisted, multiplied, fragmented, and its whole fictional micro-universe could be changed and made more complex. In this sense, it might be stated that the technical strategies developed by the short story represent the modern *Zeitgeist* of the period into which they were born.

According to O'Connor, the short story, like the novel, is a modern art form:[9] That is to say, it represents, better that poetry or drama, our own attitude to life and the fragmentation of the modern world (13). It could be presumed that brief narratives prosper in complex and fragmented contexts. Of course, the socio-cultural context has deeply contributed to the consolidation of the demand for short stories in our contemporary age. Nowadays, time is perceived as fragmented and accelerated, people have many different things to do, so the shortness of the pieces allows for a consumption that is more suitable to the present-day rush we all seem to be immersed in: reading on the tub when going to work, sitting in a waiting room, having lunch, or lying in bed before falling asleep.

Publishers of course are well-aware of this fact, as Simon Porsser, publishing director of Hamish Hamilton confirms: "The short story form is better suited to the demands of modern life than the novel" (in Kay, 2009). Nevertheless, this should not make us think that the short-story genre could be equalled to fast-food reading, since, as the Scottish writer Jackie Kay states:

> the story does not make things easy for the reader. It is a tough form for tough times. If the novel sometimes spoon feeds the reader, the short story asks her to feed herself. A story asks the reader to continue it after it has finished or to begin it before it began. There is space for the reader to come in and imagine and create. (2009)

Given the fact that the modern short story had a different form and function and was written and read by modern men and women, with particular interests and anxieties, critics started to see the new short-story form as an emblem of modernity, which could not be separated from the modern individual experience.

Ironically, the taking of the short-story genre as emblem of the modern *Zeitgeist* pushed it towards its contemporary diversification and pluralisation, since every individual voice claimed its right to be heard. Therefore, a miscellany of voices rises to meet the demand of the short-story's formal and thematic variety. Indeed, the short-story genre is so diverse in form, themes, and style that a homogenous and general definition and study is almost impossible, as recent critical studies have shown.[10]

As Jackie Kay, winner of the 2007 British Book Award, has stated, the modern short story "is a lovely hybrid form, a cross between a poem and a novel. It catches people at crucial moments of their lives and snaps them. The short story allows us in a short space of time to understand huge things, huge dilemmas" (2009). And if the contemporary short-story form reflects our attitudes to life, which are nowadays varied and plural, it seems logical to think that its form will also be quite varied.

In her short story "The True Short Story" (2008) the Scottish writer Ali Smith argues that a monolithic definition of the genre makes little sense nowadays, since the short-story form is in constant evolution and different writers understand it in different ways. The narrator of Smith's story has a tremendous difficulty in finding a definition for the contemporary short-story genre, as she enumerates different perspectives that I think are worth quoting, since they provide the best definition of the genre:

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9. In O'Connor's own words: "The form itself is modern" (1985: 15).

10. The most important essays on the genre appearing on the last years approach the short story form in its diversity from a varied number of perspectives and angles. Just to cite some among the most recent: May, 1994; Iftekharuddin, Rohrberg and Lee, 1997; Fernández Sánchez, 2001 and 2005; Iftekharuddin, Boyden, Rohrberger and Claudet, 2003; Ibáñez, Fernández and Bretones, 2007; etc.

Franz Kafka says that the short story is a cage in search of a bird. [...]

Tzvetan Todorov says that the thing about a short story is that it's so short it doesn't allow us the time to forget that it's only literature and not actually life.

Nadine Gordimer says short stories are absolutely about the present moment, like the brief flash of a number of fireflies here and there in the dark.

Elizabeth Bowen says the short story has the advantage over the novel of a special kind of concentration, and that it creates narrative every time absolutely on its own terms.

Eudora Welty says that short stories often problematize their own best interests and that this is what makes them interesting.

Henry James says that the short story, being so condensed, can give a particularized perspective on both complexity and continuity.

Jorge Luis Borges says that short stories can be the perfect form for novelists too lazy to write anything longer than fifty pages.

Ernest Hemingway says that short stories are made by their own change and movement, and that even when a story seems static and you can't make out any movement in it at all it is probably changing and moving regardless, just unseen by you.

William Carlos Williams says that the short story, which acts like the flare of a match struck in the dark, is the only real form for describing the briefness, the brokenness and the simultaneous wholeness of people's lives.

Walter Benjamin says that short stories are stronger than the real, lived moment, because they can go on releasing the real, lived moment after the real, lived moment is dead.

Cynthia Ozick says that the difference between a short story and a novel is that the novel is a book whose journey, if it's a good working novel, actually alters a reader, whereas a short story is more like the talismanic gift given to the protagonist of a fairy tale —something complete, powerful, whose power may not yet be understood, which can be held in the hands or tucked into the pocket and taken through the forest on the dark journey.

Grace Paley says that she chose to write only short stories in her life because art is too long and life is too short, and that short stories are, by nature, about life, and that life itself is always found in dialogue and argument.

Alice Munro says that every short story is at least two short stories. (Smith, 2008: 15-17)

Ali Smith seems to endorse all these different definitions, since she compares the short story to the nymph Echo, who always answers back. As this long quote suggests, the proliferation of short-story writers and of different short-story forms is really astonishing in Scotland.

The idiosyncrasy of the Scottish socio-cultural background may have influenced the proliferation of the writing of short stories, as England, the homeland of the novel, has not produced as many short stories. As O'Connor reflects, Ireland, "which had failed to produce a single novelist [until the twentieth-century], had produced four or five storytellers who seemed to be first-rate" (19). Scotland has had indeed some great novelists —such as Stevenson—, but it may be true that the nation is most prolific in the writing of short stories. Evidences point out at a difference in the literary cannon of England and that of Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

As we commented in Chapter One, the cultural evolution of Scotland and England has been different, and the same could be applied to Ireland. The Scottish literary canon was erased by the Union, and Scottish literature was excluded from the Academy until 1971. But this did not mean that the Scots would rapidly forget their literary history and naturally embrace the alien form of the English novel.

The particularities of the short story in Scotland are mostly related to language and identity issues. The particular circumstances of the Scottish nation, commented on in Chapter One, make of the Scottish identity something problematic with regard to the English. Obviously, since language(s) are of central importance in Scottish fiction, both stylistically and ideologically, the use of the vernacular in the short-story form has further connotations than in the English short story.

Similarly, the tendency of the short-story form to mix fantastic and real elements will be accentuated in Scottish literature, since, as noted above, the "polar twins of the Scottish Muse" (Smith, 1919: 20) dwell on opposites and combine the interest in the intimacies of life (41) with the allure for strange worlds and moods (23). Furthermore, the centrality of identity issues in the short-story genre will be intensified by the Scottish growing preoccupation with identity. Examples of these characteristics can be found in the works of Iain Banks, Janie Galloway, Alasdair Gray, Jackie Kay, James Kelman, A. L. Kennedy, Brian McCabe, Ali Smith, Alan Warner, Irvine Welsh, etc.

Before entering the analysis of identity in Brian McCabe's short stories, it is necessary to provide a brief outlook on the concept of identity that permeates the contemporary Scottish cultural panorama and the author's short stories.

3. Theoretical Approaches to Identity: Monologic and Dialogic Definitions of the Self —The Self-Other(s) Relation

Monologic Understandings of the Self

As pointed in Chapter Two, the traditional monologic conception of identity, which follows a unitarian logic, does not allow for a positive view of Scottish identity. Monologic identity, understood as the celebration of the unitary self, is based on the belief that the self is an individualistic, independent and self-contained exclusive entity, or, as Sampson puts it, "a kind of bounded container, separate from other similar bounded containers and in possession or ownerships of its own ca-

pacities and abilities" (1993: 31). Thus defined, the subject becomes an individual and atomic entity, capable of establishing relations with others by means of social contracts. Until the turn of the twentieth century, self and nation were both viewed in these terms as self-contained and exclusive entities; and consequently, defined in binary terms: the self was defined by opposition to the other, and Scotland by opposition to England.[11]

This individualistic and monologic conception of identity is necessarily founded on an implicit in-group *vs*. out-group distinction, often based on unequal relations: the dominant self or group *vs*. the submissive or excluded (Sampson, 1993: 73). Even though the Scots themselves decided to join the English Empire in 1707, they often harbour ideas of repression and submission which has sometimes led Scotland has to embrace the role of dominated group too easily. It is true, however, that the British Union was not exactly freely embraced by the entire population. As commented in Chapter One, there was a class problem underlying the national problem of the Union, as it was promoted and defended by an élite (Sassi, 2005: 44); and both conflicts follow the "us" *vs*. "them" defensive pattern. The division us/them was not national, "but rather ran along class and ethnic divisions" (44). With nationalism, the differences between countries —rather than between classes— are overemphasised in an attempt to establish an almost essential difference that would give the nation a sense of self: we are this, you are that; we are what you are not, or we are not what you are. But the Cartesian subject would not hold on forever untouched, as suspicions on the independence and exclusivity of self and other did not take long to appear.

Seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers such as the empiricists John Locke (1632-1704), Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677) and David Hume (1711-1776) opposed the Cartesian emphasis on the mind as opposed to the senses and to feelings, as well as the independence of the self. Their works contributed to this destabilization that has led to the present dialogic conception of the self in their refutation of the Cartesian ego and the acknowledgement of the importance of the other for the construction of the self.

After them, the Rationalist philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) acknowledged the other as a requirement of practical reasoning, while Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) stated that things or ideas are constituted by internal contradictions —establishing what has been known as Hegelian dialectics. The ancient human preoccupation with subjectivity gave another turn with the work of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). The German philosopher explored the

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11. Carla Sassi defined Scottish national identity formation in the nineteenth century in the following terms: "'Scottishness' is gradually adjusted to coincide with England's alter ego" (2005: 41). Besides, the Gaels were "relegated to Scotland's primitive 'Other'" (51).

structures and mechanisms of self-consciousness, and expressed the internal split of the self, or rather its double nature —and thus the dialogic nature of Being— in the following terms:

> for originally I am neither that which reflects, nor that which is reflected, and neither of the two is determined by the other, but I am rather *both in their unity*; I admittedly cannot think this unity, precisely because in thinking I sunder that which is reflected and that which reflects. (1971: 489)

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) further developed this internal splitting or reflecting mechanisms when he contended that the self is constituted by the ego, the superego, and the id, which may be understood as foreign entities inhabiting the subject. In a sense, Freud's concept of the unconscious destabilised the Cartesian *cogito*, since the self was no longer completely distinct from the other.

William James (1842-1910), the American psychologist and philosopher who introduced Freudian ideas into the United States, defended a kind of pragmatism that included the view that the world is a mosaic of experiences that can only be properly interpreted through radical empiricism. James' emphasis on the diversity of the human condition was a reaction against Cartesian and Hegelian duality, and in favor of multiplicity and fluidity. As is well known, his description of the workings of the mind, which he described as the "stream of consciousness", had a direct and significant impact on avant-garde and modernist literature and art.

The monologic understanding of the self, identity and subjectivity continued being set into question, especially by modernist and postmodernist literature and criticism. The unitary logic of identity was progressively abandoned in favour of the logic of multiplicity, with the result that interiority and exteriority, self and other are no longer definable as stable and opposed entities. As concepts such as "unitary self" and "radical other" are abolished, the questions of self-formation and identity have to be addressed in new terms. It is in this context that dialogic accounts of identity developed.

Dialogic Understandings of the Self

The dialogic formulation of human nature presupposes that we are constituted through dialogue. The concept of dialogical self is based on the notion that the mind can imagine the different positions of participants in an internal dialogue, in close connection with external dialogue, as Hume already anticipated. The dialogic self implies that the self is constructed through a multiplicity of self-positions —that is, of selves-in-action, or selves-in-context, rather than as essential self-contained individuals—, which can entertain dialogical relationships with each other.

The cultural and ideological revolutions taking place at the turn of the twentieth century would completely change the understandings of the self. Among the most influential modernist thinkers who contributed to this dialogical turn, we find intellectuals such as George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) —the American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist regarded as one of the founders of social psychology—; the German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) —who, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, developed the concept of *Sprachenspiel* or linguistic context—; Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) —whose theories attempted to explain the origins of the mind and its properties as derived from "intermental" social processes (Samson, 1993: 98)—; and the Bakhtin group —which included Mikhail Bakhtin, Valentin Volosinov (*c.* 1895-1936), L. V. Pumpyansky (1891-1940), M. V. Yudina (1899-1970), B. M. Zubakin (1894 - 1937), M. I. Kagan (1889-1937), and, after 1920, Pavel Medvedev (1892 - 1938) and I. I. Sollertisnky (1902-1944) (in Shukman, 1983:1).

Mikhail Bakhtin believed that consciousness follows the model of dialogue and, thus, that it requires an interlocutor, the presence of another: "Becoming conscious of myself, I attempt to see myself through the eyes of another person, of another representative of my social class or group" (in Todorov, 1984: 30). This dialogue between self and other through which thought and identity are structured, involves the pre-existence of differences. Besides, self and other are further divided by the fact that self-perception is dependent upon an other's perception, and by the fact that both perceptions will differ. As meaning-making and communicative animals, we use language to bridge that perceptive gap. It seems logical, then, that language should have become a central philosophical issue.

Dialogism focused on the conversational quality of human nature, and understood language as "communication in action" (Sampson, 1993: 97). Bakhtin and other members of the Russian Formalist school —Medev, Voloshinov, etc.— emphasised the socio-historical, extra-linguistic aspects of texts (Onega, 2005: 4). According to them, any utterance is "the product of the interaction of the interlocutors, and broadly speaking, the product of the whole complex social situation in which it had occurred" (Voloshinov, 1976: 128). This definition of human nature presupposes the need of active interaction between individuals. One of the main concerns of the Bakhtin School was the conversational encounter of the self with the other, that is to say, the "co-being" of one person with another. As Shukman argues, sometimes this dialogue was treated in linguistic terms, sometimes in sociological terms, and sometimes in philosophical terms (1983: 3). The main underlying concern of these diverse and related perspectives was the communication between two persons, "the response and interaction of one person to another" (3). Consequently, context —understood as the human situation to which a person is responding and reacting at a given moment— was of central interest.

The writings of the Bakhtin group would influence later critics including the Tel Quel group members Roland Barthes (1915-1980), Tzvetan Todorov (1939-2009) and Julia Kristeva (b. 1941), the British Marxist theory and the poststructuralisms.[12]

The performativity of the I has been further nuanced, running the spectrum from structuralism, deconstruction to postfeminist and postcolonial criticism. As Susana Onega has pointed out, "[t]he genesis of the theory of intertextuality[13] is closely linked to the cultural and ideological revolution that took place in France in the 1960s" (2005: 3). Dialogism foregrounds social and ideological conflicts, and highlights the centripetal and centrifugal forces of culture (10). Julia Kristeva refocuses Bakhtin's approach to language and literature, and proposes "a theory of meaning which must necessarily be a theory of the speaking subject" (Moi, 1986: 27). This speaking subject is inscribed in the body, in history, in a given social code.

Aware of the fact that we inhabit worlds mediated by meaning, poststructuralist thinkers, such as the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) and the philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) further extended the radical dismantling of the myth of the monological self and the Cartesian cogito by developing theories that brought to the fore the delusion of the humanist attempt to define the self in monologic terms.

Derrida's theory of deconstruction is based on the contention that what is constitutive of language is not the relation of a word as signifier to its referent as signified, but the positive determination of signs by reason of the differences in any sign system. The *différance* thesis —developed out of Hegelian dialectics and Adorno's negative dialectics—,[14] recognised internal conflict not as something negative but as a positive element of dialogue and movement. Concealed within any positive statement of meaning, there is an aporetic meaning which cannot be excluded, an other.

Lacan stated that otherness not only inhabits the self, as Freud affirmed, but it constitutes the individual. Echoing the Freudian concept of the superego, Lacan contended that the parental other (*le je-idéal*) strongly influences the construction of the I. His theories challenge the belief on the wholeness and integrity of the self, insisting that there is no clear-cut boundary separating the individual from the other, as expressed in Lacan's "mirror stage". Any baby under six months of age will recognise him or herself in a mirror. According to Lacan,

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12. See Onega (2006) on this.
13. "Intertextuality" is the term Todorov uses for what Bakhtin calls "dialogism" (Onega, 2005: 8).
14. As Buck-Morss has pointed out, Adorno's "relentless insistence on negativity was to resist repeating in thought the structures of domination and reification that existed in society, so that instead of reproducing reality, consciousness could be critical" (1977: 189).

Cet acte, en effet, loin de s'épuiser comme chez le singe dans le contrôle une fois acquis de l'inanité de l'image, rebondit aussitôt chez l'enfant en une série de gestes où il éprouve ludiquement la relation des mouvements assumés de l'image à son environnement reflété, et de ce complexe virtuel à la réalité qu'il redouble, soit à son propre corps et aux personnes, voire aux objets qui se tiennent à ses côtés. (2009)

Human beings develop a consciousness of their own bodies through the "mirror stage", when the infant recognises himself[15] in the mirror as a whole entity, instead of the fragmented movements and undefined boundaries between self and other that have constituted his world up to that point. The mirror stage could thus be compared to an identification process —"*comme une identification*" [Lacan, 2009, original emphasis]—, involving a transformation ("la transformation produite chez le sujet, quand il assume une image" [2009].).

As the baby matures and the specular stage ends, the self (*je*) will objectify itself in the dialectics of the identification with the other, and then it will be restored to its subject position by means of language. The individual understands the differentiation self *vs*. other and then realises that the self must become social, that the sense of identity is created in relation to the other. But as Lacan further states,

Mais le point important est que cette forme situe l'instance du moi, dès avant sa détermination sociale, dans une ligne de fiction, à jamais irréductible pour le seul individu, —ou plutôt, qui ne rejoindra qu'asymptotiquement le devenir du sujet, quel que soit le succès des synthèses dialectiques par quoi il doit résoudre en tant que je sa discordance d'avec sa propre réalité. (2009)

There is thus always a break, a discordance. The subject is in fact constituted by this break, a split that cannot be understood in oppositional binary terms. This will be especially relevant for a culture —such as the Scottish— that has been said to be split, essentially divided.

Indeed, this break may be interpreted in positive terms as signifying that the subject is not an "either-or" construction, as Descartes thought, but rather an "and-and" construction, that is, a cumulative construction where being and thinking, conscious and unconscious form part of the same entity that conforms our identity. As we shall see, performativity allows human beings to bridge the oppositional gap between self and other, and to find a space where the fusion of both possibilities can exist.

The fascination with our own mirrored reflection is an almost exclusively human characteristic. Among all animals, just five species can recognise, after some training, their own movements or features in a mirror: chimpanzees,

orang-outangs, dolphins, Asiatic elephants and human beings.[16] In the early nineteen nineties, neuroscientists discovered "mirror neurons" in monkeys, chimpanzees, human beings and some birds (Boyd, 2009: 142). Mirror neurons are in the brain's premotor cortex, and they become activated "when an animal performs an action", and also "when it sees another (especially a conspecific) perform the same action, or even when it sees less than the whole action but can see enough to infer the other's animal intention" (142). The neuron "mirrors" the behavior of the other animal as though the observer were itself acting. As Boyd further states, "when we (and apes) look at others, we find both them *and ourselves*" (142, emphasis added).

These mirror neurons are thought to be important for a person's understanding of the actions of other people —developing empathy and mindreading— and for learning new socio-cognitive skills by imitation. They also contribute to the creation of a "theory of the mind", which refers to our ability to infer another person's mental state from experiences and behavior. Human beings can hold multiple models of reality in their minds, since we are "capable of metarepresentation —that is, of understanding the process of representation— and involving *beliefs* as well as desires, goals, and intentions" (145, original emphasis). As Boyd explains, "'[b]eing affected by others is a design feature of human beings.' Through mirror neurons and other systems we are wired for emotional contagion" (163).

Concurring with Boyd, Susan Hurley argues that the distinction between self and other that Lacan took as a symptom of maturity is in fact inoperative at certain points when mirror neurons are activated. Hurley establishes a "shared circuits model" (SCM) to explain human imitation, deliberation and mind reading. As she explains,

The shared circuits model connects a shared information space for perception and action with a shared information space for self and other, while at the same time illustrating how the distinctions between perception and action, self and other, and possible and actual can be overlaid on these shared information spaces. In this model, information about intentional agents arrives in the first person plural: without distinction or inference between self and other. (2005)

As Hurley further states, the model develops the implications of an active view of perception for the perception of action and social cognition (2005). The self is, thus, understood actively perceiving actions and social relations.

These dialogic models have widespread implications, clearly beyond strict academic concerns, since it opens up possibilities of reconfiguring power relations. To put it in Sampson's words: celebrating the other is also to "recognize the

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15. For Lacan the infant is always a boy.

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16. In 1970 Gordon Gallup Jr. developed, following Charles Darwin's observations in the zoo, the "mirror test" in order to determine self-awareness in animals.

degree to which the dialogic turn is a genuinely revolutionary transformation in the relationships of power" (1993: 15). Consequently, the ethical implications of a dialogic conception of the self are inevitable, as we shall see.

The importance of (inter-)action in the constitution of the individual's self, and, by extension, of society endorsed by dialogism as opposed to the centrality of individual thought sustained by Cartesian definitions of the subject, allowed for important developments in theories dealing with identity, ethics, communities, environment, etc. Obviously, even if the dialogue is private or internal, conversation is by definition public, since it is constituted by a system of signs constructed by and shared within a community. Consequently, dialogism is intimately related to ethics, and can be applied to several disciplines, as the Bakhtin group made clear.

The philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas (1905-1995) strongly contributed to the construction of an ethics of alterity. After Lacan's recognition of the exteriority of the subject's imaginary identity, "the ego lies outside (what is generally thought to be) the (self-contained identity of the) ego" (Chiesa, 2007: 15). As a consequence, the ego could no longer be equated to the individual, as Freud had already pointed out. The ego, *qua* imaginary identity, individuates the subject by way of a detour through the other (15). This is why Lacan concludes that the ego is an other,[17] a psychic agency caused in the subject by his alienating identification with a series of external images.

In this line, Lévinas argued that the very process of Being expressed no interiority, no "deep inside" (61). Everything is, thus, exterior, and the self is open —an openness which could be interpreted as the relation self-other(s). As he stated in *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (1975), "the body is a sensing sensed" (2006: 16). That is, it is both on the side of the object and on the side of the subject. Thus, Lévinas inscribed subjectivity in the process of cultural signification and cultural activity: "The relation with Others challenges me, empties me of myself and keeps on emptying me by showing me ever new resources" (30). According to him, the Other, the "absolutely other", who faces me and whom I face, challenges consciousness, as the ego loses its sovereign coincidence with the self (33). And it is precisely there that personal responsibility rises: "in the approach to others, where others are from the start under my responsibility, 'something' has overflowed my freely made decisions, has slipped into me *unbeknownst to me*, alienating my identity" (62, original emphasis). This could be related to the strangeness of the self and to our strangeness to the world that began with the pre-Socratics' opening of being. As Lévinas states, "[m]en seek one another in

their condition of strangers. No one is at home. The memory of that servitude assembles humanity" (66).

Some of the ideas developed by the Scottish thinker John MacMurray (1891-1976) in the same line might also be very helpful for the analysis of identity in McCabe's work. His philosophy proposes a dialogic account of identity based on the self as a "self-in-action", which allows for an escape from the opposition self *vs*. other and from the negative associations of the split self. MacMurray's definition of subjectivity in terms of action or performance perfectly fits the analysis of the short-story form, since in the short story characters tend to present themselves through their actions, through their utterances, rather than through the external narrator's omniscient description. For this reason it seems necessary at this stage to delve deeper into MacMurray's approach.

A key element of MacMurray's philosophical position is his criticism of the western philosophical tradition as excessively theoretical and egocentric:

> It is theoretical in that it proceeds as though the Self were a pure subject for whom the world is object. This means that the point of view adopted by our philosophy is that of the Self in its moment of reflection, when its activity is directed towards the acquirement of knowledge. Since the Self in reflection is withdrawn from action, withdrawn into itself, withdrawn from participation in the life of the world into contemplation, this point of view is also egocentric. The Self in reflection is self-isolated from the world which it knows. (1957: 11)

Following a sociological approach, MacMurray contends that "human behaviour is comprehensible only in terms of a dynamic social reference" (38). And he argues that: "the isolated, purely individual self is a fiction" (38). The unity of the personal, as he proposes it, is thought "through mutuality of personal relationship", and not as an individual self (38). A similar criticism could be launched against the literary text, since it is only comprehensible in terms of a dynamic cultural reference. Drawing on this, MacMurray goes on to contend that the "[c]ultural crisis of our time is a crisis of the personal" —which he equals to a crisis of humanism (29). Traditional western philosophy —which has taken its stand from the primacy of thought and has, consequently, defined the self as "the Thinker"— "is committed formally to an extreme logical individualism" (71). This sort of philosophic conscientialism cannot be ethical in the sense that it tends to reduce the other to the same, as Levinas already denounced in *Otherwise than Being* (1974).[18]

Echoing the "imaginative turn" that goes back to Ferdinand de Saussure's definition of language, and that is further developed by structuralism and de-

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17. In Rimbaud's famous words: "Je est un autre" (1871).

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18. According to Emmanuel Levinas, the Other possesses an irreducible dimension, a radical alterity, that cannot be erased by the self.

construction, MacMurray suggests that contemporary empiricism has shifted its focus of analysis from thought to language, substituting the "I think" for the "I say".[19] As he further explains, in doing so, empiricist thought "implicitly rejects the formal dualism which characterises the two earlier periods of modern philosophy" (73), since speech is at the same time thought and action, or as MacMurray puts it "a unity of which 'mental' and 'physical' activity are distinguishable but inseparable aspects (74). The importance of this shift lies in the fact that speech is public, a means of establishing communication, and "introduces the 'you' as the correlative of the 'I', making the second person a logical necessity" (74). The "I say" is logically incomplete, and to complete it we must formulate it as follows: "I say to you; and I await your response" (74). The problem of the form of the personal emerges, thus, as the problem of the form of communication (74) and, hence, as a performative problem.

It seems logical to think, according to this, that literature is one of the main media for these anxieties to be exposed, debated and solved, and the work of Brian McCabe is no exception in this questioning of identity and communication. On the contrary, both preoccupations seem to be central in all his writings, as the analysis will show.

After MacMurray, we find other contemporary philosophers, such as Jean-Luc Nancy (b. 1940), who has further developed this conception of the self as performative and plural. Nancy is the creator of the concept of "being singular plural", which he describes as:

> three apposite words, which do not have any determined syntax ("being is a verb or noun; "singular" and "plural" are nouns or adjectives; all can be rearranged in different combinations) mark an absolute equivalence, both in an indistinct and distinct way. (2000: 28)

Nancy starts from the idea that we are meaning —"in the sense that we are the element in which significations can be produced and circulate" (2). From this he goes on to contend that meaning cannot exist if it is not shared, since "*meaning is itself the sharing of Being*" (2, original emphasis). Interestingly, Nancy, like Lévinas, locates the space of meaning, the space of Being, in the distance or space between self and other.[20] This in-betweeness implies a conception of being as a being-with and, thus, as a relational entity, a being-many. As the French philosopher further states, "[o]ur being-with, as being-many is not at all accidental" (12), rather, "[i]t forms the proper and necessary status and consistency of

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19. Deconstructionists would say "I write".

20. "Being is not the Other, but the origin is the punctual and discrete spacing *between us*, as *between us and the rest of the world, as between all beings*" (19, original emphasis).

originary alterity as such. The plurality of beings is at the foundation [*fondement*] of Being" (12, original emphasis).

Being is neither an essence, a state, nor a quality; rather, it is "the action according to which what Kant calls 'the [mere] positing of a thing' takes place" (12). Being is thus plural in that it is always with one another [*l'un-avec-l'autre*], it is always Being *with* (26). Nancy's relational ontology echoes Heidegger's *Dasein*, a concept which is essentially constituted by the *Mitsein, Miteinandersein*, and *Mitdasein*, that is, by "being-with", "being-with-each-other" or "being-with-an-other", and "with-*Dasein*" or "co-being-(there-)with-others". As Nancy explains, the definition of Being in terms of relational action carries an ethics in itself:

> The understanding of Being is nothing other than an understanding of others, which means, in every sense, understanding others through "me" and understanding "me" through others, the understanding of one another [*des uns des autres*]. (27-8)

Thus, Nancy concludes, "[o]ne could say even more simply that Being is communication" (28).

If Being is communication, then, literature seems to be an excellent medium for the study of Being, the dialogical self, the self-in-relation, the self-in-action, etc. It should not come as a surprise, then, to find that the issue of identity has become central in literary studies. Contemporary Scottish writing increasingly involves complex negotiations between the different Scottish identities that have proliferated since the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties (March, 2002: 1). Especially in the last decades, the conflicts triggered off by the globalising forces and by the growing importance of the European Union, which try to foster a new European identity, have further affected identity constructions. But this process of the redefinition of identities is sempiternal, since cultural identity "is a matter of becoming" (Hall, 1993: 394). As Stuart Hall has explained: "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation" (394).

Contemporary writers, including Brian McCabe, explore a number of possible identity configurations beyond those of the romanticised rural Scotland of kailyard and bagpipes, or those of the urban and gritty Scotland of the post-Industrial Revolution. They focus on characters who struggle to reconfigure the fragmentations of identity created by stereotypes like the Scottish antisyzygy or the Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde myth. As we shall see, the dialogical self, which functions as a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions, can help writers in this cultural struggle to overcome the traumatic Scottish identity myths.

The dialogic self is very much present in the work of Brian McCabe, as many of his characters look for an identity while developing different roles and impersonating various forms of being. The internal dialogue that accompanies our being, as beautifully expressed in McCabe's poem "Inner Man",[21] does not imply that we are split in a Jekyll-and-Hyde manner, but rather reflects the fact that individuals can perform different roles even to themselves. This performativity of the self is very much present in McCabe's work, as we shall see when analysing identity in his novel *The Other McCoy* as well as in his short stories.

With these ideas in mind, we will move on to the analyses of McCabe's short stories and novel in the following chapters.

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21. The poem, included in the collection *One Atom to Another*, argues that the dialogue of thought —"[…] while I talk / he listens"— presupposes two participants—"O I could say I'm his shadow, / say 'double', say *doppelganger*—, but that implies not a doubling or a splitting, but a unity, a "One" (McCabe, 1987: 47-8).

Chapter Four

BRIAN MCCABE'S WRITING AND IDENTITY. INTRODUCTION

Sometimes people are strangerous.
(Brian McCabe, "In a Dark Room with a Stranger")

Characteristically, the narrators and/or the main protagonists in Brian McCabe's fiction undergo some kind of crisis; in that sense, they may be said to be *in transition*. Many of the short stories are populated by narrators and characters who are "frontier subjects", that is, people who are in "threshold periods" of their vital process (see Chapter Three on this), and by people who meet a stranger, or who have to deal with a strange event, or who see the strangeness in the every day. Besides, the narration is usually focalised from the perspective of children and people with altered mental states —whether mad or having a nervous breakdown. As mentioned in Chapter Three, these characters reveal a position that understands vital stability as an apparent and passing cognitive construction, since they have to be flexible and open to the other(s) if they are to adapt to the environment and survive. As we shall see, McCabe's characters discover new meanings of the world and themselves in an always changing and subjective context.

Moreover, the liminality of the particular situations or processes that characters undergo in McCabe's short stories affects sometimes the whole text-world, as the boundaries between reality and imagination or fantasy are blurred by the focalisers' perceptions. This indeterminacy in the characters and in the narration challenges "the traditional exclusiveness of certain subjects", as Smith said on Scottish literature in general (Smith, 1919: 36), and the exclusiveness[1] and fixity of the subject, I would add.

McCabe's stories are so imaginative, that sometimes they even enter the realm of the fantastic.[2] Nevertheless, they are always set in Scotland, depict common

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1. Defined as "excluding others from participation" (Merriam-Webster, 2010).
2. A most dramatic example is "The Host" (1985), an uncanny story of a man who meets another man with two heads. This story was included in the anthology, *Damage Land. New Scottish Gothic Fiction* (2001m).

people with everyday problems and questions and are, mostly, close to his own experiences. The realistic and the fantastic are thus masterly combined in striking imaginative terms which allow the reader to glimpse at a hidden reality that is barely graspable in a first reading, but which is there at work in our perception and construction of his created world.

Brian McCabe uses the complexity of the perceptions of his character-bound narrators to present or rather create subjective yet universal experiences that combine the common and the uncanny. Thus, reality in the short stories is understood as a mixture of perception, memory and imagination. As an example, McCabe's short story "The Start of Something" (2001) describes a writer's conception of a fictional world. In this story, the author-narrator "was hoping to write something about a memory which had come into his mind as he was falling asleep the previous night: as a boy, going to the shows with only a couple of foreign coins in his pocket" (2001: 125). In this sentence we find compressed the most important aspects of McCabe's fictional world. The protagonist is somebody who seems to remember something while falling asleep —when consciousness starts fading—; he tries to remember a childhood event, but the memory he has of it is already a fictional construction.[3] As McCabe himself explains, the act of remembering is a creative act: "memories don't come ready-made. We have to imaginatively recreate the experience as we remember it, so that fiction is already at work in the very act of remembering" (2003: 10). Indeed, influences, intertexts, re-creations of past memories —of both lived and read experiences— are present in the acts of interpreting, perceiving and constructing of our personal worlds.

Together with the (re-)creation of ideas, or thinking processes, McCabe is generally interested in the representation of liminal states: childhood, when we start discovering how strange is the world we inhabit and try to understand it; adolescence, when in the process abandoning childhood, we start discovering the strangeness of people who are different from us in various ways; or the liminal states of sleeping, dreaming, being drunk, having a nervous breakdown, etc. All of these states —or rather processes— are in-between states with a blurry ontological ascription. The most important feature is the feeling of estrangement and discovery they carry with them.

McCabe's narrators and characters usually have to face the unknown, the strange hidden in the everyday, and this demands an adaptation of their percep-

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3. As McCabe commented on the process of writing: [A] story can begin from a snatch of overheard conversation, something witnessed, something experienced and then remembered, a place, a person, an object, something glimpsed from a window [...]. This isn't to say that all stories are plucked directly from experience. [...] Stories may draw things from experience [...] but always involve elements which are purely imaginative or fictional. (2003:10). In "The Start of Something", the narrator recognises the same element in the act of remembering: "So they were Irish coins. Had he remembered that or decided it? Maybe it didn't matter" (2001: 126).

tion and understanding, as happens constantly during childhood. Thus, in "The Start of Something", the boy that the narrator-character remembers or imagines has "foreign coins" (2001: 125), money which cannot fulfil its common function, since the coins cannot be used at the fair. This dreamlike symbol anticipates the oscillation of the narration between conscious and unconscious mental states, and the importance of the imagination when constructing a subjective and personal world.

McCabe is not overtly political in his fictional writings, at least in the more direct sense of the term, but he is interested in social and political issues. The realities where his characters are immersed are present in his work through the concrete perspective of narrators and characters, since McCabe's approach to fiction has a real-life basis. As the critic Collin Nicholson has put it, it is very "down-to earth" (2008). When asked about his writing, the writer said the following:

> You don't sit down and say it's really time I wrote a story about the growing social problem of homelessness, you know, that's not the way stories happen ..., that story happens when somebody knocks on your door and a homeless or something ..., it's usually something concrete. (in Aliaga, 2008)

The story "I'm Glad it Wasn't Me", for example, presents this social problem of homelessness, so alarming in cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh, as something quite real and concrete —a tramp who usually orders a cup of tea at the protagonist' restaurant— and, consequently, as an issue which cannot be interpreted or judged objectively but only from a personal and, therefore, biased perspective. McCabe uses this sort of perspective to expose the protagonist' inner contradictions and to display the different reactions of different people, as we shall in the analysis of his fiction in the following chapters.

Given all theses contradictions and multiple perspectives, readers are forced to draw their own conclusions, a task that, as Collin Nicolson has pointed out, is encouraged by "the developing empathy through the angle of perception appropriate to a situated speaker" (2008). In other words, in order to understand, the readers have to enter some kind of dialogue with the text, and empathise with the different characters' perspectives. In every tale, focalisation is made through different and diverse characters, so it would be safe to state that, in a sense, the collections of short stories permit the construction of some kind of plural or multiperpectival focalisation that suggests some kind of unity made out of various and inevitably partial bits.

Sometimes we even find stories which seem to offer diametrically opposed perspectives, thus offering the reader the possibility of constructing a whole scene through the juxtaposition of various partial and subjective perspectives. This imagined scene becomes somehow an objective or at least quite plural space

where different voices are set in a dialogic relationship to each other. A clear example of this technique is found in the collection entitled *In a Dark Room with a Stranger* (1993), where we find two stories, "Strange Passenger" and "Peninsula", that seem to depict fragments of the same event or of very similar events: These stories seem to share the same context, the reality of a family who live in a small village near Edinburgh, with a father who works in a pit, a mother who is a house-wife and a cleaner, and a young son who studies Philosophy at university.

Thought important, this is not the only strategy employed by McCabe to give cohesion, that is, a certain sense of veracity or realism, to the different stories in the same collection. McCabe repeatedly uses certain words in different stories which function as recurrent metaphors or symbols. This reflects, of course, the fictional author's particular world-view, but also represents the merging of diverse sensibilities or identities. Identification processes and similarities or repetitions are found inside a single story, as we have just seen in the previous example, as well as in different stories.

Miners, pits, strikes, politics, arts and philosophy are recurrent motifs of several of the author's poems and short stories. Thus, in "Peninsula", the problem of mining, accidents, unemployment, and alcohol are wonderfully summoned in a couple of lines:

> Hunched in his old coat,[4] his cap drooping over one eye, he reminded her [his wife] of a mole trying to find its way in the daylight. After his years at the pit, maybe he'd got used to being under the ground. She watched his limp away down the street, grasping at the wall with his hand, determined to get where he was going. She knew where that was —he'd cross the road after the railway bridge, go along past the cemetery and bury himself in the Digger's Arms till it shut for the afternoon. (97)

In this highly condensed paragraph, sensual similes or images such as the mole that is quite lost in the daylight and the bar which seems to embrace all those living-dead who dare to enter it, function as symbols not just of a single mining family in Scotland, but of the sad social reality of the working class in general.

The analysis of how identity is dealt with in the fiction of Brian McCabe will follow a chronological order. In his first short-story collection, *The Lipstick Circus* (1985), the issue of madness is addressed in relation to the topics of world-perception and (mis)communication. McCabe is very much interested in the workings of the mind, and also in the relation self-other(s), in how the individual experiences

the world and how individuals communicate their "singular" experiences to one another.

In McCabe's second collection of short stories, *In a Dark Room with a Stranger* (1993), the self is again viewed as a "stranger" on certain occasions when it is most conscious about itself. Many short stories in this collection focus on child-hood, one of those "threshold periods"—commented on in Chapter Three— that deals with the representation of autonomous and brief life spans. The child, the pre-puber, or the adolescent boy and girl, are all discovering the world —that is, other individuals and the operating social rules— and themselves, as their self-image is constantly changing and being redefined and tried on.

The stories in the following collection, *A Date with my Wife* (2001), present characters who are undergoing some vital crisis or who are considered "strange" by other people. Cultural and social influences on the individual are scrutinised in the collection, in an ironic and humorous vein.

Then, we shall see McCabe's reworking of the *topos* of the double in *The Other McCoy* (1990), where the self itself is viewed first as a dissociated stranger and then as a "ventriloquist", as a comic impersonator. McCabe's only novel to the date is overtly inserted in the Scottish tradition of the Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde figure. As the analysis will show, it offers a positive reworking of the *topos* of the double as the Scottish split self is eventually portrayed as a celebration of multiplicity.

The analysis of the short stories in each collection will also follow a straight order, as the short stories have been carefully arranged in order to produce a certain effect. The reading of the stories, which are sometimes interconnected, no doubt influences the meaning of the following short stories, as we shall see.

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4. This coat brings to mind Gogol's story "The Coat", since Russia and communism are mentioned on several occasions.

Chapter Five

THE LIPSTICK CIRCUS – MADNESS AND STRANGENESS

Les autres sont d'Autres.
(Alan Badiou, *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire*)

The Lipstick Circus was published in Edinburgh in 1985, when McCabe was already a full-time writer. Some of the poems appearing in his collection *One Atom to Another* were written around those years, so both collections, even if they are different mediums (short story prose and poetry), seem to share certain obsessions. At this stage, his main fascination seems to be the functioning of the mind; and this is reflected through his interest in perception, understanding and communication, concerns that will permeate the whole of his work.

The seventeen short stories in the collection show a certain stylistic and thematic unity. There are some elements in the stories that work as a unifying force: the dominant tone and mood, a more or less accentuated regional background, some chronological similarities of the protagonists, etc. (Shaw, 1995: 159). Each short story stands on its own, but, as we shall see, the stories work differently if taken as a whole, as every story is linked to the others through recurrent symbols that give a broader and deeper meaning to the individual stories.

These short stories usually start with the presentation of a character, the main character through which focalisation will be presented most of the times: an anonymous "he" —in "The Sunbather" and "The Lipstick Circus"—; Archie Newton —in "Killing Time" and "The Shoes"—; Norman —in "Norman and the Man"—; Ernest Lovejoy —in "To Autumn"—; Larry —in "A Little Bit of Repartee"—; Maria and Eric —in "Table D'hôte" —; and Peter —in "A Breakdown". But other stories have a intradiegetic narrator with no external narrational intervention —as "Anima", "Interference", "The Full Moon", "From the Diary of Billy Bible", "The Sky", "Jinglebells".

In "The Sunbather" (1985: 9-17), an extradiegetic narrator presents the events narrated from the perspective of a young man who has gone on his own to a warm

island to spend his holidays. The focalisation in most of McCabe's stories is internal, even if the narration is heterodiegetic. Thus, the narration in the different stories in the collection oscillates between the subjectivity of the inner focalisation and the exteriority of the narration. "The Sunbather" is thus narrated from the outside, as if we were witnessing a movie that presents the events from a very personal perspective that we can identify with, but still being conscious that we are "watching a movie". As we shall see, the distance of the observation and the spectacle of the watched scenes or objects go hand in hand with the short-story's content.

After his arrival on a warm island, a young man who has not managed to have a chat with anybody and who is on a rock watching the landscape discovers a beautiful blonde woman lying on the beach. He loves to watch her every day while he tries to make some sketches of her incredible forms. As the young artist himself notes, her beauty responds to a cliché —"He had seen it so many times before in holiday brochures, films and colour supplements" (9)—, an "illusion" (10) towards he feels powerfully attracted. When he meets another woman, who he thinks she is not so beautiful, he refuses her attempts to establish some kind of contact with him, he without knowing exactly why, obsessed as he is with the blonde sunbather. This beautiful "naked stranger" is not conceived as a person to whom relate with, but rather as something to observe, since the man imagines her in purely pictorial terms: "the gently undulating horizon of that long brown body against the luminous blue sky" (10).

He finally decides to talk to the mysterious beauty, the woman of his dreams —"He would use every trick and tactic he knew to make his fantasy real" (16). However, when he accidentally bumps into her, he realises she is not young at all, "she was fifty, over fifty, probably sixty" (17), and the image that he had created of her collapses. Reality does not respond to what he imagined or fantasised, and the "creature of the brochure and the screen" did not "exist in life", as he had hoped (10). This scission between fantasy and "life", between what is desired and what is really there, implies that even if, as Jean Baudrillard put it, "the whole universe unfolds arbitrarily in our domestic screen" (1983: 193), to the painter in "The Sunbather" "life was life" (McCabe, 1985: 10-11). As the protagonist understands that he has been admiring a construct or an abstraction, he realises that the dark-haired woman who tried to establish some contact with him had left the island by then, and that he had lost any chance of getting to know another person, and to have a holiday romance (17).

The cliché-woman on the beach, which turns to be another (different) cliché-woman in the end —desperate "to stay young, attractive, fashionable" (17)—, would stand for a product of society and art, which is understood as a "spectacle" which justifies for the conditions and aims of the existing system (Debord, 1995: 13). The

difference between the imagined woman and the real (and older) one seems to represent the "tyranny of the literal" (Franzen, 2003: 78), a notion that recalls Baudrillard's obscene transparent hyperreality, where the individual is nothing but "pure screen" (Baudrillard, 1983: 197). Ironically, as the protagonist realises his "mistake", "he paid for the sunglasses [he had in his hands] and dropped them into his bag, thinking vaguely that the purchase was appropriate given his blindness" (McCabe, 1985: 17). The artist recognises thus with humour that his idealised perception may cause him a certain blindness to the real world.

Nevertheless, this acknowledgement does not mean that reality is not as deceiving as fiction, since, as the last lines in the short story state —"When he asked the old man which island [she had gone to], the old man […] said, 'To Crete maybe, maybe to Rhodes.' He could not, of course, say which." (17)—, the young man does not know where the real brunette woman can be. Reality can be as undecidable as fiction. Maybe, if he had talked to her as he had the opportunity, things may have been different for them. Communication between self and other(s) and closeness seem to be the only means of avoiding these mistakes fostered by imagination.

In "The Lipstick Circus" (1985: 18-24), a heterodiegetic narrator presents the perspective of a child who is left alone at home while his mother is working and his father, who is "on the night shift at the pit", has "gone out to put on a horse" (18). The child is afraid, not knowing exactly what it is that he fears, something, an "it" that is hidden, behind him, or in "the mirror with the wooden frame and the stand", or "the cracks in the lino" (19). The fact is that "[i]t only tried to come out when he was *on his own* in the house" (18, emphasis added).

In the stories, children are closely linked to strangeness and discovery, since they are portrayed as "frontier subjects", as we explained in Chapter Three. Their perception of the world seems strange to an adult reader, and the author seems to enjoy using this estranged perspective in order to further investigate the workings of the human mind. As MacDouglas has noted,

> [McCabe] shares many Scots authors' fascination with the young mind, using the child's viewpoint to open unexpected doors on conflicts and tensions the adult world would prefer to hide away. Along with R. D. Laing he seems to view mental imbalance or breakdown more as the product of a warped society than the result of a biological or personal defect. McCabe introduces his readers to the profoundly shocking concept that children, far more than adults, are sensitive and prone to mental collapse. (1991: 570)

In a sense, a fearful child's perspective is close to dreams, to the imagination and, as the short story suggests, the human mind can have access to things that

the conscious mind cannot get to know by these means. As John MacMurray explains, "the form of the child's experience is never outgrown, but provides the ground plan of all personal experience, which is constituted from start to finish by relating to the Other and communicating with the Other" (1961: 38). The child's fears are thus feelings that do not disappear completely as we grow older.

Laughing helps the child in "The Lipstick Circus" to overcome the fear of being alone: "Now he really looked like a clown in the circus. […] He made a funny face at the mirror and laughed again" (McCabe, 1985: 21). As we shall see, laughter is a recurrent element in the work of Brian McCabe, who is quite humorous himself. As Henri Bergson commented in his essay on laughter —*Le rire* (1940)—, strangeness can produce laughter because the rigid mechanisms that sometimes slip into the normal continuity of life call our attention; it is an intruder that becomes a distraction from life (2008: 66). In the short stories, the contact with the normality of things is broken and the boy reacts to the odd situation with a burst of automatic laughter that has something of the puppet or the clown in it.

The boy feels a fascination for his own reflection and experiments with the possibilities of changing his aspect, the features of his face: "he started painting the lipstick on his own lips, looking at the mouth in the mirror. He smudged it over his chin, because he couldn't help laughing at his own face with the bright red lips and sticking-up, powdery hair" (McCabe, 1985: 21). Through the act of watching the face in the mirror, his face, "his own face", becomes something he could watch as other-than-himself. Eventually, the narration of the description of the child's face moves from the perspective of subject-viewer, to the perspective of the child in the mirror, who then seems to have a life of its own and the capacity to observe the flesh-and-blood child:

> He looked at *his own face* in the mirror. The tears were still dripping down his cheeks. He started crying again to see what it looked like, *then watched himself* wipe off the tears with his sleeve. Now his face was covered in snotters and dirty marks from the tears. It looked a bit of a clown's face and it made him start laughing. […] He laughed a bit more and watched the face in the mirror changing. (19-20, emphasis added)

Thus, the child imagines into being an other to whom he can relate, somebody to interact with in order to forget his fear of loneliness.

Then he decides to draw a circus on the wall with his mother's lipstick, in order to forget his fear, to feel comfortable. But, when the mother returns home, she does not like at all what the boy has done. Nevertheless, "[t]he scream scared him, but not as much as being in the house on his own" (23). This sentence points to the importance of the absence of the child's parents, whom have to work. However, the adult issues of having to work or the problems they might have are not transparent to the child, as he does not understand many things: "It was

strange how they shouted at you and hit you for making a lipstick circus, then bought you a big book with coloured pages and a box of crayons and told you to do another circus" (24). Consequently, these mysterious things adopt strange and illogical forms, like "the thing he felt when there was nobody else in the house" (24). As the boy cannot explain his unconscious fear, it can "come out of everything. Out of the sideboard or the setee, […] the china cabinet or the mirror", a mirror where the boy can see his defamiliarised and strange reflection (24).

It could be argued that, if identity is defined in terms of subject-position, a change in this position would alter the identity of the child. His imagination and his lack of security and parental guidance lead him to an unstable self-perception. As the short story concludes, if the undefinable feeling or thing can come out of the mirror, then, "maybe it could even come out of him" (24).

This same estrangement occurs in the next short story, "Anima" (1985: 25-30). "Anima" also shows the perspective of a child, but this time the child is also the autodiegetic narrator who shares his thoughts and feelings directly with the reader: "I went on staring at the dinette linoleum in silence. […] It was making me feel queasy, staring at it like this" (25). The child seems preoccupied because he doesn't know what he wants to be. He considers being a frogman, an astronaut, a pirate, a member of the lumpen proletariat, or even a Chinaman, but none of these social roles seem to fit the boy, he believes: "I needed to think of something better to be, something original" (27). His sister decides for him: he shall dress as a girl to go to a party. First he seems to oppose the idea, but once his bigger sister has dressed him up, his own appearance seems to fascinate him:

> I stared into the mirror. She had stopped being me a long time ago, this creature with the thick coating of coloured grease on her cheeks, the bright red lips and darkened eyebrows. She wasn't me, but she was. Everytime I spoke, her lips moved. (28)

In contrast to what happens to the child in "The Lipstick Circus", here we are not presented with yet another example of the fascination with the mirror stage. Rather, we are confronted with an I that seems to be exploring the different roles he can perform in society, as the short story's emphasis on role-playing and ventriloquism suggests.

The boy imagines what would have happened, had he been born a girl. At first this thought puzzles him: "My confusion as to what to call myself was made worse by the sight in the mirror" (29). But then, when left alone with his new disguise, the boy seems to start assuming his role as a woman: "I sat down and looked into it the way I'd seen my mother and my sister doing it, tilting my face this way and that, touching my hair here and there with a hand" (29). Nevertheless, the

discovery of his *anima*, that is, of the female facet in him, is quite disturbing: "Now that I was alone with her, she seemed more monstrous than before" (29). The reader realises at this stage that the boy feels ill, and that his illness is making him experience the whole thing in an unusual and estranged way: "[I was] hearing my father's rumbling laughter and my mother's whoops behind me and my sister's squeaking giggles like balloons, balloons with faces painted on them at the party, faces with faces painted on them at the party [...]" (30). The child's fever makes him feel that he is watching his other, his *anima*, as "the girl in the mirror was smiling *at herself*, pleased to see herself at last, smiling in triumph" (30, original emphasis) and, the rest of the others, as strange characters with masks on, with masks like faces: "faces of frogmen and astronauts and cowboys and pirates at the party" (30). The Greek word *persona* —which comes from the word *prósopon* (πρόσωπον), meaning "face"— has come to designate the mask that actors used to wear during their performances, and the roles they play. As we shall see, there are plenty references to faces in McCabe's short stories, and all of them related to this etymologic associations of the word.

Mirrors are associated in these stories to the figure of the double and to the multiplicity of the self. The reflections the children watch produce not proper *Doppelgängers*, but rather suggest the presence of unknown facets in the self. Both the child in "The Lipstick Circus" and the protagonist in "Anima" see different persons —from *persona*— or facets —meaning "faces"— in the mirrors: the different *personas* he could be, and the girl he could have been, respectively.

McCabe's first published short story —in *Scottish Short Stories* (1979)— was "Interference" (1985: 31-40), originally entitled "Feathered Choristers". The story is again presented by an autodiegetic narrator, an imaginative boy who believes to have a Martian friend, with whom he can contact trough the radio interferences. Through his conversation with this imaginary companion, we build a grim picture of a young boy's home, as in "The Lipstick Circus", and the restraints of his education. "The Lipstick Circus" presents a boy's life home, and "Interference" the life at school, so it could be agued that both stories complement each other.

The boy feels lonely, does not seem to find his own place in the family or at school, and is desperately trying to make friends: "Hello. I'm outside the door again, I can talk to you. You're not like anybody else in the class. You're from Mars, you're a Martian. That's why I can talk to you, because I'm not like anybody else in the class either" (31). The boy feels isolated and misunderstood by his class mates and teachers, so he needs a companion to talk to. Significantly, the Martian is exactly like him, he is like a soul mate. But his Martian friend is invisible to others:

> Nobody sees you except me, nobody wants to. [...] See the dust in the air up there, where the sun's coming through the window? You're like the dust in the air—nobody notices you except me. See the dust in the air up there, where the sun's coming through the window? You're like the dust in the air—nobody notices you except me. And your voice is like interference on the radio—nobody wants to hear it except me. (31)

As he has no one else to talk to, the narration is addressed to the Martian, even though many of the things he says should be known by his —imaginary— alter ego.

The Martian is exactly like him, but he lives in a mirrored and other world: "You were born on the same day as I was, at exactly the same time, except *you* were born on Mars" (33). Everything is reversed, constituting an alter-reality, a parallel universe the boy wishes to escape to:

> You go to a primary school on Mars, and you're like me. You're last in the class on Mars, except it's great to be last on Mars. It's like being top of the class on Earth. And 4B is better than 4A there isn't it, because everything's a reflection the other way round. You're like me the other way round. (33)

Following our previous interpretation of the reflections in the mirror as presenting the viewers some of his different selves, it could be argued that the boy in "Interference" sees in his Martian friend what he would like to be, that is, the same person(a) that he is now, but accepted and loved by others and without the problems he has in his life.

The boy prefers to invent a world of his own, because he does not like his present life at all: "I bet you're glad you're not at a school on Earth" (33). He does not like his everyday routine, and wants to be saved: "This is an SOS. I will continue until I'm rescued or until my Oxygen runs out" (31). And, above everything, he feels different to others and keeps reinventing and reinterpreting the world under this personal light:

> Yesterday the teacher held my writing up for everybody in the class to look at, so they wouldn't write like me. See I don't write like anybody else, see I write in a kind of Martian. Nobody can read it except me and you, it's a secret code that's why. See all the mistakes are secret for something, every blot is a secret wee message. (32)

The boy gives his own personal meaning to everyday occurrences that go unnoticed to the rest. His perception of the world is quite poetic and imaginative, and is even close to madness. As he relates:

> Anyway I'll tell you what to say about Earthling birds. Put down that they've got wings, beaks, claws, feathers, tails and they fly. They eat worms and crumbs, and sometimes they migrate. It means go to Africa. See when they peck for crumbs they look like they're bowing, like actors at the end of a pantomime. Maybe they're all going to migrate to Mars, so they're bowing to say cheerio. (34)

In a sense, a child's perception could be compared to madness, as it does not conform to that of an adult as it is not the type of perception considered to be normal or correct. Nevertheless, the boy seems to consciously play with words and concepts in an attempt to alter the world:

> On the Planet Earth, everything is the other way round [...]. A bird is a flying machine, with a screw loose. Cuckoo clocks have minds, as well as hands, faces and speckled breasts. [...] Poetry is people pecking for crumbs without minds in their heads. After a pantomime, the actors migrate. I am dust in the air, I am a reflection. I am the only Earthling with a mind, and the mind is interference from another programme. Koo-koo, koo-koo. (35, original emphasis)

This playing with the words is done by poets, by "people [...] without minds in their heads" (35), as he defines them. The literality of his mind escapes the more normative "sane" thinking of adults. The non-rational interpretation of the world, the imaginative perspective, allows new meanings to emerge. As McDougall put it,

> McCabe spatters the piece with the commands and reprimands of a world which is rapidly closing around the boy, and makes characteristic use of poetic and fantastic images to deal with topics which the reader would find difficult to reach by rational thought alone. (1991: 570)

The boy creates a better reality by imposing his own imaginative and fanciful meanings on the generally accepted interpretations of events and data, such as the dust in the air or the radio interferences.

Madness appears explicitly in the story, as the child's mother had a mental breakdown, which clearly affected him: "I'll tell you something else: my mother put her head in the gas oven and she lost her mind" (McCabe, 1985: 34). The boy seems to be traumatised by this event, as the figure of her mother and the topic of madness is constantly present in his non-linear narration. Significantly, there are striking similarities between his mother's and his own behaviour. As the child tells his Martian friend:

> she doesn't talk to anybody else except herself. See she lost her mind, then she went into a home, and now she's got two minds. And one mind talks to the others mind, I think. But I wonder if the other mind can hear it. Maybe it's more like interference. But what I can't understand is how one mind take away one mind equals two minds. (38)

The boy feels isolated and lonely without his mother —who is in a "home for mental defectors" (37)— and without friends, so he longs for contact and communication. He wants to merge with the others. Once, when he was expelled from the classroom and had to wait alone outside, he imagines a totally different reality on Mars:

> You probably just sit in a big circle holding hands, passing messages to each other through your fingertips. Because hundreds of Martians can get together and think One thought, because you can sort of merge, can't you? Blur with each other.
> I wish I was an alien being. Maybe the next time you materialise, if you touch me we'll merge. (38)

The boy is trying to merge with the Martian boy and transfer himself to the mirrored world, so that he can be himself free from all his present problems. But he knows that everybody is a different individual: "I can't be him. I've got to be me" (36). Nevertheless, the boy believes in the powers of communication, and thinks that the blurring and merging allow an intimate relation self-other(s) to take place: "Especially when here's interference on the radio, the two subjects sort of blur with each other, don't they?" (34).

As he is being beaten at school he desperately wants to be on another planet, on Mars, in order to receive just the opposite, to receive love instead of punishment: "He [the Mad Ringmaster] got me again, for getting put outside the door. He wanted me to cry on the outside again, to make me an example" (39). The boy is able to overcome the pain and the humiliation and transforming it into something different by means of his imagination:

> But I didn't, I cried inside. My hands are on fire, they're Martian Hands. Touch my fingertips, touch. Send messages through my fire. Don't ask me any more questions, blur with me. My hands are full of a thousand stings, so are yours. [...] You can feel the message, so can I. It's sore, that's the message. (39)

In this particular case, his "mad" creativity and language play, which could be described as symptoms of his traumatic situation, allow the boy to cope with reality, and to transform it into something bearable. Nevertheless, it seems that he is not changing the external circumstances: his mother's madness, his father's absence and the terrible situation at home will still be there, affecting him. Maybe, then, everything that he can do, as the last sentences in the story could suggest, is to play with language and let his mind creatively fly away.

"The Full Moon" (1985: 41-45) presents the reader the story of an adult who works in a mental asylum. While he is with the patients making some Halloween decorations at the Therapy Unit, he is taken for one of them by an American woman "from the Psychology Department of an illegible university", and "one of her colleagues, a young man in a brown velvet suit" (41). The woman starts praising his cardboard full moon —with statements like: "My, it's gorgeous" or "Ain't it cute?" while the reader realises a possible mistake even before the protagonist himself (41). Eventually, he also becomes aware that her praising is excessive:

"That's the dark side," I said. Twin-set gave out a short squeak of delight.
"Did you hear that?" she whispered excitedly. "He says that's the dark side —ain't that adorable?"
I noticed that my status had changed, somehow along the line, from the second to the third person singular. (42)

As in "The Sunbather", the imagined stereotypes or roles that the protagonists have ascribed to, without any real contact with the other, can lead to such mistakes and identity confusions.

The way the man is being addressed is, obviously, different; he is treated as an other with whom direct and sincere communication is not possible.

> "It's a bee-oo-tiful moon!" she said.
> I was beginning to wonder why so much was being made of what was, after all, only a decoration, when I felt the lady's hand gently patting the crown of my head. (42)

People with mental illnesses are sometimes treated as non-individuals, following the Cartesian axiom that identifies reason with existence. According to it, the ones who do not conform to the norms of rationality are non-existent, and can thus be locked up and removed from society. Madness is thus identified with the outside, with non-being. Therefore, the exclusion or confinement of mad people is not seen as something inhuman, as Michel Foucault remarked in his famous essay *Madness and Civilization* (1961) (2005: 224). As Foucault pointed out, under these conditions, "the madman is obliged to objectify himself in the eyes of reason as the perfect stranger" (237).

The actions of the American woman are different when addressed towards him and, thus, the main character realises:

> I felt a curious tingling all over my scalp, which then ran down the back of my neck and swarmed up and down my spine —a sensation I would normally associate with moments of acute embarrassment, anger, pleasure, or seeing ghosts. I was forced to realise it: they thought I was one of the patients. (McCabe, 1985: 42)

Overcome by this complex sensation, the protagonist feels unable to communicate normally with the American woman, unable to explain things, maybe because he is assuming his outside-position of misfit. He can think properly, but words will not come out:

> All I had to say was: "Actually, I'm not a patient at all; I'm a member of staff". I might add, just for good measure, that I was in reality a Philosophy Graduate, working here in the Therapy Unit as a preventative expedient against unemployment. In my confusion I was able to utter three words. All three were monosyllabic, and I said them without much conviction:
> "I . . . work . . . here," I said. (43)

It is clear that he has no conviction because of the fact that the others do not recognise his "sane" and "normal" status, and thus feels pushed to the margins of conversation and interaction. He is even pushed to the margins of language and rationality, and all he can do is giggle "like a maniac and, after all irrational laughter could be the symptom of anything" (43-4). His reaction brings to mind that of the child confronting his clownish image in "The Lipstick Circus". Hysterical or irrational laughter, non-proper laughter, so to say, excessive laughter, is one of the symptoms of alienation that constantly appear in McCabe's work.

When the American woman and the other visitor realise their mistake, his "sanity was restored" (44). This reveals the importance of the role of the other(s) in our self-image. The reflected image of madman that the staff members see and project shatters his own self-image and he even seems to doubt about his own sanity, unable to speak coherently. Moreover, madness seems to be then something that is imposed, a role that the majority forces on a minority that escapes the norm, as can be seen in the repeated opposition of the first person to the third person: "Mind you, some people say it [the moon] does affect *them*" (45, emphasis added). Reason has been is equalled to power, and madness to weakness since the Middle Ages,[1] and Brian McCabe subverts the notions of sanity and madness by emphasising the relativity of those socially constructed roles or positions. As the visitors' "mistake" shows, anyone could be taken —or rather we should say "put"— as sane or insane. Therefore, social stigmas and roles, which are based on power relationships, can be subverted and changed.

The questioning of sanity and madness will reappear in other stories, such as "Norman and the Man" (1985: 46-52). McCabe worked in a mental asylum for some time when he was young, and it seems logical to think that, being a good observer, this experience will have been an inspiration for some short stories. "Norman and the Man" presents the story of Norman, a patient who draws circles, and "a man", who watches him. This man is referred to as "the man", so it may be used generically to refer to any (sane) person. Both stories are linked through the obvious topic of madness, but the careful reader can also find more concrete elements that connect both the story of the sane man in "The Full Moon" and that of the mad man in "Norman and the Man", and, as we shall see, the connection can also be extended to the next story, "From the Diary of Billy Bible", which also deals with sanity and madness.

In "The Full Moon", the decoration made my the man working in the Therapy Unit who is mistaken for a patient is a full moon, a satellite often associated with

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1. As stated by Michel Foucault, the gradual disappearing of leprosy during the Middle Ages handed over the excluded position to madness (2005: 4).

madness, as explicitly stated in the text: "You know the old wives' tale about how the full moon affects them?" (44). But the story allows for another reading: like the moon the narrator-character has made, the mind can also have a "bright" and a "dark" side, and both make part of the same whole. As stated at the end of the story, conscious and unconscious, rational and irrational, can turn "slowly . . . now the bright side, now the dark" (45).

This symbol is taken up again at the beginning of "Norman and the Man": "Norman's mind is *dark*, wide water —who knows what's living in there?" (46, emphasis added). Norman, the short story's protagonist passes the hours drawing circles. "The man" is hoping that Norman will recognise himself in a "round mirror" (46), which he does not. He reacts as a *dog* or a *cat* might react on seeing its own reflection: "curious for a moment, troubled perhaps, then bored" (46)—; and the small mirror ends up being broken in many pieces. As Foucault argued in *Folie et déraison*, in the eighteenth century, madness was understood as opposed to reason. Consequently, insane men and women were not considered human but *animal-like*, and were not treated like human beings (Foucault, 2005: 69). Norman's animalisation in the narration is thus strongly related to this view on madness, a fact that clearly will make communication between Norman and the man, beast and animal, madman and reasonable man, impossible.

Nevertheless, the man expects Norman to confer meaning to the circles he constantly draws over and over: "It could be that at last, when he's done so many circles, Norman will look into one of them and recognise something there" (McCabe, 1985: 46). Norman does not understand representation in the same way as the man does —since, in order to communicate, the sharing of the same symbolic system, that is, of values and meanings, is indispensable. Later, he believes that the paper cannot contain his circles, so he tries to find other ways of expression and communication.

> Then, reaching out as if to retrieve something he has lost, Norman begins to dig up the snow with the fingers of one hand. Where he furrows it up, the black of the path begins to show through.
> *Get up, Norman, get up.*
> But now the black begins to grow into a line, and the line begins to bend and yes, it is indisputable: with his hand he is digging a circle. (49, original emphasis)

Complete isolation is broken when he can relate to the outer world, to the other. And then, instinctively, the other man joins him, communicates with him non-verbally: "The man joins in, digging up the snow on his side, disclosing a black arc. And soon they will touch, making a circle to end all circles —it's bound to surround them both" (49). After this magical moment when they are both together inside the circle, the distance between the man and Norman is reduced, and "if someone were to pass by now" as they return to the ward, he or she would see

two figures "like two drunk men going home: hard to say who is taking whom" (49). Their symbolic position and their roles are now equal, and there is no madness-sanity opposition at work.

They have managed to touch each other not through language, since Norman's language is not shared, but through action, the performance of reciprocal and equal roles; as both men fall in the snow the roles are reversed, and "Norman and the man are both laughing at each other" (48). Laughter, as Bergson stated, expresses an individual or collective imperfection, it is a social gesture that highlights a distraction from events (2008: 66). In a sense, here laughter manifests a break —this distraction from each other and from a happening— that is needed for re-establishing a new, corrected, relation between them.

The short story emphasises that it is the imposition (and acceptance) of certain roles that makes individuals what they are. When the man wants Norman to draw a figure of himself, made out of circles and lines, both their respective languages miss each other, since it is the man who cannot recognise in Norman's self in his drawing:

> The man looks at it: a mess of heavy black lines and circles. It makes the man look away.
> *What is it, Norman, what is it?*
> Norman laughs, nods his head slowly, stabs at the picture with his finger. The man sees a muddle of misshapen curves, overlapping and smudged hopelessly. Curious for a moment, troubled perhaps, then he looks away. (McCabe, 1985: 51)

The initial roles —when the man wants Norman to recognise himself in the mirror— are ironically reversed in the narration, so that sane vs. insane becomes insane *vs.* sane, that is, a mere subject-object position rather than an essential thing that defines individuals. Moreover, it is also important to emphasise that, on the one hand, the mad man recognises his own drawing but not the figure reflected in a mirror or a schematic generic drawing drawn by the man —"simple and rudimentary" (50)—, while on the other, the sane man recognises a mirror and not Norman's expressive drawing —"laboured and grotesque" (52).

The representation of the irrational, of the ungraspable, needs its own language. The psychiatrist Emil Kraeplin (1856-1926) characterised *dementia praecox* —later known as schizophrenia— by the impossibility of normal communication (in Martínez, 2005: 15). As the man in "The Full Moon" states, "it makes you wonder what's going on inside his head. You know, I'm sure some of these people are in touch with things which are uh . . . inaccessible to us, except maybe in dreams . . ." (McCabe, 1985: 44). Therefore, madness seems to be a topic that demands further stylistic and linguistic explorations, and new literary and communicative strategies in order to convey the meanings that the writing is seeking.

The Scottish psychiatrist Ronald David Laing (1927-1989) argued that the seemingly confused speech of mad people could be understood as an attempt to communicate worries and concerns, often in situations where this was not possible or not permitted. This valuing of the content of psychotic behavior and speech as a valid expression of distress, albeit conveyed in an enigmatic language of personal symbolism which is meaningful only for the patient, was quite revolutionary. In McCabe's stories we can find how the abundant symbolism does transmit concepts and feelings. The same symbols are transferred from one story to another, and their meanings are both developed and further nuanced through their appearance in the different contexts of each short story.

The next story, "From the Diary of Billy Bible" (1985: 53-57), also deals with madness. The story is presented through Billy Bible, who writes a diary with his thoughts and feelings. This is the only story McCabe has written in the form of a diary so far. It is worth noting that, as Roy Porter has pointed out, most of the mentally-ill individuals who were locked up between the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century wrote autobiographical texts (1987: 87). Here it is the insane man who narrates his life following the patter of his Therapy sessions on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Monday. The weekend is excluded since on Saturday and Sunday he is "in the ward because Therapy is shut" (McCabe, 1985: 53). Billy is also very interested in drawing, he likes drawing tunnels —"I think I will do another tunnel today" (53). Billy's tunnel appears already in the previous story, as the man in "Norman and the Man" "walks around the room looking at the pictures: a smiling face with the legend 'GOOD BOY' written above it; a thickly crayoned dinosaur confronts the words 'THE STONEAGE'; inside a dark tunnel, a figure carrying a torch", etc. (50). Billy, presumably deeply influenced by a Presbyterian upbringing,[2] is obsessed with the part of Genesis, that describes the moment before Creation, when there was no word, and "the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (53). The link between the Bible and madness is of course not exclusive of McCabe's short story. There is a long tradition in Scottish literature, which takes the New Testament's view on the nature of madness: someone goes mad because he is possessed by the Devil, because he has been granted admittance, like in James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Herdman, 1990: 87).

Billy compulsively repeats the darkness, the face and the tunnel,[3] and the coming of a train in his narration, and then the reader discovers that Billy is deeply traumatised by the death of his friend Peter: "Last night I had a dream and I awoke in the middle of the tunnel. I saw a torch far away and I thought it was the men coming for Peter" (McCabe, 1985: 56). The darkness of the deep symbolises his unconscious, and the face he sees there is both Peter's and Billy's —and that of the Other. Actually, it turns out that it was Billy who killed Peter: "I was bad in the tunnel when the train came I pushed my friend Peter into the deep and now that is where he is" (56). He is tortured by remorse and guilt, and he sometimes identifies with the victim, as when he looks at himself in the mirror. First he sees that his "face is without form and void", and then he sees Peter and himself in the mirror (55-6). Billy cannot undo of what he did, and he is forced to act out the traumatic event once and again: "Peter is with me in the tunnel where I put his face instead of the mirror" (56). Billy is stuck in traumatic time, as he cannot clearly distinguish between past and future, and has very intense nightmares. He is trapped in the "acting out" process, which we have described as repetitive compulsion, and he has not managed to take himself to the "working through". As a consequence, he cannot gain critical distance and I trapped into the circularity of his traumatic memory.

As commented in Chapter One, trauma has often been related in Scottish culture to identity search. As the text suggests, there are more traumatic events that are hidden from the narration; readers are offered some hints and clues: "I liked my friend Peter because he was scared of my father" (56). The strictness of Billy's father acquires then a strange undertone: "I wasn't supposed to go where the tunnel was my father said not to go there being a minister of God" (56). If we pay attention to Billy's religious obsession, it could be argued that his strong Presbyterian upbringing and the castrating[4] discipline he has suffered from his father have made him a masochist —"our suffering is nothing to the suffering of Christ Our Saviour on the cross" (56)— who does not want to be forgiven, or to forgive himself for what he had done. It is not my intention to suggest that religion blocks his working through, but the constant mental and psychical repression as well as his acceptance of pain and suffering as something sacred and positive do inhibit him from a possible recovery. Consequently, Billy will continue drawing black circular tunnels.

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2. Presbyterianism, a religion that emphasises the authority of the Bible, has been a strong influence in Scotland.

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3. The combination of these the elements, a tunnel, darkness, and a face, is repeated in McCabe's short story entitled "The Face" (1993: 43-48).

4. The castration is almost literal, as these lines suggest: "It is harder to be good now without the steel clip before you go to bed and you wake up in the middle of your sleep. The steel clip had little teeth that cut into you where you were dreaming the wet dream" (56).

The next story in the collection, entitled "Killing Time" (1985: 58-67), presents the story of Archie Newton, a young boy who seems to have a special character. At the very beginning of the story the reader is told that he likes to ride his bike and hold "his feet out to the sides and [watch] the pedals go round on their own: round and round dementedly" (58). Both circles and clocks appear constantly in this story, and if we relate this to the previous story, where the protagonist is stuck in traumatic time repeating over and over the same things, it is easy to interpret those circular elements symbolically.

The reader realises that Archie's father died when he was a child, and that things have stopped working, time has halted for Archie:[5]

> Somehow he knew that when the wick or the flint ran out, or when it ran out of petrol, he wouldn't do anything about it. He'd just let it stop working, like the watch and the dynamo. Everything was going that way anyway, winding down, running out of whatever kept it going. It was the way things wanted to go. […] Since his dad had died, everything in the house had been breaking down. (61)

Archie associates time with death, as the title already anticipates. Expressions such as "killing time" or "dead time", together with entropic elements and symbols such as the broken clock, the useless dynamo, the unheard transistor, darkness, nothingness, etc. emphasise the protagonist's feelings: Archie feels a certain anxiety about entropy, but on the other hand he seems resigned to it, as "[w]hat he was doing was usually nothing" (61).

Archie, like Billy, seems to be trapped in the phase of "acting out". The absence of father has affected him profoundly, as the story suggests: Archie "heard his own voice going on like that, heaping threat on threat, curse on curse. It was his voice all right, but it didn't sound like his own. It sounded more like his dad's" (59). And it seems as if he is having some identitarian crisis: "He'd caught himself doing things too, just the way he moved a hand or found himself sitting in a chair, that reminded him of the old man" (59). His father was a referent for him, but his premature death makes identification much more difficult, as it introduces death into the equation; hence the boy's obsession with broken objects and with the halt of time. The abundance of circular elements —such as the wheels, the clocks (58), or the "going round and round dementedly" (69) —, associated with entropy —"he'd just let it [his father's lighter] stop working, like the watch and the dynamo" (61) or the empty house (61)—, suggest that the boy is affected and feels lost, and that he prefers riding "away to the Nothing" (67), as the short-story's last line states. But the end of the short story, which is quite pessimistic, does not have to be Archie's end, as the author decides to give him a role in another story.

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5. Time stops literally: "The time was the same as always: a minute to twelve. The watch didn't work but he still wore it" (60). Billy wears it because it was his father's watch.

"The Shoes" (1985: 68-73) shares some important elements with "Killing Time": the narrator is extradiegetic and the main character is again Archie Newton. If the previous story starts with Archie's feet, this one starts with his shoes. The boy's shoes are quite old and have holes in their soles, while "the clock on the kitchen windowsill" stopped working when his mother "once tried to 'brain' him with" it (68). Time, death and old shoes are central elements in the story: "'Ma, Ah need a new pair of shoes!'. 'There's a perfectly good pair in the hall', said his mother. 'He'd only worn them twice before he dies'. 'Ah cannae wear *them*', said Archie, 'Ah need a new pair!' (69, original emphasis). Archie's father has died and he has inherited his shoes. As suggested in the previous short story, Archie partially identifies with his dead father, the boy wants to walk in his own shoes, both in a literal and in a figurative way, in order to follow a path of his own that will make of him a singular person with own will.

Shoes appear quite frequently in McCabe's fiction, so they may be interpreted as a personal symbol of the author. As in the poem "Shoes in a Charity Shop" —included it *One Atom to Another*, published just two years after the short-story collection—, shoes often carry the identity of those who have walked in them, and in that sense they can be associated, both in the story and in the poem, with loss and absence:

> You are too full of emptiness for me.
> Too twisted with human histories
> of caved-in cheeks, lolling tongues.
> You remind me too much of the men
> who have worn themselves out in you
> and of those you will choose again:
> by whose beds you will wait for morning
> like misfortune itself, open mouthed. (1987: 22)

This feeling of loss is intensified with the holes in Archie's shoes, and then as "the cardboard insoles he'd put in before leaving the house had worn through […], he could feel the new holes—holes in the holes" (1985: 70).

Here the haunting host is not just the absence of his father, but also the family's economic situation —that may be also a consequence of the father's absence—; "misfortune itself" (1987: 22). The meaning of the boy's personal trauma is expanded in this story to a broader social context.[6] Archie's lack is not just sentimental, but also economical, as the shoes suggest. The character feels insecure because he does not have a father, and also because his mother and him have economic problems. Maybe, he seems to be thinking, if he could have a shinny new pair of shoes, his problems would magically change: "they were black

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6. As mentioned above, the first line in "Killing Time" presents readers with Archie's feet, and "The Shoes" with his shoes, that is, with something external to him and that is related to money.

and shinny and new, and he saw that they really were magic" (1985: 73). In a sense, things would change if he could afford them. Identity is thus not only affected by particular events, such as the influence of a father's death on a child, but also by the economic circumstances.

"To Autumn" (1985: 74-86) is the story of an "unsmiling, unmarried and widely unpublished poet", Ernest Lovejoy, on an "ordinary October day in Edinburgh" (74), told by an external narrator. Lovejoy is desperate because he is having a writer's block. As he explains, he is in some state of depression, but "it wasn't the right kind of depression, the kind which —he'd often heard it say— brought with it a muse. This was no such solemn, dignified emotion. This was the ordinary feeling of depression, a mere feeling of lack" (76). As in the previous stories, the character has a strong feeling of lack, of incompletion, and is undergoing a crisis of identity.

Indeed, as the character states, reality is quite different from highly aesthetised feelings:

> A tiny, bright red leaf came loose from a branch and was blown quickly towards him, landing a few inches from his foot. There was nothing very moving about the process as far as Lovejoy could see, if anything it looked slightly comical. If it made him feel anything at all, it wasn't the exquisite melancholy we associate with the perception of transience. He felt wet, and depressed, and ridiculous. As if through this so written-about phenomenon they called "autumn", something or someone were poking fun at him. (76)

Lovejoy wants to catch the beauty of the world, but he cannot even feel it. He has the great writers in mind, he compares him to them, and all he can do is to try to imitate them, as with "Autumn", the poem he had written a year before. This poem, "in which a zigzagging arrangement of fragmented lines had been meant to suggest, mimetically, the leaves falling from the trees" (76), is a plagiarism of e. e. cummings' poem,[7] whom Lovejoy mentions to himself as

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7 The first poem in cumming's *95 Poems* (1958) reads as follows:

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an influence. But the fact is that "no words came to Lovejoy" (76 and 78). He does not seek for inspiration in books, but outdoors, walking in the rain and surrounded by fallen leaves, that is, in contact with the world. However he keeps interpreting everything in literary terms, and is constantly looking for "a good metaphor" or "a fresh personification" (76-7).

Then he finds a girl, or rather we should say that the young woman finds him, wet under a tree, and he automatically starts comparing the ensuring conversation with the writing of a poem: "in his mind Lovejoy was furiously scoring out that dull first line. That was the trouble with life, you couldn't revise it" (78). Like the young painter in "The Sunbather", the poet cannot help but trying to approach women through artistic constructions rather than with spontaneity and natural-ness. But even if "[h]e searched among the windblown leaves for his next line", the girl's spontaneity invites to forget about lines (78). Eventually, fixed lines dissolve into relaxing laughter:

> Suddenly Ernest and Louise, the unpublished poets, had made contact through humour, as if to put this on record, they laughed again, this time in unison. When they had finished there was a new kind of silence between them. One they could share and relax with. (81)

Laughter becomes a non-linguistic form of conversation that relaxes the word-obsessed writer. As we have seen in other short stories, laughter can be a means of communion, of sharing. In "To Autumn" the two characters mutual sharing ends up in Lovejoy's bed. On the next morning the girl, Louise, is gone, after leaving a note. As P. S.: "You gotta keep on writing, Ernest. Start with this"; and then there is a "long arrow trailing down to the bottom of the note. On the table lay the tiny, scarlet leaf" (88). Louise seems to want to remind Lovejoy what poetry should start with: the palpable, the familiar, the world. Still, Lovejoy perceives the leaf differently, full of wonder, as a token of his encounter with Louise, an experience that has uplifted him a bit.

The next story, "A Little Bit of Repartee" (1985: 87-94), explores the topics of role-playing and replication. The short story, reported by a heterodiegetic narrator, describes the everyday routine in the life of Larry and Eddie, two men who work at a restaurant. The story is clogged with mirror games: Larry looks at his own reflections —he "looked again at the bloated little replica of himself" (87)—; or at Eddie, and then imitates what Eddie was doing —"lit a cigarette, looked at the mirror, sucked in his cheeks" (89). And Eddie also looks at himself —"Eddie didn't reply, but went on staring at his reflection" (92), etc. However, the most outstanding replication is not visual but verbal. Both Larry and Eddie seem to know each

other quite well, as two people who have worked together for a long time, and their conversation seems both spontaneous and natural, and contrived, since it gives the impression of a dialogue learned by heart by actors. Eddie is well aware that he is performing a prescribed role in the Grand Theatre of the world:

> "I'm depressed as hell," he said. "No, no, that's not it, it's worse than depressed. It's that nothing feeling. The feeling that nothing's happening, nothing's ever going to happen. Even if it did, it wouldn't be real. We're actors, that's all, except that we don't have a play, a stage. (93)

Here Eddie describes his feeling as depressively existential, as if both were Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon. As Eddie continues stating, "we've got the walk-on parts every night, the waiters, we're not expected to be people" (93). As we shall see when analysing Brian McCabe's next published collection, *In a Dark Room with a Stranger* (1993), the idea of waiters as actors who have to perform their roles is repeated in "Me is the Problem": "As regards who am I, I do not know. As regards which type of waiter —you tell me. For I have been so many waiters, now I don't know which one to be" (1993: 121). As Eddie reflects, "[t]he more like machines we are, the better we are at our part" (1985: 93). So we may deduce that his depressed state, the feeling of lack, and his paranoia are due to social and labour pressures. As we shall see when analysing "A Breakdown", this is the kind of thought associated with anti-psychiatry, and the kind of psychiatry influenced by philosophical existentialism, as developed by R. D. Laing.

The routinely role-playing causes Eddie a deep feeling of hollowness that brings him to drink: "No wonder I drink too much! It's the same, night after night, the same actions. It goes on and on, but none of it means anything" (93). Moreover, the conversation between both "follows a predictable pattern meaningless in itself, or jest and rejoinder" (93). Eddie wants to have some real conversation, to "[g]et *through* to each other" (93, original emphasis). Constant role-playing can lead to a feeling of alienation, which is patent in their depression and alcoholism, as happens in other short stories. Conversation, real dialogue beyond role-playing is always a difficult task in McCabe's stories. Nevertheless, the characters try once and again, once and again.

The next short story in the collection, "Table d'Hote" (1985: 95-104), starts exactly were the previous story ended: "there", in the restaurant. A heterogetic narrator describes a tense situation: Maria and Eric, sitting at a table and emptying their glasses, have a difficult conversation on Eric's affair with another woman. They both feel uneasy, and "[s]he finds herself addressing his teeth", while he "stares into the alcove beyond her shoulder" (96). At this occasion, role-playing is not allowed, since their whole relationship has suddenly changed. For Maria the

discovery of the affair is a "tale of the unexpected" (96), a strange event that is changing it all. At the table next to them, "the contrary situation" (100) is taking place: a young couple who is talking animatedly orders a bottle of champagne to celebrate its love. Thus, while Maria and Eric drink in an embarrassed and tense silence, the other couple —the "Ideal Couple" (100)— seems to be sharing their comfortable silence. As Marie goes to the toilet to wash off her grey tears and Eric goes to the gents something unexpected happens: the woman of the Ideal Couple insults the man "banging her fist hard on the table" (102), creating a great scandal at the restaurant. The crying woman and the embarrassed man are asked to leave. There is no Ideal Couple in the restaurant. As Eric and Maria return to their table from the toilets, they

> are unaware that anything has happened [...]. But gradually, noticing that the next table has been hastily cleared, and sensing the scandalised chatter going on all around, they are able to summarise that something out of the ordinary has taken place at the next table in their absence. What it is, exactly, they can't imagine". (103)

Strange events seem to make us aware of the fact that perfection does not exist and that we cannot stick to certainties. Therefore, people should be open to other and to the world in order to adjust or react to the present situation.

In "A Breakdown" (1985: 104-108) the *topos* of madness appears again. In this story, Peter, a worker suffers a nervous breakdown on his night-shift at the factory where he has been working for many years. The founder of antipsychiatry, Laing, highlighted the social, intellectual and political significance of mental illnesses. He stressed the role of society, and particularly of the family, in the development of "madness". Laing saw psychopathology as being seated not in biological or psychic organs, but rather in the social context which cultivates it, the very crucible in which selves are forged. This reformulation of the locus of the disease was in stark contrast to psychiatric orthodoxy and was thus considered as part of "anti-psychiatry"[8] or "critical psychiatry".[9] Antipsychiatrists examined mental illness in terms of social context: the emotional dynamics of the family and the institution of psychiatry itself (Showalter, 2004: 221). Consequently, this psychiatry movement understood the self as related to its social context, as a self-in-relation, and not as an isolated entity.

R. D. Laing and Aaron Esterson, authors of the famous study *Sanity, Madness, and the Family* (1964), concluded that schizophrenia was not an organic disease but a social process that was comprehensible as a response to social

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8. It was David Cooper, a college of Laing's, who named the new movement (Showalter, 2004: 221).
9. Along with the works of Michel Foucault, Erving Goffman, Thomas Szasz, Franco Basaglia, etc.

"transactions" and "interactions" (221). Consequently, the treatment to be followed was no longer based on pychosurgery, drugs or electroshocks, but rather on the deep analysis of the complex social (and institutional) interrelations. As Elaine Showalter has pointed out, the works of Laing, Michael Foucault and Edwin Goffman "were part of an international trend of renewed interest in the history of madness and the social institutions of psychiatry" (221-222). Antipsychiatry especially focused on social circumstances surrounding mad people, and was also influenced by deconstruction, as it aimed at the deconstruction of the system of power —the mental institutions— and that of language —as Laing's and Esterson's seminal essay "promised a psychiatry responsive to the nuances of silence as well as to the systems of language" (222).

As we shall see, the spark that causes Peter's breakdown is his context, his alienating work. The work at the can factory is done mainly by machines, while "Peter's job was to operate the can-loading machine, which amounted to switching it off and on, and to watch out for damaged cans" (McCabe, 1985: 104). This alienating routine gives Peter a "dull, persistent" headache, "a feeling of deadness"; he misses talking to somebody, "have a bit of conversation" (104-5). He complains about this proliferation of machinery; the proletariat cannot compete against machines that don't smoke, don't have to go to the toilet, do not complain never get tired or ill, etc. Suddenly the main character starts imagining the machine as a person, with its own face and will.

Peter's working activity resembles that of Starky, the greenkeeper, in "Killing Time", as Archie explains: "his little task [was] to move it from here to there, then from there to somewhere else" (62). As he further states, old men who do not have to worry about their work seek for distractions: "when they couldn't work any more, the old men needed to play" (62). Peter, the main character in "A Breakdown" also needs to play. Playing, which is a basic mammalian impulse, is a way of interacting with, and learning from others (Boyd, 2009: 96). Peter feels completely isolated and bored, so he inevitably starts imagining himself at play:

> He walked around the chute and watched them [the cans] rolling down: they seemed to be grinning at him, like a row of teeth. He took the one he'd crushed, a bad tooth, and slipped it between the others. It didn't roll too well, but the momentum of the others carried it down until it disappeared through the hole in the wall. (McCabe, 1985: 105)

Next, Wilson, his supervisor —"who came round to check up on him every so often" (104)—, tells him to cut the power, because "there's been a breakdown" (105). In absence of authentic human contact, besides the orders from his cold supervisor, Peter starts talking to the machine he has sabotaged: "here he was, the saboteur: an old man with a pain in the head, talking to a machine. 'I must be going crazy', he said", before feeling the trembling in his hands (106).

Then he offers the machine a cigarette and explains to it: "I may be old, but I'm not senile. I just . . . think aloud sometimes. It's different" (106). Thinking is indeed talking, a self-addressed dialogue, as we have already exposed at the beginning of this chapter, but we are not supposed to do so aloud, as we are not supposed to share our thoughts with a machine. But Peter goes on, telling it how things were before it arrived: "we were as fast as what was it . . . humanly possible. [...] It's okay for you, you never had a childhood . . . you don't know what it's like to . . . *play*" (107, original emphasis). He starts thinking about playing and the playground at school, and is afraid of the machine —it might want to eat him. He goes outside to take some fresh air, and as Wilson finds him, his answer is not the one his supervisor may have expected:

> "Listen is it playtime yet?"
> "Pardon?"
> "Is it playtime? Don't get me wrong. I've worked all my life, I'm a good worker, but that machine tried to attack me. I had to come out into the playground, but nobody else came out. I didn't see any, on my oath. [...] Mister Wilson, is it playtime yet?". (108)

The mind of the protagonist has started to play, indeed. It seems that human brains are designed for cognitive play, and the tediousness of Peter's work has caused him a breakdown, as anticipated in the title, that could be interpreted as a nervous breakdown or temporal madness, a mental break or fracture due to the "deadness" in his alienating activity.

If we read this under the light of antipsychiatry, which had a great effect in Scotland,[10] the problem of madness could be found in the basis of society. Following Laing's theory, psychosis[11] was the intensification of the divisions of the self that mirrored the fragmentation of modern society (Showalter, 2004: 227).

The following short story, "The Sky" (1985: 109-118), also deals with madness in a sense, or rather with a mental breakdown. The story is narrated by Paul, a patient who is visiting a psychiatrist, Doctor Pleasingham. Paul feels that he has "come apart", as if "all the pages [were] loose from the binding. All jumbled up in the wrong order" (109). As the character-narrator says, "Doctor Pleasingham is trying to find his way to" him, to communicate with him (109).

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10. The spokesman of antipsychiatry, Laing, whose *The Divided Self* (1960) became one of the best-known works of the decade, was from Glasgow.

11. In psychosis, the subject experiences a division between body and mind, or rather, between "inner or true self", which becomes a detached spectator, and "false self", located in an unfeeling, mechanised body (Showalter, 2004: 227).

Again, as in "To Autumn" and "A Breakdown", the feeling of missing parts and gaps in consciousness and in reality is present. The gap Paul feels "is growing, coming between you and ah . . . things" (110). This feeling could suggest that the character is suffering from psychasthenia, as the description is quite similar to those made by Jean Delay and André Gide in Lacan. Delay and Gide describe psychasthenia as provoking feelings of incompleteness or lack, of estrangement, of doubling or second reality, of inconsistency or deconsistency (Lacan, 2002: 727).

Paul feels a lack and break or scission, as he does not feel in touch with the world. As the character explains, "it would touch me if I could be touched. I am touched, touched in the head" (McCabe, 1985: 110). He tries to tell the doctor about the gap, but the gap itself makes it impossible, since, as he states, it is "between me and Doctor Pleasingham. Between the words and the meaning" (111). Paul's description reminds in fact of the existing gab between sign and signifier. As Jacques Derrida explained in his seminal conference on *différance*,[12] signs can never fully summon forth what they "mean", but can only be defined through appeal to additional words, from which they "differ". As a consequence, meaning is forever "deferred" through an endless chain of signifiers. Any symbolic system is, thus, a trap and a tool, as seen in Chapter Three when dealing with Lacan's and Derrida's dismantling of the Cartesian *cogito* and the monologic self.

Paul tries to describe his condition as some form of "dissociation", and when he is asked to explain the term, he explains: "I just mean I don't feel . . . I mean what the word means. The feeling, no not the feeling. The idea, no not the idea. The fact of being apart from doctor. Not getting through to doctor. Having no contact with doctor. That's all I mean doctor" (112).

In this clarifying discourse there appear no commas, and the syntax seems to be reduced to the minimum suggesting his difficulties with communication. As the commas are not present, it could be interpreted that Paul is addressing the doctor, not just defining the term "dissociation".

Paul feels locked up, he can't get outside himself, because he doesn't engage, "not only with you doctor and other people. But with myself. And with things, objects. Because of the . . . gap" (114). Freud's "talking cure" will not help him, as it wouldn't help the character in the next short story, "Jinglebells",[13] since

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12. The paper, presented at Société Française de Philosophie on the 27th of January 1968, was published in *Bulletin de la Societé française de philosophie* and *Theorie d'ensenble* (1968).

13. The narrator sarcastically explains: "Last night I dreamt that I stood on a freshly laid wad of dogshit, burnt sienna in colour and still warm and steaming from the bodyheat of its creator. Look up Freud under symbols dogshit" (McCabe, 1985: 119). He is clearly pointing out at the evidence of his problems, and the difficulty of solving them once identified, as he feels totally incapable of improving his "existential context", as put by Laing. As antipsychiatry proposed: "the existential

Paul does not believe in the curative power of telling a story that he himself does not believe in or understand:

> This is part of the trouble, isn't it? I start talking to Doctor Pleasingham. It's difficult, but I start. I play along. I think of a word. I add another word and another. It gets easier. Easier to talk like this. He sees it as a progress. What he can't see is the gap. Between me and what I say, the gap. He can't see that the more I appear to be involved, the less I'm involved. (116)

Telling a story to Pleasingham will not help him because Paul's problem is precisely with narration, with words, with communicating through language. As antipsychiatry defends,

> Even the well-intentioned actions of others, including the therapist, may seem threatening or devastating to th[e] disembodied self,[14] which protects its perilous autonomy by cutting itself off from relation to others, and which functions primarily through observation and fantasy. (Showalter, 2004: 227)

In "The Sky", there is no real communication or self-other relationship among the therapist and the patient. For example, he tells the doctor his story, that once he looked at the sky and it came into him, he met it (McCabe, 1985: 117). If the doctor understood what that meant, what the sky means for Paul, he may be able to help him, but since there is no communication, healing is difficult. Paul looks at the sky and wants "[t]o be out there again, to be part of it" so as to get out of himself (117). The sky makes him feel much better, "[t]onight and every night" (117).

Paul still believes in the possibility that the doctor will understand some day what he wants to express: "One day perhaps at this moment in the story, he'll look at the sky. And it will come into him. Or he will go up to meet it" (117). In a sense, his "illness" is closely related to existentialism, as the character feels trapped in his life and he dreams of becoming the sky. His very experience and consciousness have split: there is a rent in his relation of the world, and there is a disruption of his relation with himself. As Laing has stated,

> Such a person is not able to experience himself "together with" others or "at home in" the world, but, on the contrary, he experiences himself in a despairing alone-ness and isolation; moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as "split" in various ways, perhaps as a mind more or less tenuously linked to a body, as two or more selves, and so on. (1965: 17)

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context cannot be mastered by intellect alone; it demands that the therapist transcend the barriers created by his professional *persona* and by the institution of psychiatry; he must survive his encounter with the patient as person only —without the shield of reification, without the armour of theory, without the sword of status" (Showalter, 2004: 227).

14. Of the psychotic or psychastenic subject.

Therefore, his cure can only be understood in social and communal terms, so communication, as a relation self-other(s), is indeed indispensable. As Jacques Lacan remarked, mental illnesses as communal:

> Les souffrances de la névrose et de la psychose sont pour nous l'école des passions de l'âme, comme le fléau de la balance psychanalytique, quand nous calculons l'inclinaison de sa menace sur des communautés entières, nous donne l'indice d'amortissement des passions de la cité. (1966)

Madness is thus a social matter; and should be dealt with as such.

Paul's narration in "Jinglebells" (1985: 119-130) resembles stream of consciousness. The story is situated on a night around Christmas time, and the short story is linked to the previous one, which also takes place at a night. At a given moment, the narrator-character, notices that he has shifted to the first-person plural, and asks himself: "[w]hence this royal plural all of a sudden I would like to know" (119). The readers do not exactly know whether he is talking about himself as a plural entity or whether he includes other people in his talk. He asks himself the eternal question: "Who am I?", and the answer he gives is: "I am an identity crisis with a bad hangover in need of a way to begin" (119). As we shall see when analysing *The Other McCoy*, this is also Patrick McCoy's situation.

Paul, the protagonist of "Jinglebells" is a painter, but he earns his living working at a restaurant. His preoccupations are also artistic. In this story —as in "The Sunbather", "The Lipstick Circus" "The Full Moon", "Norman and the Man", and "From the Diary of Billy Bible"—, painting is a very important activity. It is a way of understanding, representing and communicating. The metaphor of the canvas or sheet of paper for the mind is repeated several times in different stories, and in "Jinglebells" both canvas and mind are explicitly compared: "[b]ecause the canvas in my mind is not blank, far from it" (124).

The narration is not a monologue but a soliloquy, since the narrator has an explicit addressee: "Listen to it" (120 and 121). Ironically he imagines himself writing to "the problems corner" in a newspaper: "Dear Mrs Earhole, my problem is [...]" (122). Later the readers may deduce that he is actually talking to himself: "You see how jolly idealistic one was in those days and now look at you" (125). There are several voices in is head, different styles or, as Bakhtin would have put it, different "genres": "think what Aunt Marie would say. Ah kent he wis a bad bugger the minute Ah clapped eyes on him" (121). As is often stated in McCabe's work, characters are "ventriloquists" (28). The very process of thinking is an internal dialogue self-other(s), and in that sense he could be a stranger to himself, "l'etranger" (122).

The fact that the emissary and the addressee of the message are not clearly determined points to identity as the subject-matter of the short story. The narrator posits different enunciations which seem to be contradictory but that are paradoxically true: "I am what I think they think I am" and "I think they think I am what I am not" (124). His self is constructed through its reflection on others, thence the first sentence, but since one cannot know what the other really thinks, one cannot know if their opinion is "correct", in the sense that we may not feel identified with their opinion, but this opinion, may it be "faithful" or not, no doubt influences our self-image. Paul also states that "I am what I do when I'm alone" and "I am not alone after all despite everything all things considered" (127). Without the influence of others one may act with less pressure, more freely but, of course, that influence cannot be eradicated, since it is what gives us a sense of being. Contrary to Descartes' philosophy, it is not reason that brings self-consciousness, but experience, our interaction with the world, our relations with others. Consequently, consciousness cannot be separated form its social context.

The narrator-character wants to connect to people, so he goes outdoors, to have a walk along the canal bank. He observes that "there were a couple of swans", and "[o]ne felt obliged to stand and watch despite the freezing wind" (129), and he then decides to "make a snowman" (129), a companion. Nevertheless, this unanimated creation, this icy golem, which emerges "from the nothing" does not make him feel better, as he represents precisely the character's feeling of absence: "Already he begins to emerge, the absence of his face. The shoulderless form, lacking ear fingers toes. From the many shades of white he shall emerge, moronic and oracular. An abominable snowman, and believe me he will be abominable" (130). His creation just serves to remind him his isolation. What he needs in order to break this situation he is in is to get rid of his fragmentary and alienating lifestyle —"I am a modern man" (122)— and to establish real contact with others.

"The Hunter of Dryburn" (1985: 131-135) is McCabe's first story written in vernacular Scots. The narrator is a man who lives in a small town in Scotland.[15] He addresses a young couple who has entered a bar in a rural Scottish town. All the

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15. As McCabe himself commented to me in an interview, he had written this short story inspired by a real anecdote: his wife Dilys and he went to a small village near Edinburgh and a local man started to ask them things and tell them stories as they were drinking something at a bar. He also had read in the newspaper about a dead man found in a canal in Bonnybridge, and then decided to introduce this in the story. Moreover, McCabe recommends as an exercise to the students of creative writing to look through the newspaper pages and try inventing a story based on an event that strikes them. For a detailed transcription of the interview see Appendix.

narration consists of the words uttered by the local man, so the whole story is written in direct style; the passing-by couple does not interrupt him, as if they had no time to answer or as if their answers where irrelevant to the narrator, and thus unworthy of being recorded. The old man tells both "strangers" —although, the focalization suggests that he is the strangest, as he is quite scary: "Ever shot anything son? Naw?" (133)— a morbid story of something that had happened there in the village, in Dryburn: a respected and wise man, the Auld Man they called him, had gotten killed. It was a normal entertainment to go rat-hunting, and one night both the Auld Man and the narrator went hunting, and the police came by, they argue a bit and one of the policemen tries to take their guns: "See it wis when wan o them tried tae take ma gun that it startit. A fight" (134).

During the fight the narrator's "gun went oaf an wan o them got a pellet in the neck" (134). "Ah wis struggling wi baith o them when Ah realised the Auld Man wis in the canal", and he could not swim, so he drowned (134). After his macabre story he tells the man who is listening to his story while the lady is in the toilet, that he should "haud ontae her. Or somebody else might" (135). The inherent violence and morbidity of all the story crystallises on the last sentence, which sounds almost as a threat: "Ah'm no meaning anything or anything, but ye're a jammy wee swine so ye are and don't you try an deny it" (135). In this sense the "menacing" or "strange" other, as the story's focalisation suggests, would be the narrator or those bizarre things that happen anywhere, both in known and remote places.

The next story, "Hiss" (1985: 136-140), is also reported without any other character's intervention. The narrator starts with the remark: "Quiet in here, isn't it?" and recognises that if he listens closely, "you can hear something, always something" (136). Actually he is listening to "a faint sort of hissing sound" (136). As in "Jinglebells" the narrator's thoughts often have a dialogic aspect; as for example when he is talking/thinking about one of his travels, to Moscow:

> I don't know about these Russian airhostesses though, they're not very glamorous. Why should they be glamorous? That's what you'd say. You're right. They didn't smile either [...]. They were a bit abrupt about it all, I must say. Why shouldn't they be? You're right, why shouldn't they. (136)

In fact the whole short story is a soliloquy which presents his thinking in the mode of stream-of-consciousness, and the narrator constantly asks things to somebody who is not there physically present. The narrator is "in a strange country [...] in an unfamiliar environment [...] late at night, and [...] exhausted" (137). He cannot sleep in his hut and hears the sounds of howling dogs, cicadas, the sea, etc., and one whose source he cannot determine; there was a sound he

"couldn't identify", he hadn't "heard before", for which he "could imagine no source" (138). Those strange noises "were the ones that kept [him] awake. Things rattling, squeaking, screeching, hissing" and his "imagination was running riot" (138). The undecidability of the sound —"I didn't know what it was, but it sounded very strange" (138)— seems to be the cause of his alerted state. Next, the narrator remembers "the cat then, taking the cat to the vet's in a basket" (139). He "was beginning to feel the way the cat must've felt" (139). The comment refers to the cat he took to the vet in order to be put down when he was a child. The narrator imagines how the cat "couldn't understand what was going on around it [...]. It could hear the sounds —the screech of the brakes, the roar of the engine, the voices [in the bus]— but it couldn't identify them" (140). Here the incomprehensible is associated with death. But then, while he waits in his room as the cat had to wait in the basket, he realises that: "I kept on hearing the noises, all strange noises outside the hut, and inside the hut, inside me. It took me a long time to realise that the thudding sound was me, it was my heart. I can still hear it, like somebody running" (140). Thus, the narrator realises that the strangeness is inside himself, that the undecidable, the unknown, the awe-inspiring, belongs to life itself and that we cannot know were certain things come from. Nevertheless, human beings keep trying to provide a reasonable answer to their essential questions about the meaning of life on Earth, even at the price of cheating themselves. As he comforts himself in the last sentence: "It must be the air-conditioner" (140).

When analysing identity in a collection of short stories, one cannot talk in terms of resolution or progression as in a novel, as the resulting narrative construction of identity is a general impression extracted from all the short stories put together. A close reading of the stories in *The Lipstick Circus* reveals hidden connections and meanings, beyond the isolation of individual characters and single stories, conveyed by the recurrence of certain ideas and symbols. The parallelisms and similarities found in the different stories of this collection are not repetitions but variations on the same theme, since they not only emphasise the key ideas on the stories, but enrich their meaning, which reveals itself as much more complex and mutable, relational.

Moreover, each of the isolated characters seems to be linked to the other(s) by an invisible thread that the reader follows through symbols and associations. If the self is understood as self-in-action, self-in-relation, it is clear that a self that cannot engage with others, as is here often the case, that cannot relate to the world, will have a feeling of loss, "a gap", and will feel unconnected, de-centred, marginalised. But it could be argued that all these characters are linked in their

solitude through the juxtaposition of readings, as they mirror and refer to each other(s), drawing invisible connections and, in this sense, those characters are related and communicate through the reader's dialogical movement, contrasting the different perspectives and stories.

Most of the characters in the collection are under going some identity crises; they are in-transition or in a "threshold period" or "peninsula", as McCabe has put it. Some of them, like the children in the first short stories, feel lonely and out of place. They are discovering themselves —their selves— and the world, and try their personalities out. Mirrors are associated in these stories to self image —constructed through the others' reflected gaze— and the multiplicity of the self. The reflections that the children often watch to learn about themselves produce not proper *Doppelgängers*, but rather suggest the presence of unknown facets in the self which the can explore. Others do not feel happy in their environment, like the boy in "Interference", and they long for a reversed alter-reality, a parallel universe they wish to escape to.

This escape of reality can easily be connected to the issue of madness, which is revealed in the stories as a positional matter, related to social and cultural elements. Education, for example, seems to be a key element at work when dealing with mental matters, as shown in "The Lipstick Circus", "Interference", "Killing Time", "The Shoes", "From the Diary of Billy Bible", etc. Children seem to be especially fragile or open to these external influences, but they also have an intellectual and perceptual openness that allows them to find tangent ways, marginal directions, to escape the system. In this sense, a de-centred position may be positive, as it is precisely their tangentiallity that allows for an escape, and thus, for the non-fixity of the whole system or society.

Nevertheless, characters with mental illnesses or who do not conform to the norms of rationality are sometimes treated by others as non-people, following the Cartesian axiom that identifies reason with existence. Their position is contextualised in McCabe's stories by means of relating them to their social context: the family and the institution are scrutinised indirectly, by means of suggestion, and incorporated into the individual's problem.

Other characters in the stories are not mad, but alienated by their daily routines, such as work in a factory —in "A Breakdown"—, pointing to the alienating consequences of certain socially accepted conventions and practices, or a monotonous sentimental life. In a sense, their identity crises are closely related to existentialism and to social pressures, as the characters feel trapped in their life. Their very experience and self-consciousness is sometimes split: as there is a gap between them and the world and they cannot experience themselves "together with" others or "at home in" the world, as Laing has put it (1965: 17). They experience themselves in a despairing aloneness and isolation. Constant

required role-playing —as in "A Little Bit of Repartee"— and lack of authentic and meaningful conversation can also lead to a feeling of alienation and depression.

Therefore, their healing can only occur in a social and communal context, by means of communication; to establish a strong bond self-other(s) is indeed indispensable. An encounter with a stranger or with an unexpected event can disrupt the daily routine as become a solution to breaking of routines. Moreover, the subject's opening to the unexpected other invites him or her to open to the world and to establish an improvised bond with others, allowing for a recuperation of the self-other(s) relationship and a possibility of the subject's healing.

In the following collection, *In a Dark Room with a Stranger* (1993), the possibilities of this strangeness are further explored, as we shall see.

Chapter Six

IN A DARK ROOM WITH A STRANGER – CHILDHOOD
AND STRANGENESS

Each singularity is another
access to the world.
(Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*)

In McCabe's second collection of short stories, *In a Dark Room with a Stranger*
(1993), life is the dark room, and the stranger is oneself, as well as others such as
partners, sons, neighbours and passers by. The collection contains seventeen short
stories that are interconnected with each other through recurrent motifs and sym-
bols, which create a complex microcosm. Some of the short stories in the collection
deal with childhood perceptions, with discovery and the process of growing up and
becoming an adult. In a sense, child perceptions could be compared to those of mad
people or aliens because their view of the world is not mainstream, it is different
from what could be considered "normal" or normative. As we saw in the previous
chapter, the perception of the child in the short story "Interference" is very similar
to that of a mad character, because his imagination is so powerful that it changes
reality. The question posed by the story, and further developed in this collection,
is whether all sorts of perceptions can alter reality and to what extent.

The narrators and characters in the first stories in the collection have contra-
dictory feelings of estrangement and admiration for the world. As character
David Law puts it in "Media Studies", sometimes he "felt like he'd just arrived,
just come down to the planet Earth and was seeing and hearing everything for
the first time" (McCabe, 1993: 76).

Other short stories, especially those at the end of the collection, deal with being
an adult with more mature preoccupations such as income, partner relationships
and kids. These characters are quite desperate and lonely, as they have already
grown up and still feel that they are living the life of a stranger, or living with
strangers, and they keep searching, maybe with some nostalgia, for a return to
the past and to childhood.

As I will try to demonstrate, the encounters with the other(s) that permeate
the work of McCabe allow the characters to escape their mental schemes and

roles and to enlarge the spectrum of their thinking and acting through the incorporation of new and alien experiences. In this collection, the encounters with the other(s) and with these experiences are associated to discovering both the world and the self and to a process of maturation and readjustment.

The first short story in the collection, "Strange Passenger" (1993: 1-32), is told by an intradiegetic narrator, a young man who travels to Murkirk because his father has just died. Even if the main character recognises that he does not feel anything —"My reaction had been—but had there been any real reaction? Hadn't I just made the sorrowful and shocked noises appropriate to the occasion?" (1)—, the news of his father's death triggers off some reflections on the relationships between father and son. Also, the narrator-character remembers many things about his father. In fact, the whole collection of short stories seems to be a collection of remembrances about a past that could be that of anybody born in a small mining area in Scotland around the nineteen fifties, like McCabe himself.

The narrator-character might soon be a father too if her girlfriend, Polly, were pregnant. Before his sister called to communicate the sad news, he and Polly had "been building up to an argument all evening" (1). The reason for the argument had been that "[s]he'd first mentioned that her period was late a few days ago and it had come up again" that night (1). The protagonist does not seem to be prepared for this responsibility, and tries to avoid the discussion: "[s]he'd demanded to know how I felt about it, but I'd been coolly evasive, treating the whole thing like a hypothetical ethical dilemma from Moral Phil. 1" (2). This coldness or evasiveness associated to intellectualism will reappear in several stories in the collection, such as "Say Something". As we shall see, in some short stories academic education is sometimes seen as a weight or shortcoming rather than as an advantage. It seems logical to think that an author such as McCabe, being the only son in his family who went to university, could feel the necessity of questioning the benefits and troubles of devoting one's time to abstract academic study, while other people around seemed to be doing more practical things and to have other —maybe more earthly— worries.

As commented in Chapter One, most of the writers who started publishing around the eighties were the first generation in Scotland that had access to higher education. Consequently, they seemed to harbour a certain feeling of gilt or rather a need to justify this fact to the rest of society. Moreover, there seems to be a certain generational gap caused by this educational fact. In McCabe's short stories sometimes the young character who has studied at university, tries to justify himself to his parents or to himself.

In "Strange Passenger", for example, this issue is explicitly raised: "I was beginning to have doubts about academia: hadn't my father once said to me that you shouldn't have to look up a book to know what you think?" (3). Later —earlier in the story's time— there appears an explicit discussion on this topic between father and son, showing the strong autobiographical component of this story.[1] His father —"a trade union activist for twenty years in the pits!" (17)— complains to a friend about the younger generation's cold and socially detached intellectuality —"Cannae unnerstand a word he says since he went tae college" (17)— and seems to feel a bit threatened or at least challenged by it —"Thinks he kens it aw, no let his auld faither tell him onything!" (18). These words bring to the fore the generational conflict between father and son. The father is a communist who has read Marx and Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Fellae* —"[a] great book [that s]hows the working man how tae fight back" (19, original emphasis)—, and the son is a nihilist who reads Nietzsche and seems to believe in the *Übermensch*. Nevertheless, as we shall see when analysing other stories, *In a Dark Room with a Stranger* shows a great respect for and understanding of the father's generation, maybe because growing apart from one's parents during adolescence and then getting closer to them as both grow older is a common stage in human relations. This seems to have been the case in this collection, which opens with a short story about a father who has died and a son who, in order to pay him his respects, returns to the small town he had wanted to escape from as an adolescent —no matter whether it is called Murkirk, Dunburn or Bonnyrig—, and go to Edinburgh, Glasgow, London or Paris (81). However, for all the autobiographical elements in the collection, it should not be forgotten that, as the son in "Strange Passenger" states: "There's a difference between fiction and autobiography!" (19).

At one point in the story, the protagonist, who is in the local pub, remembers another occasion when he was in Murkirk having a pint with his father, and the memory makes him feel like a stranger: "Here I am, home, where I should belong, but don't feel that I do. Not any more. I look around the bar at the faces, all the faces, all the faces of the men and the women here. Even if I want to be one of them —will they still have me?" (21).

The changes in him make him see his previous self as a stranger, as somebody not himself, not now. Consequently, the self is viewed as a changing entity inscribed in time and in a social context, a relational self, in short.

At this stage, the protagonist behaves like an intellectual in the sense that he interprets the world surrounding him and the events he is living in abstract

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1. Another example can be found in the following statements by the main character: "There was almost an hour to kill until there would be a bus to Dryburn —the godforsaken little village where my parents lived. It wasn't even home. They had moved there when my father's pit had been closed and he'd to retain as an engineer" (22). A pit like the one McCabe's father worked at is also mentioned in other short stories in this collection, such as "The Fight" or "The Face", so it could be argued that the whole collection has important autobiographical elements.

terms. Thus, pondering on the discussion with his partner, he reflects: "And wasn't Nietzsche partly to blame for what I was acting about Polly?" (3). Here the hyperbole of this affirmation makes us think of a bitterly humorous narrator mocking about himself. Humour is a constant in McCabe's work, displayed in different forms and with various functions. It is used to express unutterable truths, to establish a bond behind formalities, to go through difficult situations, etc. Sometimes it seems that the characters cannot help being humorous, other times they just do their best to be funny. In this short story, for example, the narrator-character seems to be a rather ironic intellectual, bent on laughing about himself. As he is sitting on the train terrified about the possibility of him becoming a father, he reflects: "What would we call it —Kandinsky or Zarathustra?" (5). Of course this should not be taken at face value, but there is some seriousness in the election of both names: he evokes one of the greatest painters, father of abstract painting, and one of the creations of Nietzsche, the father of nihilism, two inspirational figures both for the character and for Brian McCabe. The protagonist recalls his hysterical laughter when he broke a taboo by hitting his father:

> I punch him so hard on the arm that he drops his fork and recoils in pain. [...] I am truly astonished at what I have done. [...] Then I see the anger flaring in his piercing blue eyes and I know I have to run. And I do run, and with good reason, because my father is chasing me through the house, shouting and cursing. And [...] although I'm scared of what he might do to me if he catches me, I'm also laughing hysterically. (14)

In this example, laughter has nothing to do with humour. As the protagonist himself realises, it is a symptom of the trauma associated with his separation from family and social environment. Thus, he describes his action in terms of madness: "[I behaved] like a madman—and in fact I'm mad at this moment, I have stepped into the realm of madness, because I have broken a taboo" (14). As we have seen, in McCabe's previous collection laughter and madness are closely linked. Mad characters who are unable to verbalise their trauma often use laughter as a form of non-verbal communication or as an emotional relief[2].

In "Strange Passenger", another example of insane laughter associated with the breaking of taboos is found when the protagonist is sitting in the room with his family, talking about his father's recent death: "It was hard to keep down the laughter. What was this laughter inside me? This desperate, uncontrollable thing inside me that could only come out as laughter?" (25). Here the uncontrollability of the hysterical reaction to the situation is symptomatic of his disturbed state.

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2. The Relief Theory on humour, based on Aristotle's comments on catharsis in comedy, believes that laughter serves to relieve us of nervous tension (Morreall, 1987: 131). More on this see: Herbert Spender's "On the Physiology of Laughter" (2010).

According to Herbert Spencer, laughter is the cathartic action of a difficult emotion which is build up and then is suddenly seen as inappropriate (in Morreall, 1987: 131). The mismatch between his required attitude or role-playing in that specific context, and his feelings of guilt and inadequacy make him feel like a stranger, a laughing stranger.

As we have seen in other stories such as "Norman and the Man", laughter sometimes expresses the inexpressible, that is, conveys what language cannot communicate. Other times, it bridges the gap between himself and the world that the narrator- character in "The Sky" felt. But unlike the protagonists of these stories, the young man in "Strange Passenger" is no madman. He is a sane and socially adjusted character who knows how he is expected to behave. Thus, when he feels the uncontrollable urge to laugh, he reflects: "anyway, I couldn't let it out, not here, not now. It would seem like I was being deliberate perverse" (McCabe, 1993: 25). Still, the he ends up associating laughter with his father, as he realises that: "[c]onfronted with his corpse, [he] had failed to recognise him, [… his] father's rasping, derisive laughter coursed through [him]" (25). He feels that his father has taking him over, haunts him and feels the need to let it out through his lips (25).

At this stage, the narration jumps from the present —when the son goes to Murkirk to pay his respects to his father— to the past, through the protagonists' memories of his relation with his father, intermingled with thoughts about his present and future with Polly. Even if the narrator acknowledges no real feelings at the beginning of the story, he is in fact deeply affected by the death of his father as is suggested by this uncontrollable need to laugh and to think about many important issues. Moreover, as he wanders around the streets of Murkirk, he cannot help seeing everything differently, "as if everything had taken on a life of its own" (23). As he further explains: "My father had died, that must be it, and everything else was too alive. I felt something stirring inside me —a feeling to do with death maybe, or maybe it was to do with life" (23). Indeed life seems to be going on, as is suggested by her partner's possible pregnancy. As the narrator walks around the churchyard, a place where he used to go with a girl as a schoolboy, everything seems to be too alive, too poetically fleshy: "It seemed to me I could see the pores of the stone opening and closing" (23). As he further states: "I walked over them to read an inscription above the statues and my foot disturbed a used condom among a heap of litter and leaves. That brought the pregnancy back and the image of a ghostly foetus I had seen in a colour supplement" (23). Thus, the condom and the graveyard become the symbols of inseparability of *eros* and *thanatos*, projecting a relational light on the death of the protagonist's father and his own fathering of a child that transforms his solipsistic perception of life into a never ending generational chain. As the protagonist becomes conscious of the fact that some things are lost, except for the memories, and that other things

will naturally come, he matures. Life and death cannot be separated, just as past and present constantly flow into each other, and they should be integrated. The story reproduces this process of maturation and integration. At the beginning of the story, when the narrator-character was on the train to Murkirk, he felt like "an outsider, a strange passenger" (6). By contrast, at the end of the story, he returns to Edinburgh with a bag full of objects that belonged to his father, a bag that "made a strange passenger" (32).

The main character is undergoing a crisis, as his father has just died, and the possibility of him becoming a father has appeared. Consequently, the character feels like a stranger, as he does not know exactly how to deal with this situation. Disoriented, he has come back to the place where he grew up and remembers things he had lived and felt as he was younger, but these memories do not help him to find himself, as they belong to the past, to a previous self. The feelings of guilt, sorrow and inadequacy make him feel strangely out of place. Nevertheless, as he returns to Edinburgh, to his present life as an adult, he takes with him some memories of his childhood and of his father.

The next short story in the collection, "The Fight" (1993: 33-48), presents the experiences of a child who is taken by his father, who is an atheist miner —again, a trade union activist—,[3] to a fight. His father tells him to shut his ears, meaning that he should not listen to the men's language, and so the boy starts thinking about sounds and words. The child's thoughts and associations are at the forefront of this story and conduct the narration, as the barrier exterior-interior is blurred through focalisation. As he literally covers his ears, "he'd still hear the voices coming nearer in the night, the men's voices cursing and swearing and singing, only they'd sound like they were inside him, like the cursing and swearing and singing was coming from him and not from not-him" (33-4).

As in other short stories, the other is not something that exists outside the self, but something that can be found both inside and outside, a certain strangeness that provides a different perspective and questions the ego's certainties and experience.

Eventually, the boy realises that he cannot stop the other, that is, the alien, from getting into himself:

> shutting your eyes didn't stop you seeing things, just the same as covering your ears didn't stop you hearing things. Even when you were sleeping, you kept seeing things. The only way to stop hearing things and seeing things and smelling things was to be dead. He tried to imagine what it would be like to be dead, to be not-him. (34)

Indeed, only death can stop the self from interacting with the other.

As the boy, who comes from Rosewell, is asked by a boy from Gorebridge about his religious affiliation —"'Ye a Proddy?' he shook his head. 'So ye're a Pape, eh?'" (41)— and he answers that he is an atheist, the confrontation, "the fight", becomes inevitable. Surprisingly, it is the protagonist's fists that "drummed against the boy's hard head"; he cannot stop or control himself, "because it wasn't him, it came from not-him, rolling and crashing through him like avalanche" (42). The boy has lost control and lets his rage come out like the avalanche he likes to think about at the beginning of the story, that comes "loose inside him, [...] moving, growing. And everything had been leading up to this, this was what the whole night was really about" (42). This proleptic metaphor works almost as a metacomment on the short-story form, as the story too "had been leading up to this" (42), to the violent rush that has possessed the protagonist.

In "The Fight" the boy discovers not only the violence in him, and his power over others, but also, and most importantly, a world previously unknown to him, the place were working-class men, like Les, who had "left school to go down the pit" (38), gather to fight. The fight described in the short story is of a double kind:[4] boxing, and trade union activism. This is exposed as the child starts thinking about the silent men in the place, those who were miners, and thus "strong inside as well as with their hands" (37). Miners who "sang songs as they walked along the road together [...] in a march [...] to see a prime minister, who lived in a house in London with a policeman outside the door" (38). The narrator shares the child's admiration for the miners, which he inherited from his father's confidence in cooperation: "If a fight did start, they would win. And even if they didn't win, they would fight as well as they could, they would stand by each other, and so even if they lost the losing would be almost like winning" (37). The boy associates both fights, the one he has been in and the one his father and the other miners are leading, and he cannot help drawing connections between both. Power relationships seem to be at the core of both, as the short story's last lines evidence: "Even though the other boy had started it [the fight], he knew that because he'd won, he'd get the blame" (42). The boy has thus incorporated the —working-class— fight into him, as he has absorbed his father's values.

This boy-father relationship is further developed in the next story, "The Face" (1993: 43-48).[5] In "The Face" an external narrator reports the experiences of

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3. Like McCabe's father.

4. It is common in McCabe's work to find titles and core phrases that have a double meaning, as the poet loves playing with words.

5. This short story has been recorded on video by BBC Scotland as part of the programme Education Scotland (2003-2004).

a child and his mining father, from the perspective of the child. As Crawford has stated,

> A deftly handed relationship between father and son is at the heart of "The Face", one of the best short stories by Brian McCabe (b. 1951), whose finely observed fiction often deals with male dilemmas and whose poetry images an alcoholic man in a doorway as "the Buddha in Edinburgh".[6] (2007: 687)

The story develops in a dark railway tunnel, which resembles the one in "From the Diary of Billy Bible", from *The Lipstick Circus*; thus emphasising the connection between tunnel and death. Like other short stories, "The Face" has some autobiographical elements which function as elements of cohesion of the short stories in the collection, as for example, the general worries about the meagre future of the miners: "the [...] miners talked about the pit and how it was closing" (McCabe, 1993: 43). The child remembers the evening when his father "came in late from the pit [...b]ecause somebody had got killed at the face, John Ireland had got killed at the face, so he'd had to go to Rosewell to tell his wife" (43). Besides being a miner, John Ireland had "ran a boxing gym for boys" (44), a fact that again draws connections with the previous story and thus allows the reader to build up a complex unitary picture of the collection, with each short story providing a different and complementary perspective on the same undefined but recognisable fictional world.

The father tells the boy to go down the dark tunnel in order to test his courage, as if it were a male ritual of the passing to adulthood. It could be thus argued that the boy is undergoing one of those "threshold periods". The child recognises that "[i]f you looked at darkness like that too long you started seeing things in it: patterns, shapes, faces. . .", but he goes down the pit (44). The connections of "The Face" and "From the Diary of Billy Bible" are further enhanced by the fact that both the child and the madman allow their imagination to run wild. The boy comments that even if the tunnel was "pitch-dark [...,] coal wasn't always black, because sometimes it was blue or grey, and sometimes it had a dark shine to it, like the cover of the Bible" (46). This remark suggests the influence of Presbyterianism in the boy's perception. As he advances into the dark, he sees a shadow: "the shadow had the shape of a man and the man had a face and the face was the face of John Ireland" (47). As his father catches him and lifts him in the air, "[h]e was laughing and saying he was proud, proud of him because he'd walked down on his own, proud because now he was a man" (47). Nevertheless, as the boy tells him that he has seen a face in the pit, and that it looked like the man who ran the gym "his father stopped smiling, turned pale, opened his mouth

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6. Crawford means Brian McCabe's poem "Buddha" included in *Body Parts* (McCabe, 1999: 42).

to say something but didn't say anything, then stared and stared at him—as if he couldn't see him at all, but only the face of the dead man" (48). The boy's rite of maturation is associated to death and to adult topics, such as the accident at the pit.

Thus, the short story's title can be interpreted in two different ways: as the name of the pit and as a ghost's face. Both readings are valid and non-exclusive; and what is more important, both interpretations complement each other, they enter into a dialogue and create a broader and more complex and accurate meaning. If we apply this auto-referentiality, the intertextuality that enriches the general meaning of the works in the collection, the readers may interpret this death in the light of the previous story that praised the miners' strength and the harshness of their work.

The following story "Spirit, Tinder and Taboo" (1993: 49-63) also presents a heterodiegetic narrator focalising through a young boy's perspective. The protagonist and his friend Derek Logan are discovering the attraction towards the "other" sex, girls. They collect the cards that come with bubble gum, which they buy "in Jeannie's shop". The cards show pin-up women: "[s]ometimes they wore bikinis, sometimes see-through negligees, sometimes black lacy bras and knickers, suspenders and stockings" (51). As the narrator further explains, "[t]here were even a few without bras, but they were rare. Collector's items. He'd swapped Derek three brand prehistoric monsters and a golf ball for one of them" (51). Both are hungry for new discoveries. Consequently, as new things stop being new, they are forgotten: "Last summer it had been ginger beer. They had decided ginger beer was the thing to drink. They'd drunk it everyday. [...] This summer it was the bubble-gum cards they couldn't get enough of" (52).

The main character believes that "[h]e had grown up that night, lying in bed thinking about Shiona Fraser and the women on the bubble-gum cards" (51). Once they have encountered these new and alluring objects, they feel that the world has changed and language with it. As he matures, the protagonist feels that he is discovering new hidden meanings in old words, and coming across forbidden words, words meant only for adults, such as "cunt": "It was one of those words you weren't allowed to write or say. You had to hide it from the adults" (52). Consequently, the boy tries to use more adult words while he is with his friends in order to seem grown-up: "'She's a brammer, eh?' A brammer. He definitely wasn't going to say that one any more —it was childish" (53).

The sound and meaning of words is a key feature in the work of McCabe, as characters and narrators are always wondering about them. As the boy glances at a pin-up woman in one of the cards, he realises that "[h]er blonde, back-combed

hair and her high, pencilled eyebrows made the surprise look sort of fixed" (53). "There must be a word for it", he wonders, and then adds: "[p]ermanent. That was one of the words that meant more than before. A bit sinister. Sinister. That was another one" (53). Experience has changed the boy's perspective on the world and, consequently, on language, which he now sees as a complex encrypted code: "Since the thing had happened, some words sounded different, sounded like they meant more than before" (49). He recognises the subjectivity in this process: "Every word still meant the same, but now it was like he was listening to them inside his head one at a time" (54), a playing with words that leads to dissociation or estrangement of the pair sign/signifier, language/world, as happens in the short story "The Host", as we shall see. Other times there were words like "nipple" that "sounded just like what it meant" (54).

Language is a particularly important issue in Scotland, as was pointed out in Chapter One. Until recently, Scots has been seen as an "improper" language at schools, and as a language that should be restricted to the private sphere. This outlook on Scots also forms part of the boy's pondering on the meaning of words:

> *Glaiket*. It was one of the words you said all the time but got told off for if you wrote. Words like scunner and smirr and girn and nyaff and glue and eedjit and dreich and wheesht. You knew what they all meant but you didn't write them because you got told off for it. Even if you wanted to write them you didn't know how to spell them, because they weren't in the dictionary, because they weren't real words. (50)

The boy wonders why some words are proper and made real by its inclusion in the dictionary, and others are not.

He has noticed that certain words are used by adults —such as "cunt" (52)—, that others are used by Scots, and should not be used at school —such as "loused" (51)—, but he cannot find a satisfying reason for this. It has nothing to do with taboos, as he realises that "spunk" is in the dictionary:

> It wasn't a word you were allowed to say or write or think, but although it sounded Scottish and it was dirty and it was a swear word, he'd been amazed to find it in the dictionary. It meant a lot of things. It meant spirit. It meant tinder. It meant taboo. (55)

As experience changes the meaning of words for the protagonist, it also alters the readers' understanding of the words. "Spirit, Tinder and Taboo" unveil their secret meaning as readers realise that the protagonist has experienced his first sexual arousal (55), making him feel grown up. The body thus reveals itself as a terrain full of secrets and changes.[7] The body connects us to the outer world and, in

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7. The fascination for the body is further developed in McCabe's poetry collection *Body Parts* (1999), as well as in other short stories, such as "The Host" (2001: 33-44).

this sense, it maybe said to symbolise the link between self and other(s), especially in short stories like this one, which explores desire and the way in which biological and psychological discoveries lead to a change in perception and, thus, in identity. While the boy is in the swimming pool, everything seems to have changed:

> he didn't want to race. He wanted to do everything slowly, because everything felt a bit different. The smell of chlorine, the reflections of the window on the water, the way their voices seemed to stretch and bend and echo off the walls and the ceiling . . . maybe everything was the same as usual, but he was just noticing it more. (56)

The body is an ever-changing entity, in the sense that it is constantly meta-morphing and transmogrifying; and it is also liminal in the sense that we gain our sense of self through identification with the *cogito*. From this perspective, desire seems to be the bodily force that destabilises the Cartesian conception of identity, making mind and body undistinguishable.

Watching the cards with the pin-up women, the boy and his friend discover that desire is a powerful active drive which can be fostered by contact with real girls as well as with fantasies or pictures. But it can also be experienced passively as objects of somebody else's desire, as happens to the boys when they notice a strange look in McAllister, the swimming pool attendant, which is full of desire, as they later realise at the showers: "he took one of his nipples between his fingers and squeezed it very gently. His other hand was doing the same with Derek" (57). This event, which is completely unexpected and incomprehensible at first —"There was something not right about the look on his face. It reminded him of something. What was it?" (58)—, adds a layer of strangeness to their own process of growing up. The strange event becomes something new the protagonist has learned to decode; he now knows what McAllister was feeling at the showers: "As he turned and started swimming away from him, he knew: on the bus, the way Derek had looked at the woman on the card, the way he'd looked at the gun" (58-9).

With this knowledge, the growing-up boy can react to things that where before invisible or just strange or unexplainable to him. Thus, he tears up the swimming season tickets McAllister had given them without saying a word about it. Derek, who still does not understand, although he feels some strangeness and senses some unexplained things —"How come he gave us them [the swimming tickets] for nothing? [...] "What was he [McAllister] saying 'don't mention it' for? [...] Why did he touch us in the showers?" (60)—, decides to do the same.

At the end of the story, the boys have discovered words with new meanings and that desire and sex can be taboos, that is, strange things which are never talked about, and which have their own encrypted (adult) meanings, and thus knowledge materialises in actions that respond to newly learnt social behaviour, as his destruction of the ticket shows.

The next short story, "Kreativ Ritting" (1993: 63-71), explores the issue of language from another perspective. The story, set in a Scottish classroom, develops during a creative writing class.[8] The protagonist is a student who is more interested in punk than in literature. The teacher, PK, tries to gain the attention of the class, but Joe, the clownish student, is just interested in spoiling the lesson —though, admittedly, in a very creative way—, as he constantly gives a funny turn of the screw to the teacher's comments and demands. Thus, when the teacher tells them to not "to worry about punctuation or grammar or anything like that" in an exercise of Automatic Writing, Joe "says for a laugh, ken: 'Sir, what's punk-tuition? Is that like *learnin* tae be a punk?'" (67, original emphasis).

It seems difficult for the teacher to connect with the students. He wants them to relax and get inspiration by listening to "a great piece of music by Johann Sebastian Bach [...] a musical genius who wrote *real* music, the likes of which [they] have probably never heard before and probably won't know how to appreciate" (68). Here the teacher points out one of the key issues in the story: the distinction between high and low art, between the art established by mainstream ideology and power and the popular art considered as such by the common people.

The students' responses are quite creative and funny —as when the teacher mentions the classical piece "Air on a G string" and they transform it into "Hair on a g-string" (68). Like the punk music made by The Clash, which the students love, these linguistic games show that popular culture can also be art. As stated above, the students respond to the teacher's academic English language with their creative vernacular. This vernacular element as opposed to the teacher's standard English, echoes the issue of language and culture in Scotland in the last four centuries, when the central power imposed English culture, and censored as "improper" the marginal and disempowered Scottish culture. So the title, "Kreativ Riting", which seemed to refer to the students' learning of the subject of Creative Writing may now be said to allude to the creative capacity and validity of non-canonical forms of artistic expression. The questions of what is and what is not art and what is and is not proper are revealed as socio-political questions, related to power and position.

Indeed, identity, power relationships and the subject's relational positions are at the core of the story, as its end suggests: the teacher asks the uninspired students to write a short essay on themselves —"Myself As Others See Me" (71). Joe writes his short essay—in capital letters, with no punctuation marks— and describes himself as a punk with a "DOG KOLLAR" (70), and a tattoo that reads: "KUT ALONG THE DOTTED LINE ON MY BACK" (70-1). As he further states:

"I HAVE NO FUTURE ON MY BOOTS I HAVE GOT NO HOPE IN MY POCKET I HAVE GOT NO MONEY" (71). Joe describes himself externally as a real punk, but then he adds a subjective commentary: "BUT MY MUM LOVES ME AND I LOVE HER BACK" (71). He is very conscious of the fact that certain things such as his love for his mother do not belong to the radical punk stereotype and thus, half-recognising the fissures in his *persona*, he decides to tell the teacher that he does not want to read it out to the class or to the teacher, he wants "it to be *destroyed*" (71, original emphasis), in order to adjust to the image he wants others to have of him. Following such strict role-play patterns and expectations seems thus a bit censoring, as they do not allow Joe to speak up and to present himself as he really is, with all the complexities and nuances of people.

"Media Studies" (1993: 72-82), which are the protagonist David Law's "best subject" at school, is another story narrated by an external narrative instance, but focalised through the perspective of an adolescent student. David has just been awoken by his mum's steps and his dad's wheelchair downstairs, but he wants to return to the dream he has just had, "an erotic dream —that was the word, *erotic*, although a year ago he'd 've called it dirty—[9] but now he'd lost the thread of it" (72, original emphasis). David's sexual awakening is again associated with discovery and a sense of growing up. The boy had recently removed from his wallpaper all the pictures of his heroes, "cut from newspapers, magazines and album sleeves [... because] he'd decided he didn't want to have heroes any more, that having heroes was really pretty naff" (74).

The boy is undergoing an identity crisis, so to say, since at this stage he does not feel either as a little boy or as an adult. Once more we are offered a story dealing with a "threshold period" in the protagonist's maturation process. As he lies completely still in bed, the boy thinks about school, girls, his parents, etc. As the external narrator explains, "[s]ometimes he felt like he'd just arrived, just come down to the planet Earth and was seeing and hearing everything for the first time" (76). The boy feels both disconnected and astonished, like a stranger or an alien.

He imagines himself being paralysed, like his father "after an accident at the foundry", and then "been struck down in the night with some mysterious fatal illness —then they'd be sorry . . ." (77). He narcissistically imagines himself in several roles meant to punish his parents for not loving him as he ideally desired, and then as a "juvenile delinquent" reported in the headlines of the local paper

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8. As pointed out in Chapter Two, McCabe himself has been teaching creative writing courses for several years and still does.

9. David's new use of vocabulary related to sex is reminiscent of the two young boys in the previous story, "Spirit, Tinder and Taboo".

(78), and he relishes the thought of "the little drama that would happen when he did go down" when his parents read in the newspaper what he had done (79). In fact, however, he feels quite guilty and is afraid of their reaction about something bad he seems to have done, even though he cannot remember exactly what: "He tried to remember doing what he'd done, but now it didn't seem real, like something that had happened to somebody else a long time ago" (81). It seems as if the boy does not want to assume his actions, and has a feeling of fracture or dissociation. The sense of unreality is further developed as it is not made clear to readers if what David has supposedly done has in fact happened, or if it is one of his guilty-narcissistic fantasies.

Supposedly, he had accompanied a girl to her house the night before, and when walking through some parked cars he had opened one and got inside. Then, "He'd fiddled with things on the dashboard and had switched on the headlights, then he'd taken the hand-brake off and he felt the car move forward […]. He'd started to steer it, guiding it down the hill" (82). After he manages to steer it to the side of the street he put the hand-brake on just when a "cop car had drawn up alongside" (82). Obviously, if the police had caught him, his parents would not have known what happened when reading the local newspaper headlines the next morning, but immediately after the police had discovered him inside the car, so he might have imagined it all. His feeling of guilt, which is suggested by his desire/fear of being caught, doing something illegal, may have stirred his imagination. The unreality of the whole story is emphasised by the boy's focalisation, which is somewhat unreliable in its lack of precision. This impression is enhanced by the fact that the whole story is focalised through the boy's perspective, while he lies in bed, half-asleep, and without any authorial comments. Without the possibility of comparing David's version with the reactions of other characters in the story or with other versions of the story, it could all have been just a dream.

The idea that the boy's musings may be just a product of his feeling of guilt is emphasised by the last line in the story: "Birds were singing in the back garden, and even they seemed to quarrel and accuse" (82). His paranoid imagination has overtaken his perception and his thinking process and guilt seems to be haunting him.[10]

"Botticelli's Flytrap" (1993: 83-96) is a short story about the experiences of a young man under his twenties, named Brian, who works in a factory "making industrial ceiling tiles through the night" (83) while he fantasises about his future:

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10. As we shall see in Chapter Eight, the feeling of guilt has often been associated with hallucinations —and also with the figure of the double, as in Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

"rock star, artist, writer?" (83). This story recalls the harshness of "A Breakdown", as it shares the protagonist's distrust of huge —and dangerous— machinery. In the factory there are older workers, some "without their teeth in" (85). Some seem to be really tough, like McIver, who had "done some amateur boxing when he was younger" (87). This *topos* appears also in "The Fight" and in "The Face", intertexts that help create a broad working-class atmosphere of post-rural Scottish towns.

Brian carries a book, *The Story or Art*, because he had "failed the first year exam in the History of Art" at university (87). This adds an autobiographical element to the story, since Brian McCabe also worked in a factory while he was studying art at university. The intradiegetic narrator feels like a stranger during his first year: "I wasn't fitting in. I felt intimidated by other students, who seemed to know so much about art already. It was like I was in a foreign country and didn't speak the language" (88). And he also feels like a stranger at the factory. When he is offered a sip from the bottle of whiskey by a fellow worker, he "didn't want to drink, but [he] didn't want to turn it down either" (88). It seems that he does not completely fit into either the stereotype of university student or factory worker. In this case, the protagonist holds a liminal identitarian position, as he does not seem to belong completely in either place.

After watching some pictures of Boticelli's "Venus" and "The Rape of Lucretia" in Brian's art book, some of the men start a discussion on art: "'Whit's this—pornography?' 'Naw, it's art,' said Archie. 'Here Mick, which yin dae you fancy, the tits-yin or the botty-what's-it?'" (91). With this non-intellectual remark Archie is actually pointing at one of art's main driving forces: desire. His words bring to mind the reflection of the protagonist in "The Sunbather", as he is attempting to draw the curves of the woman of his dreams, that art has often been about —male— desire and that many classic paintings portray "[a] fuckin Venus flytrap" (91).

Some workers, like Jake, feel respect for the art book, but others think it has no worth. Jack advises Brian: "[y]ou stick in, son. You learn aboot art an that. Learn yersel a foreign language—Italian, French, Spanish and that. Then ye can fuck off away frae this dump. No like us. We're fuckin stuck here" (92). But others, like Mick, think "[i]t's the fuckin same everywhere", and studying art will offer him no way out: "what the fuck use is that gonnae be tae him? What kinda job's he gonnae get wi a degree in aw that fuckin stuff?" (93).

Even though Brian is very different from them, the other workers do not ignore him, they offer him a drink and talk to him; then Mike proposes to "[p]ut the fuckin art gallery away and […] have a game" (94). Brian feels good in the group, he likes being accepted by the others: "I was playing, that was what mattered. Conversation dwindled, and time seemed to congeal around the card game.

I was drawn into the repetition and the boredom of it—it was a kind of boredom for me, and it was irresistible" (94). At least he could share with the others the feeling of loneliness he got at the beginning of the story.

In contrast to Joe, the young boy in "Kreativ Riting" who sticks to his strictly-defined punker role, Brian (who is more mature than Joe) cannot be labelled in predetermined social terms, and he accepts his complexities and hybrid roles. Moreover, his identitarian plurality and his social and communicative skills allow him to overcome the differences between self-other(s) and to establish real contact with the others.

The next short story, "Peninsula" (1993: 97-107), could be said to provide a feminine perspective on some fragments in "Strange Passenger", since both share important autobiographical elements. Mary McAfferty works as a cleaner and is married to Ernie, a communist who had worked for many years at the pit. They have a son, Paul, who studies Philosophy at Edinburgh University. Again the topic of the questionable usefulness of studying philosophy, or art —or literature— is raised, not without some irony: "there's no demand for philosophers like what there used tae be", says Mary to "Mrs Logan the lollipop woman" at the paper-shop (99).

Like the son in "Strange Passenger", Paul comes home to visit his family and have tea with them, and like him, he has black pudding and sausages (12-13 and 100 respectively). While Paul is on his way home, Mary reads her horoscope: "It said somebody very close to her would act distant, or else she was to expect a visit from a dark stranger" (100). The grim forecast acts as a telling prolepsis of the growing estrangement the working-class woman will feel for her university trained son. What is more, by focalising through her, the readers will have direct access to the frustrations of a woman who does not share the men's interest in politics and does her best to keep their house nice and clean. As Paul comes in, Mary observes that he looks serious and distant, and she thinks immediately of the horoscope: "Somebody close acting distant. It was like that. It was like your laddie went away to university and a stranger had came home. There was something wrong but he wouldn't let on what it was. Maybe he didn't know what it was hissel" (105). This remark mirrors what the father in "Strange Passenger" thinks about his son, who is also studying at Edinburgh University, and his complaint that he cannot understand any longer what he says: "cannae unnerstan a word since he went tae the college" (17).

The title of the short story is taken from a word that Mary finds on a blackboard in a classroom she has been cleaning. She asks his son what it means, and he explains it to her:

"A peninsula is a narrow strip of land, projecting from the mainland into the sea. A peninsula is almost an island."
She felt glad she'd asked, and thought of something else:
"Is Scotland a peninsula?"
The way he stared at her when she asked that made her think she'd asked something difficult, something important.
"In a way it is, but 'peninsula' has also another meaning, Mum. [...] A peninsula is also a time in a person's life when they feel like a stranger among friends. They feel they don't really belong, but can't break away from where they are. [...] A peninsula is a very difficult time for some people, Mum. Sometimes they get over it, sometimes they don't and the peninsula goes until they die". (106)

The mother understands perfectly what his son means, and wants to ask him "if he was having a peninsula",[11] but then she sees he is laughing: "He took his hands away from his face and threw his head back and laughed and laughed and laughed" (107). Nevertheless, his mother believes "he wasn't happy. It was like watching a stranger laughing" (107). As she can no longer relate intimately to her own child, she believes that "[w]hatever it was, there was definitely something very far wrong with him" (107), without realising that there may be something wrong with her. Maybe she has some difficulties with accepting that his boy, Paul, is growing-up, that is, growing apart from her, as he has a life of his own in Edinburgh. Her job as a cleaner at the primary school, the vexations she has to suffer daily and her daily routines reinforce her feeling of worthlessness, so she feels lonely and is, no doubt, also undergoing her own peninsula.

The linking of both the young student and the mother "Strange Passenger" and "Peninsula" emphasises the analogies and similarities between both characters, even if they are in fact quite different persons in different contexts. The story points to the thoughts and feelings which are common to people, and thus the particular with universally human characteristics. In a sense, then, son and mother are not so strange to each other, they are really not so apart from each other as the first impression suggests. Moreover, this short story is an example of a feminine perspective of the "hard man" stereotype and on the Scottish masculinised working-class life, and adds richness, complexity and emotion to the whole picture.

While the figure of the mother is invisible in "Strange Passenger", it provides the dominant perspective in "Peninsula", casting a feminine outlook on the same family. The figure of the strong and stubborn father who was a miner and a political activist in the first story, is defined by Mary Afferty, the cleaner and housewife in "Peninsula", as follows: "He [her husband] had no idea of bettering himself.

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11. Those periods we have been referring to as "threshold periods" are defined by McCabe as "peninsulas".

He had wasted his life with politics and reading books and drinking and betting. It was a downright shame when you thought about it, a man with his brains" (101). The shift of perspective in stories makes the depicted scene(s) more realistic, in the sense that the same reality reveals itself as ambiguous or, at least, as being open to different interpretations.

The following short story in the collection, "I'm Glad That Wasn't Me" (1993: 108-120), tells the story of a tramp who had been entering the main character's restaurant "almost everyday for the past two weeks" (108). It presents the social problem of homelessness, alarming in some Scottish cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, as something quite real and concrete —a tramp who usually orders a cup of tea at your restaurant— and, consequently, as an issue which cannot be interpreted or judged objectively but only from a personal and biased perspective. McCabe uses perspective to expose somebody's inner contradictions, and to display the different reactions that different people —the owner, Gus, a student of English Literature called Paul, and Lucy, a beautiful young woman, who work for him— have towards this event which has become something usual during the last weeks.

Gus, the owner, "was sick of the restaurant, of dealing every day with food and with the public, but he was also sick of the street and the people who worked in it —including himself, maybe" (109). Most of all, he misses the "communal feeling" (110) he had found in the street when he opened seven years earlier and which he can find no longer. He now questions his decision of opening a restaurant, because business was no longer good, and he had to put too much energy into it, but feels unable to do more than he is doing already, in liberate himself: "He'd been here too long. He wanted out, but for the moment there was no way out: he had to make business pay to meet the outstanding bills" (110). He is tired of playing the roles of restaurateur, cook, maître-d'hôtel, accountant, dish-washer and even floor-sweeper. Like the waiters in "A Little Bit of Repartee" —analysed in Chapter Five—, he feels somewhat alienated after many years of work in front of the public and seems to be undergoing his own "threshold period" or "peninsula": "He was sick of the restaurant, of dealing every day with food and with the public, but he was also sick of the street and the people who worked in it—including himself, maybe" (109). The mixture of many years of work and routine, and the obligation to keep always his public role at the restaurant have exhausted him. Nevertheless he still tries to do his job with care and precision. This idea will be further explored in the next short story, entitled "Me is the Problem" (112).

A day like any other, the tramp comes in, orders a pot, and sits at the table in the corner, but after some time has passed, they realise that "[t]he man had

become a slouched statue of himself [and h]e had not poured his tea" (119). The man is dead, and while the ambulance comes, Gus "sat down on a chair next to him and held his hand" (119). He had seen plenty of corpses, but this had been his first real death, "the first real death he felt truly involved in" (120). Paradoxically, while he is feeling the reality of this event, he discovers himself already rehearsing this reality as a story to tell in a bar to his friends "[t]he others in the street […] waiting for him in Dr Jekyll's, the pub on the corner, waiting for the story of how the down-and-out had died" (120). He is aware that "[t]here was so little to tell" (120), he'd relate the event, "and in the pub, the other dealers would chip in with their anecdotes […] all relieved as hell that he was gone […] and relish every detail of the death, as if it concerned them" (120). But then, he concludes, "maybe it did concern them, all of them", after all (120). Because story-telling is indeed a way of sharing an event, even if the experience is betrayed by words and clichés, it can still communicate something important that can be communicated.

McCabe's skilful art resides in the subtle expression of a political or social reality through the identification processes activated while reading. Stories suggest, but it is left to the reader to extract conclusions. As Nicholson has put it, this invitation is encouraged by "the developing empathy through the angle of perception appropriate to a situated speaker" (2008). The readers have to enter some kind of dialogue with the texts, through the different perspectives, and extract their own conclusions.

In "Me is the Problem" (1993: 121-128), the figure of a man who works at a restaurant is further developed. As the nameless protagonist states at the beginning of the story, his public work implies a certain role-playing: "As regards who am I, I do not know. As regards which type of waiter —you tell me. For I have been so many waiters, now I do not know which one to be" (121). The waiter is Pakistani, and this fact, his foreign nationality, seems to imply another added mask: that of being considered a stereotype by the rest of people —as he will explain later, "[h]e has been described [in the newspaper] as balding, dark skinned, dressed in a black suit and white shirt, and is thought to be of Indian, possibly Pakistani origin" (122). Significantly, the perception of the image he projects makes him feel like an actor (122), who does not interpret his role perfectly.

The story, narrated by the protagonist, has a "strange" syntax, a foreign syntax, as the autodiegetic narrator is no native speaker of English: "I wish above all to write of Beauty, but I have no experience of Beauty. I do not know how to write the beautiful English sentences, I have tried to speak them for so long, but they sound ugly in my mouth!" (121). McCabe, being a Scottish writer, does

know a lot about the "properness" of the English language, and often uses Scottish vocabulary and syntax or rhythm to enhance the reality of his created world. Further, in his fiction as well as in his poetry, the author often consciously subverts the equation Beauty = "proper" English, replacing it by Beauty = creative or artistic use of language(s). He creates beauty with Scottish vocabulary and syntax, and is very much aware of the fact that Beauty does not equal Truth, as Keats famously contended,[12] and that our conception of beauty, like our linguistic choices, are the product of power relationships, as pointed out in Chapter One.

The narrator-character finds consolation for his incapacity to narrate his life story in beautiful English, on the reflection that: "It is more important that I tell the Truth", so he gets to writing some sort of confession in "the cash book from the restaurant" (121). He explains how when he was returning home, he found a shoe in the park, the shoe of a dead woman. The man is shocked and afraid and runs away. As his neighbours, who have never spoken to him before, ask him if everything is all right, he nods "yes yes, of course, everything is all right, it is a beautiful warm summer night, everything is beautiful in your country" (125). His use of fixed phrases in this response is meant to reassure his neighbours that he is happy and adjusted, that there is nothing to fear about his otherness. However, this involves suppressing his alien past, for, as he reflects, to talk about himself, about his past, "would be to tell you a dream" (126). Silently, addressing one of the neighbours, he adds: "You would not understand the dream, madam, and I would change it to tell it in your words. Everything is so cold in your country, even your words are cold" (126). Unable to narrate his life story in a foreign language, the man feels the physical and spiritual cold that surrounds him and is painfully aware that this makes him feel insecure, since his self-image, the image of himself projected by his neighbours, is that of a dangerous and alien Other. As he reflects, "I am like the bad actor who forgets his lines but must go on and play his part" (128). Language, identity and community cannot be separated, as we saw in Chapter One. Without an authentic voice to communicate, this man is ostracised and excluded, so he cannot establish a sincere and open relationship with his neighbours or his clients. His racial complexion, his language, his job, all seem to be labels that prevent others from relating to him as a complex and individual self.

Even though Scotland is becoming a globalised nation, racial, gender and social stereotypes are still at work in society, just as in the rest of the globalised countries in Europe. Obviously, as the story expresses, these stereotypes can become labels that prevent individuals from making real contact and which prevent them from establishing a dialogical relationship self-other(s). It is not exactly a real,

palpable otherness that scares the rest, but rather the monologic opposition Self *vs* Other. Stereotypes thus become a social mechanism based on a monologic conception of the self to classify and pin down such differences.

Just as "Me is the Problem" points at the inadequacy of language to express truth, so the following short story, ironically entitled "Say Something" (1993: 129-138), is full of silences and gaps the readers must complete if they are to understand what the female character wants to tell but cannot fully utter. The many silences in her flow of speech and thought demand interpretation, since they all seem to point to a strongly repressed traumatic story.[13] The short story takes place in a more or less implied physical place with two characters. The setting of the scene is virtually invisible, with the focus on the autodiegetic narrator's voice and on the development of her spoken thoughts. The title "Say Something" —which is a sentence the narrator-character, Izzy, repeats several times to Pete, her partner— is an imperative command to speak, directed to the addressee. Thus, the story anticipates from the very start its main concerns: the importance of speech and the difficulty of dialogue, and the isolation of human beings in contemporary society. Moreover, the symptomatic abundance of silences in Izzy's speech points to something else: she is not only angry with Pete; it seems as if there is something hidden in her story, maybe something she has repressed, something unspeakable that she cannot bring herself to express in words.

There is no description of the external world, but the reader can nevertheless construct a more or less abstract setting or space through Izzy's soliloquy. Firstly, we deduce that she —they, if we accept the presence of the invisible and silent addressee— may be in the street, since she tells Pete to stop running away, because she has found a doll, a doll that can talk. Apparently, they are returning home together after a party; she got drunk and they quarrelled. No further explanations are given about the particular circumstances, and this gives the whole story a general timing, location and setting that recall some of Beckett's minimalist spaces. This may disorient readers, in that they are not given clear coordinates to situate the story. Paradoxically, however, this spatial and temporal indeterminacy also allows readers to empathise with the characters and to develop a sense of intimacy with them. Thus, the presentation of a more or less neutral and general situation is used by McCabe to create a sense of universality out of a particular situation: a discussion between two lovers; in this case Izzy and Pete, with her rebuking him forcefully, because of his indifferent attitude towards her.

The whole short story is focalised through Izzy, who is the only narrative voice, and thus provides the only point of view for the action narrated. Every-

12. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" (Keats, 2010).

13. There are traceable twenty-two silences in Izzy's narration.

thing that is narrated in the story comes out of the narrator's mind, and the narration's rhythm, fluid without any interruption as if we were witnessing the very process of ideation, at first sight produces the illusion that everything that the character thinks, everything she wants to express, is actually uttered. One could say after a first reading that she is in total control of the narration, although she may not feel in total control of the situation itself, as her voice seems hysterical and irritated. However, her voice is in fact full of silences and stops; and as it emerges clearly and without artifice in the soliloquy —since there are no other voices, no place descriptions or contextual interruptions— the silences are inevitably exposed.

What is not said assumes, therefore, aesthetic properties in its symptomatic appearance —for example, the silences are made material through their graphical representation: ". . .", three dots with spaces between them— thus expressing what cannot be said, and drawing attention to the narrator's mental processes and needs. Eventually, the readers are forced to interpret those emotionally charged silences if they are to gain access to the story they hide.

From the very beginning it is clear that Izzy identifies the found doll —a doll that has the power of speech— with herself, since she constantly compares herself to it: "Hear what she says, Pete? She says she wants a dwinkie. I wanna dwinkie too, Pete" (259). The narrator constantly draws attention to the parallelisms between the doll's and her own desires and needs. The identification process is multiple: she identifies with the doll, the passive object, but at the same time she assumes the role of a fictitious mother —"Mummy"— and of a child in need —"I'm thirsty too, Pete" (259). At the same time, Pete is associated with the figure of a careless, indifferent, silent father: "Say something, will you, don't just stand there. Pete, you don't care, do you? You don't" (269). Pete expects Izzy to act as a passive and silenced housewife, her "formal little fiancée, [...] a wifeling. (261). But she is not willing to assume the prescribed role of objectified Other, of artificial and silent doll: "a play-thing. And a work-thing. And a sex-thing. And a little wifeling-thing. I can't be all those fucking things! Not anymore, Pete" (268). Now she has decided to speak up, to be a speaking subject. Izzy implicitly suggests that the role of silent doll is a patriarchal imposition in general. Feminist issues are further developed until they become an open comment on the role of women and specific women questions. The particular and anecdotal becomes much more general, so that in Izzy's personal story we find the story of many women in patriarchy.

These specific feminist issues are introduced in a very subtle way, as if they were something hidden that cannot be contained in the soliloquy, the abject which becomes visible, the silenced which has to be spoken:

Say something. Go on, tell me I'm a drunken slut. Tell me how terrible I have been. How mortified you were when I dropped my wine. [...] I spoiled it all, didn't I Pete? The tablecloth, the dress, the carpet . . . [...]. Ruined your career, didn't I Pete? (263-4)

The image of the dropping of the red wine reappears later on, so that the careful reader may feel tempted to reinterpret the red wine in a figurative way, as a proleptic symbol waiting to be unravelled as the story goes on. Izzy recognises that she did not act properly at the party but, then, she tells Pete: "A little red wine isn't so bad, is it, Pete? It isn't as bad as blood, not as bad as spilling blood, new blood" (264). After associating the image of the wine with the image of spilt blood and of new blood, Izzy asks her addressee: "It's worse, isn't it, to spill new blood? Get your old ethics textbook out and tell me" (264). Thus, readers are carefully guided towards the necessary interpretation of the —silenced— issue of blood.

Izzy recalls at this point how the fact of having the period when she went to school was completely silenced and made taboo, and how she was expelled for raising the topic.[14] For all this, Izzy cannot yet speak overtly about certain things that she keeps hidden, things she has learned to repress; and it seems as if those repressed feelings and thoughts were struggling to break up the narration, rising as silences and breaks, gaps in the (conscious) flow of narration, represented by ". . .". There is one silence which is not broken, though, there is something that she cannot say and needs to say, something so forcefully repressed that she cannot even utter the particular word that summarises the cause of her trauma: abortion.[15]

At the end of the story, the reader realises that Izzy had been pregnant and had had an abortion in order to allow her partner to achieve professional success:

You look like a ghost. Worse, you're as white as a thesis. An unwritten one, one that just can't seem to get written. That one you kept telling me about the *first time I got* pregnant, that one you had to get finished then [...]. Then we'll get a bigger flat, have a baby! (265, emphasis added)

At this point, the whole story has to be reinterpreted under this new light. The second reading offers a quite new perspective on Izzy's silences, symptomatic of her hidden trauma. Thus for example, the slightly nostalgic and innocent phrase she utters: "Look, it's one of those dolls that can talk, Pete, I used to have one

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14. "Can you understand what I'm telling you? That was why I was 'asked to leave school'. I raised the issue of the issue" (267).

15. "I want to keep it, to hold it, to care. I don't want to . . . You shouldn't make me have to . . ." (269).

exactly like this" becomes terribly painful, as the reader realises that she is referring to her lost baby (259). The constant presence of the doll, which is just an object, casts a new shade of meaning on the whole story.

The absent little girl who had lost the doll found by Izzy at the beginning of the story now acquires a much more dramatic meaning: "A little girl's gone and has lost her dolly, but you don't care, do you, Pete?" (268); once the issue of abortion has been raised, one could easily interpret that she is herself the girl and her baby the lost doll. The reader does not see Izzy any longer as a maddened, hysterical woman, but rather as a deeply traumatised woman attempting to cope with her trauma, a woman refusing to go on performing the role of silenced other in her relation with her partner: "You've pushed my bottom, Pete, and now it's time to drop the bomb. The only kind of bomb we women ever drop, Pete" (264). It may be the "time to drop the bomb" now because of the fact that Izzy may be pregnant again, as suggested above —"the first time I got pregnant" (265). This quarrel that recalls an event in the past is in fact an argument about their present situation and, consequently, about their future.Thus, the story asks the reader to interpret the silences in the narrative, and to identify the missing word: abortion. It is through the omissions in Izzy's narration that we can glimpse her truth. The identification of Pete, the addressee, with a general audience is made explicit: everybody has to listen and care about these personal and social issues. Women (and men) should be free to chose, nobody should be silenced, nobody should be forced to do such a thing, and this is something that concerns us all, as Izzy herself states: "everybody has to care" (269).

The fact that the narration has the form of a soliloquy has totally different implications from those associated to the use of direct interior monologue, since in the monologue there would be no addressee to listen to Izzy's story. And her speech, if not being heard and interpreted by somebody, would remain silent, in the sense that no communicative act at all would occur.

In conclusion, this short story engages in an ethical discussion, since it points to the importance of language as a social (healing) practice. By linking art to its social function, this piece of trauma fiction begs readers for an empathic and ethical reaction. This ethical reaction seems the key to making the "working through" of Izzy's trauma possible, since it allows for the transformation of traumatic memories into narrative memories, the first step in the healing of a trauma.[16] The end of the short story presents, thus, a liberated woman who has

made a decision; she leaves Pete, and a world full of new possibilities opens up, including that of having another baby. This optimistic reading is reinforced by the fact that McCabe's short story is intertextually indebted to Ernest Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants", as we saw in Chapter Two. In McCabe's rewriting of the story, the woman is allowed to give her own perspective on the traumatic events and to make a final choice, while in Hemingway's story, the point of view and perspective are those of the male. The short story's pointing to some female silenced issues and the character's speaking up could be extrapolated to other silenced issues and characters in the literary canon, and thus, the title, would be given a much broader meaning, addressed to all kind of people.

In "The Gargle" (1993: 139-145) the readers have access to the main character's thoughts while lying in bed, before getting up, as in the short story "Media Studies". In this story the protagonist hears "her husband gargling in the bathroom" while she thinks of Mike, an affair she has just had (139). The main character does not love her husband, Douglas, anymore. In fact, "[e]verything about Douglas had become irritating" (139). Their relation is no good, and "[w]hen they weren't arguing about something, they maintained a mutual, silent hostility" (140). There is no bond between them, no connection, no communication, just "a mask" (139). Even as they make love, which happens very seldom, only as he insists very much, he has a solitary climax accompanied with a "fornlorn groan of loss" (141). However, as she was having sex with Mike and he was approaching climax, she could not help thinking of Douglas: "Mike would moan throatily and all she could hear was Douglas gargling in the bathroom. At such moments she'd cling to him desperately […] and she'd hold on tight and charge into the orgasm like a hunted animal running for cover" (144).

She has, then, no real communication or pleasure with Mike either, while, on these occasions, he thought "it had been *really* good" (144). The story portrays solitary and unhappy characters who view their partners as strangers they have to live with. The protagonist of the story has the feeling "[s]he was living with a stranger. It was scary. Sometimes when he looked at her she had no idea what he was thinking or feeling" (140).

She, like David in "Media Studies", wished "she could go back to sleep", return to her dream about Mike (141). But the feeling of emptiness and guilt grew "inside her like a tumour" (145), and she could not get rid of the annoying gargling sound

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16. Drawing on Freud's hypothesis that the neurotics feel the "compulsion to repeat" traumatic experiences over and over again, in an attempt to achieve a retrospective mastery over the shocking or unexpected event that have brought about the neurotic condition. Pierre Janet, a contemporary of Freud, distinguished between traumatic memory and narrative memory, and contended that the

cure is achieved when a patient manages to integrate the fragmentary contents of nightmares of flashbacks by arranging them chronologically and situating them into a meaningful past of the individual life history (Whitehead, 2004: 140). See also Onega (2009: 197-98) on this.

that symbolises all her discomfort and unrest. The character seems to be absolutely paralysed and incapable of breaking with the situation in which she is trapped. She seems to prefer keeping the status quo, playing a constant role, and bearing the symptom of her unease, the gargle, with her, inside her head. As a consequence, as the short story's last lines predict, if she is paralysed and does not seek a way to solve her (their) situation, nothing will change, and "the gargle would never stop" (145). The roles that the characters play in their lives and the actions they take are what defines them and what will define their life stories.

"A Good Night's Sleep" (1993: 146-154) is the first of a series of short stories starred by the character George Lockhart. In this short story, Lockhart lies in the darkness of his flat, on the third floor of a tenement building in Edinburgh, listening to a soft an insistent sound produced by some kind of pressure on the door (146). The city of Edinburgh, especially the old city, is formed by old tenement buildings in which neighbours share stairs and sounds but live independent lives. As Brian McCabe commented to me on in a private conversation, the isolation of its inhabitants is not made lesser by this sort of communal living.

Lockhart has access to the outer world that surrounds him while he lies awake in bed in his lonely flat, through "the noise puncturing the quiet" from the outside of the building: "taxi-brakes, car slams, the Muzak from the late-night bar downstairs", the staff of Chinese restaurant, bands of students, tribes of drunks (146-7). But there are also noises coming from the inside of the building, from the neighbours, and "the people through the wall" (147). Lockhart is a divorced man and the father of a kid, who works as "a teacher of Communication and General Studies", and conducts with his students "a series of discussions […] on the Problems of Modern Society" (147). As he is trying to sleep he is disturbed by a noise he cannot identify, produced by some "kind of pressure on the door, ceasing and coming again" (148). As he finally gets up to find out what it is, he discovers a young girl, "in her earlier twenties, maybe younger", lying at his doormat, trying to sleep (149). She is a homeless and has "been sleeping in stairs for a long time" (150). They have a small chat and he offers her "the boy's room for the night", but she refuses and then he tries to get back to sleep. But as he is "[t]urning over and over in the warmth […] trying not to think about her out there in the doormat, he heard it again, the soft bumping sound as she leaned back against the door" (153). Thus, a certain bond is established across their respective solitudes: "She must be trying to get comfortable, or not comfortable exactly but into a position for sleep. Lockhart endeavoured to do the same" (153). Nevertheless, their situation is far from being the same, as she is coughing in the cold. As he "could suffer it no longer, he climbed out of bed again and switched the lamp", but

as he intended to open the door he heard his new neighbours, outside in the stairs (153). As he unlocked his door in time to catch his neighbours closing them, they tell him that they had just thrown out a "junkie sleeping in the stairs" and he simulates surprise (154). Then, they both locked their respective doors.

Lockhart, again locked in his flat, thinks that he should use the topic of homelessness as discussion subject in his next Communication class. Once asleep, he dreams of the soft but insistent sound again (154). A sound he cannot ignore or forget, just as the unhappy woman could not forget or ignore her husband's gargle in the previous short story. In both stories, there is a kind of paralysis that makes it impossible for the characters to undertake action, to give a positive turn to their lives or to help others in distress. The obsessive repetition of key sounds summarises their feelings of unease, guilt, loneliness and paralysis. Thus, they may be read as symptoms of their traumatised state: the unconscious produces symptoms that take the form of sounds like these,[17] the compulsion to repeat a given word or act, nightmares, flashbacks, etc.

Lockhart, like the woman in "The Gargle", or the one in "Peninsula", is a character who is caught in a paralysed state where the alienation he feels is like a negative strange element inside him, an otherness (in the sense of something-not-me) into the self. This does not mean that all the characters in the collection that are undergoing a "peninsula" or are feeling alienated or estranged cannot break out of their situation and feel happy. There are others who are able to exploit the positive side of strangeness, especially the protagonist in "A Dark Room with a Stranger", the short story which significantly gives the title to the whole short-story collection. Both types of stories, the more pessimistic and the more optimistic one, suggest the same idea: subjects must take their own roles and actively shape their lives, they have to overcome their traumas if they are to achieve a certain vital stability and happiness.

Lockhart appears again in the next short story, "The Long Way Home" (1993: 155-166). In this story, he is teaching "History of the Working Classes", and one of his student points out that "so far he hadn't touched on the plight of working-class women during the period in question" (155). After the class Lockhart decides to read a chapter on the topic, which triggers off a nostalgic memory of a picture of his mother. As he returns home late in the afternoon, he comes across "an enormously fat woman who lay on her back across the pavement, howling loudly"

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17. As we shall see, in the short story "The End of Something", included in *A Date with My Wife*, the protagonist, who is also vitally paralysed after his girlfriend has broken up with him, also had this problem and was "hearing too much" (McCabe, 2001: 143).

(156). Another woman, who is with her, asks him for help and explains that "[s]he's upset" and does not want to get up (157). He tries to help, but Margaret, which is the fat woman's name, goes on howling and refusing to move. After a long struggle, they manage to stop a taxi and get on it, the three of them, as Lockhart is shocked into action when Maureen, the other woman, suggestively says: "Ye cannae leave me like this! Help me get her back to the flat! Help me an Ah'll gie ye what ye want!" (159). As they arrive at the flat, Margaret, who had finally fallen asleep in the taxi, is put to bed by Maureen, who offers him a whiskey. She tells him that she has worked hard for everything she has got, that she is divorced and has a kid —just as he does. She also tells him that Margaret had been fired, and that, two days later, she had received a letter from her fiancé, Dennis, telling her that "he's decided tae break it off wi her because o how he's no ready tae settle doon yet an that" (163). Margaret has no money, no fiancé and "she thinks might be pregnant" (163). Quite depressed she accedes to go out with her friend that night and some guys at the disco called her fat. The poor woman could not bear all that and "then in the street she couldn't stop howling" (164). The situation of this unemployed, poor and pregnant working-class woman is indeed quite desperate.

Lockhart and Maureen continue talking about their lives and then, feeling both quite lonely —Lockhart's need had been exposed in the previous short story: "It was months since he'd slept with anybody and now he didn't know which he needed most—the sleep or the anybody" (148)—, they go to bed. As in "The Gargle", orgasm is "like running for cover", and "Maureen cried out with what sounded like exasperation", while Margaret had started howling again (165). After sex, Maureen fell asleep, but Lockhart could not sleep because of the howling; and he "went on listening to it, until it sounded the strangest thing on earth, this woman sobbing her heart out in the box-room next door, unsuppressible syllables of something which couldn't sleep, had never found words for its condition" (166). Lockhart thinks that it is as if this woman were howling for every woman who suffered in the past, and in the present, and he cannot suppress that sound in his head: "Even as he drifted into sleep he could still hear it, that something that couldn't speak, swelling and subsiding, voicing its elongated vowel of despair from century to century" (166). As the last two quotes from Margaret suggest, Margaret's howling is the pre-verbal expression of the unspeakable and unendurable suffering of women in patriarchy, an ages-old hair-rising, wounded-animal-like sound coming from the female collective unconscious, expressing a rage and pain that cannot be conveyed by words.

Loneliness may be hard both for Lockhart and for Maureen, but Maureen's situation, being a working-class woman, is even worse, as she has no place to stay or a job to feed her possible future child, whereas Lockhart has a job and it is her wife who is looking after his son. The story points out the extra difficulties that, for example, working-class women have to undergo.

In the short story "Where I'm From" (1993: 167-177) George Lockhart is with his son Ben. In the first short story where the character appears, "A Good Night's Sleep", the readers are told that George Lockhart is divorced from Elaine and has a kid, and this continues to be the case in the next short story, "Where I'm From" (148 and 176 respectively), where he appears with his son Ben. In this sense, it might be stated that readers are offered a series of episodic short stories dealing with the same characters and circumstances, with each story presenting different aspects of Lockhart's life.

Progressively the readers get to know more about the main character's family, about his ex-wife and their son. In "Where I'm From", Lockhart wants to show Ben where he comes from, the place where he had grown up. But when they visit the place, he realises that everything has changed, has deteriorated: "Off in the distance, beyond the railway, there was nothing. There was just an emptiness where once the silhouette of the pit wheel had risen above a dark bing" (166). This pit of his childhood brings to mind the nameless boy in the first short stories in the collection, "The Face" and "The Fight". In the light of these stories, it could even be stated that are we now offered some kind of grown-up version of one of those boys in the earlier short stories. They were boys who lived in some rural town near Edinburgh, and who then left to study at university, as happened to the protagonists of the central stories of *In a Dark Room with a Stranger*, "Peninsula" and "Botticelli's Flytrap". From this perspective, it could be argued that the whole collection of short stories works as some kind of fragmented *Bildungsroman* made out of memories, but, of course, this is not a novel. The collection starts and ends with the topic of childhood and is suffused by ideas of alienation, pain and guilt, but each story approaches these topics and motifs in very different ways and has meaning in itself.

In "Where I'm From" it is not the perspective of the younger generation that we are presented with, but that of the older one, the perspective of a father. Lockhart seems to do his best to try to communicate with his son and he takes him to those places that were important to him as a child, in order to show him "where his father came from, where his grandparents had lived —in hope that this would give him a stronger sense of something: his background, himself" (168). Actually, however it is Lockhart himself who expects that "remembering small events of his own childhood" will help him make sense of his life, as he is undergoing a vital crisis after his divorce and the breaking up of his family, as readers of "A Good Night's Sleep" and "The Long Way Home" (169) would know.

As Lockhart wants to show Ben "[t]he pit where my dad —your grandad— worked", further associations are brought to the fore. He insists that he should

see the pit, but Ben is not interested; then he orders him to get out of the car, and "he could sense his son looking up at im with alarm" (171). This passage resembles the rite of passage that the boy in "The Face" had to undergo as his father brought him to the pit. When he is told to go down, the boy "didn't move. He didn't say anything, hoping his father would lose his patience with him and change his mind" (45). In "Where I'm From" the boy looks at his father "in disbelief, the wide shallow pools of his eyes threatening to spill their tears again. Even as he lumbered out of the car he kept his eyes on his father, as if expecting him to smile, tell him he was joking and that he should get back" (172). Especially in this story the reader can sense the generational gap,[18] embodied here by the relation Lockhart-Ben, existing between the boy in the first short stories in the collection, such as the ones in "The Face" or "The Fight", and the boy in the latter, such "Where I'm From". Lockhart's son, Ben, has grown up in a big city, with divorced parents, with lesser fiends and with more commodities, whereas Lockhart —like the boys in "The Lipstick Circus", "Killing Time", "The Shoes", "The Fight", "The Face" and "Spirit, Tinder and Taboo"— have experienced a different childhood, in a small mining village and in a larger family. Naturally, as their experiences have been different, their character and world-views are also different.

Lockhart is aware of this generational gap and decides to show Ben what his life as a child had been, but the reality is that time has irremediably passed, and that those places are no longer what they used to be when he was a child. As there is no possibility of showing this reality, the only thing left is to try to communicate to his son in order to share his memories with him. As Lockhart brings his son back to Elaine's house, Ben tells him that his mother had also been taking him to the place where she grew up before going to college, another "dump" (175), as Ben remarks with contempt. Lockhart's ex-wife, Elaine, feels the impulse to get closer to his son through her childhood memories. But, as his father is leaving, the boy, with his laser gun in the hands, says: "This planet is where I'm from. What a dump!" (177). The boy does not identify with his parents' past or with the places they were born in. He rather prefers to be an inhabitant of planet Earth, expressing his more contemporary anti-parochialist, consumerist and globalised upbringing and character.

The following short story, entitled "Not about the Kids" (1993: 178-187), further explores the difficulties of a tired marriage, especially for children. As the title anticipates, the story does not provide the children's perspective on these difficulties. The main character seems to have had an argument with his wife,

Ruth. Actually they had not had an argument, rather their tense situation collides: as Ruth is doing the dishes,

> [t]he plates were crashing and colliding in the sink and she was smashing handfuls of cutlery down on the metal draining board. He'd asked her what was wrong with her. Nothing, she'd said, but in the tone of voice that seethed with resentment. (179)

Then they start arguing until he "smashed the fruitbowl and stamped out of the house" (180). He takes the car and drives dangerously in the night rain until he stops at a pub, far way a from home: "There were only a few people in the pub and he was conspicuous as he walked to the bar. He was a stranger, and they didn't often get strangers here" (182). This emphasis on strangeness could not only refer to the character of the people in small villages, but also to the feeling he has of loosing control of both the situation —his conjugal relationship— and himself —"I am totally out of my mind" (184). Then he calls home and talks to his wife; neither of them knows exactly what is happening:

> "What's it all about?"
> "What?"
> "This. What's it all about?"
> "What do you think it's all about?"
> "That's what I'm asking you."
> She sighed with fatigue and said wearily that she didn't know. He was glad she didn't. (184)

Both feel lost and tired. When she says that she wants to have some rest, her husband tells her a bedtime story about two kids who were madly in love: "These kids are so in love they manage to go on for a year, more than a year . . . [...]. But [...] they're young, too young really to know how to go on being in love, if you know what I mean, and after a while something has to happen" (185). He further explains that "there comes a point when the boy begins to feel restless, he feels the need for change . . . He's changing anyway, he's growing up, and the whole world is changing round about him" (185). All these changes have provoked in him a crisis, as he is undergoing one of those "peninsulas", and feels lost and alone. As he makes clear in his little story, there is no real difference between the feelings of the young boy and the grown-up man for their beloved. The danger lies in the need for change. For both, the enemy of family harmony is simply monotony, boredom. It is the stagnation of routine that kills love and brings about anger and restlessness.

As the husband further explains, the boy and the girl split up, as the boy needed a change. But after a while he comes back to her, for he feels miserable

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18. Similar to that in "Strange Passenger" or in "Peninsula", but one generation later.

without her, and they go on together again; but "[i]n fact, nothing is ever quite the same after that brief separation", and then "the girl begins to feel restless, she feels the need for change . . ." (185). The threat of family disruption and loneliness seems thus to be a temporary engine of renewal and strengthening of their relation, the element that makes them value what they have and what they could lose, but, as he says, "once the threat was there, it would never really go away" (187). Innocence cannot be recovered.

As they finish their conversation, he gets out in order to have some fresh air, and the street "reminded him vaguely of his childhood, although he had never lived in such a place" (187). Strangeness, childhood and growing up are again associated with each other in this story. In the cool and clear night, he imagines being a kid again, as he feels nostalgic for the innocence and purity of childhood, of the boy who knew no routine, who did not need a change, who did not know the pain of love, or the weight of adult life.

As we move from the first to the last stories, it becomes clear that *In a Dark Room with a Stranger* is a collection about growing-up, or rather about having grown-up and feeling a certain nostalgia towards childhood. The last short story, entitled, like the collection, "In a Dark Room with a Stranger" (1993: 188-199), offers some hope in this respect. It also starts with an argument between husband and wife: "Although she had her back turned and he couldn't see her expression, he knew she was angry by the way she was frying the liver" (187). They argue about money, and that brings about another issue:

> "We can't afford it."
> "Here we go. Money"
> "No wonder. You don't think about what you spend when you go out. Jenny needs a new coat for the winter. So does Lucy". (189)

They argue a bit, and then the husband asks her: "Madeleine, what's happening? We're like strangers", and she answers: "[s]trangers would give each other more" (189). Thus, she points to a key element in their relationship: as in the earlier story, routine seems to have engulfed the couple's relationship. Later that night, as Madeleine has gone out and he is alone at home with the kids, the phone rings; when he unhooks it, "[n]obody answered, but he felt sure there was somebody there" (193). "He couldn't tell it was a man or a woman, but it sounded very near, almost as if he'd heard himself clearing his throat" (193-4). This familiarity in strangeness, or uncanniness, comes from his wife, who has called home to talk to him about the difficulties their relation is undergoing. When she eventually manages to break the silence, her husband shares his feelings with her: "I get to

the point where I don't know who I am. I'm just a parent. I feel like a stranger to myself" (195). She feels the same too, "[i]t's called baby-stress" she explains (196). He wishes he were there with her and, as she asks if they are "friends again", he proposes to "be strangers. You said strangers would give each other more" (197). She accepts the pact and hangs up. By these means, they would be themselves again, he thinks. "At least, they would be strangers of a kind again, and they would talk as only strangers are free to" (199). He then starts thinking about her, thinking of all the things he wants to tell her, the stranger, and so, "although he was utterly alone, he was still in a dark room with a stranger" (199).

Thus, the pejorative connotations of stranger and strangeness are thoroughly subverted. In the light of monotony and routine, strangeness is redefined as the renewing force for change that would restore the necessary progression in the individuation process. In this sense, McCabe's redefinition of otherness echoes Emmanuel Levinas' definition of the ethics of alterity as a movement from Self to Other, triggered off by love and aimed at looking at the Other in the face and accept him or her utter Otherness. Only through an ethical approach to the alterity of the other(s) and by a solid relation self-other(s) can the individual feel in harmony and complete.

As we have tried to show, the whole collection seems to provide some kind of revision of different "peninsulas" or "threshold periods", such as childhood, adolescence, marriage, fatherhood, separation, reconciliation, etc. It is worth noting that, as the collection became published, the author had himself experienced what it was to become a father, as McCabe and his wife Dilys Rose had had two children.

In this collection, childhood is approached with certain nostalgia, as the nature of children's problems was different from the problems of adults. As we have seen, some stories explore childhood perceptions, related to discovery and to the process of growing up. The encounter with new experiences, with the Other, is associated to discovery of world and self, to the exploration of communication with others, and to a process of maturation and readjustment. The young adolescent boys discover their changing bodies and new social environments, which lead them to experience a liminal self still under construction.

As they enter adolescence, and their self image is more clearly defined, they have to keep on looking for their place in the world. In many short stories, the protagonists are still negotiating their identity. Some of them do not completely fit into a single clear-cut stereotype, such as he protagonist in "Botticelli's Fly-trap", who is both a university student and a factory worker. In this case, the protagonist holds a liminal identitarian position, as he does not seem to belong

completely to either places. This liminality points to the generational gap existing between the generation of the parents in "Peninsula", which could be that of Brian McCabe's parents, and that of the parents in "Where I'm From". As commented above, McCabe belongs to the first generation in Scotland that had access to higher education. This educational fact may have fostered the existence of the generational gap presented in stories like "Strange Passenger".

As the collection moves to the end, maturity reveals itself as a threshold period too, where the world is displayed as a complex web of events and relations. Some adults undergo an identity crisis as they feel lonely, paralysed and overwhelmed by an alienating and monotonous life. Nevertheless, the collections' general impression is that their "peninsulas" or crisis can be healed by means of their relation to others. Some characters are able to exploit the positive side of strangeness, as happens in "A Dark Room with a Stranger" or to actively change their lives by breaking out of the stagnation of routine that kills their love and happiness.

The definition of the stranger and the relation self-other(s) will be given a further turn of the screw in McCabe's following short-story collection, *A Date with My Wife* (2001).

Chapter Seven

A DATE WITH MY WIFE – THE SELF AND THE STRANGER

A world is as many worlds
as it takes to make a world.
(Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*)

Brian McCabe's third collection of stories, *A Date with my Wife*, was published in 2001. The collection consists of eighteen short stories, some of them quite experimental. The style is more inventive, and the humour sharper than in the previous collections. The stories keep questioning identity issues, the mechanisms of the mind and the relation self-other(s). Once again the characters in the stories undergo a certain crisis or are considered deviant by normative society. The narration is mostly heterodiegetic, but the events narrated are focalised through the main characters, thus giving them their own imprint. As in the earlier collections, McCabe's expression of emotional perceptions and affects is precise and moving, begging for a highly empathetic response from the readers.

"Welcome to Knoxland" (2001: 1-14) is an experimental short piece of fiction in the form of a web-site text. John Knox (*c.* 1510 – 1572) was the leader of the Scottish Reformation, hence the name "Knoxland" for a site related to Presbyterianism. Presbyterianism is a theological trend related to Calvinism that emphasises the sovereignty of God and the authority of the Bible. The Scottish Reformation logically affected the concept of Scottish identity, as can be deduced from the strong presence of the notion of guilt, associated to restrain and self-denial, that can be found in post-Reformation Scottish literary classics, such as James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) or Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).

McCabe's short story begins with the reproduction of ten search results of the word "Knoxland". In them, Knoxland is mainly associated with words like "guilt", "sex", "shame", "Scottish punishment", "Scottish Presbyterian repression",

"self-denial", "salvation", etc.[1] There is no narration here, just a list of words and sentences, supposedly found on the World Wide Web, which suggest that religion and pornography are closely linked, if not part of the same phenomenon:

> 72% SOUTAINE FETISH AND CONFESSION BOX LIVE ACTION
> Resume: Choirboys abused by priests take the host in their mouths in more ways than one — LIFE — crucifixions and extreme Catholic perversions — stained-glass windows of nudecelebs — SPICE GIRLS bare all — MADONNA blowjob — the three main tenets of Calvinism — monstrous regiment of women vid. feeds. http//www.guilt/shame/perv/knox.html. (3)

Moreover, Calvinism, Scottishness and the split self are explicitly and humorously linked: "69% KNOXLAND Resume: Welcome to Knoxland the hottest Presbyterian site on the net — Click here for kalvinist klingons wee free skandals — latest news: The Great Wee Free Split Personality" (3). These associations suggest that the Scots may be mentally ill —squizophrenic, perverted, absurd— due to their Calvinist influence. And, thus, Scottishness and perversions are associated too:

> 98% WEE FREE hot shame of the body Scottish Sex Perversions […] CLICK HERE for extreme hardcore presbyterian HAIR SHIRTS self-denial lithographs — men fuck sheep bestiality — cattle buggery and very original sins. http//www.guilt/shame/perv/knox.html. (1)

The sentimental kailyard representation of rural life is substituted by "cattle buggery" here, as a way of aggressively destroying Scottish stereotypes through humorous exaggeration.

Then we enter "Welcome to Knoxland. The Hottest Presbyterian Site on the Net" (2001: 4). There is an option for Protestants, one for Catholics, the option of leaving for Atheists ("exit here"), and a "free preview" for Agnostics (5). The site offers sections such as "CHAT TO GOD", "KALVINIST KLINGONS" (that is, the Calvinist extraterrestrials[2]), "XXX SELF-DENIAL", "FREE CHURCH SKANDALS", "KISS MY PAPAL RING", "MONSTROUS REGIMENT OF WOMEN" (which refers to John Knox's controversial text, "First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women") or "REFORMATION FETISH", among others (6).

The site combines religion with sex, and (historical and religious) scandal with a mixture of acid humour, which is both absurd (as in the inclusion of the section "TRANSVESTITE ELDERS"),[3] and tremendously critical of the church (as in "FREE CHURCH SCANDALS") and of the Scottish past ("MARY GIVES HEAD"[4]) (6). The next section, printed like a web page, offers readers the keys to "become one of the elect" (7). Clients are asked to fill in whether they are or are not protestant and whether they want or do not want to be saved. Then, they have to type their credit card number, e-mail address and password. Naturally, salvation is not offered free of charge. Those who do not join and pay are condemned to "ROAST IN THE FIRES OF HELL" (7).

On the next page there are four accesses: for the "CHOSEN", the "DAMNED", a "FREE PREVIEW" and an option for those who "ACCEPT THE TENENTS OF PREDESTINATION", who can click anywhere (8). The hosted image cannot be seen but is labelled as "happy well-adjusted adult" (8). On the next three pages a "knoxland — free tour" is offered, with several options for the customer to click, such as among others,: "I am a happy, well-adjusted adult and I wish to leave Knoxland now"; "I am a Catholic who wishes to be converted to Knoxland"; or "I am a screwed-up Scottish alcoholic with deep problems to do with my protestant upbringing. I am already a member of Knoxland", which overtly suggests that Protestantism has deeply damaged the Scottish identity (9). As a consequence, all those accessing "Knoxland" are mentally damaged, unhappy, and screwed up.

On the next page the tour quotes a fragment on the killing of Cardinal Beaton in 1546: "After insulting his corpse, they hung the body over the castle wall for the inhabitants of St Andrews to see, and held the castle against the government. This sordid affair was just the beginning" (10). This sentence is literally taken from a real web page on the figure of John Knox,[5] recounting the murder of Cardinal Beaton by some Scottish nobles, who also took possession of his castle at St Andrews. This event has been considered the fuse that lit the Protestant revolt in Scotland.

The next stop in the tour is: "THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT OF WOMEN PICTURE GALLERY", where the user can click to censor the images of "Mary Gives Head", "Floating and Sinking Witches", "Dirty Historical Underwear" or "Servile Sandwich Makers", among other options. One of Knox's most polemical literary work is "First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of

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1. There actually exist web sites where religion is ridiculed through sexual associations, violence and humour, such as The Landowner Baptist Church (Anon., 2010). And there are also books in pulp style, such as *Welcome to Jesusland. Shocking Tales of Depravity, Sex and Sin* (Harper, Bradley and Walker, 2006).

2. Klingons are a warrior race in the fictional universe of the series *Star Trek*. It is worth noting that there are also some *Star Trek* intertexts —such as the Enterprise— in the short story "Interference", included in McCabe's first collection, *The Lipstick Circus*.

3. Meaning priests who wear a cassock, which is in fact a kind of dress.

4. Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots was one of the political and theological enemies of John Knox's Reformation project.

5. http://www.higherpraise.com/preachers/knox.htm

Women, a resentful publication", written while he was in Geneva, against the feminine government of the two Catholic queens, Mary of Lorraine, regent Mary I Queen of Scots (1542-1587), and "bloody Mary", Mary Tudor, Queen of England and Ireland (1516-1558), who was succeeded by her Protestant half-sister Elizabeth I in 1558.

Then there appears a "Browser alert" that tells the user that "[t]he application is running low on memory" (12). It denounces the historical amnesia that seems to have dimmed the brutalities occurred in the name of God during The Middle Ages. There appears also a paranoid warning: "The information you send to this site may be intercepted by a third party in the Free Church of Scotland" (12).

On the next page there appears another window that informs the customer that "the server named 'god.saviour.com.tw' cannot be found", and that there is either a misspelling or "the server no longer exists" (13). The atheist and Nietzschean allusions in McCabe's other collections echo the meaning of the messages generated by this cold computer: God-saviour cannot be found. On the last page of "Welcome to Knoxland" it is stated: "You don't have permission to access godgraceforgiveness.html"; the reader/user will not have access to god's forgiveness, as God cannot be found (14).

In this short story, the influence of Presbyterianism in the configuration of Scottish identity is both asserted, as both religion and a damaged Scottish identity are constantly associated —the Presbyterian emphasis on guilt and sin would have provoked in the Scots a dislike of themselves. This would have led to the assumption of a double standard —which would have driven them to assume a split self—, denied through the histrionic exaggeration of some sexual perversions. Nevertheless, the historical facts mentioned emphasise a more serious interpretation; Presbyterianism in particular and Catholicism in general are portrayed as violent ideologies that have had too much power for centuries.

Brian McCabe's father declared himself an atheist, as commented in Chapter Two, so the author was not directly influenced by a strong religious upbringing. Nevertheless, this fact does not imply a disconnection from religion, as nobody can escape from the cultural and historical context —as is suggested by the short story "The Fight". Chosen or not, these historic and cultural elements influence a nation's character also influence its individuals.

The second story in the collection, "Something New" (2001: 15-22), is a futuristic short story reported by a heterodiegetic narrator. Jack, the protagonist of the story, has been searching for his ancestors on the World Wide Web, and he finds out that "they'd got their own parliament in 1999" (15). "Strange", he thought, supposing "it couldn't have achieved very much, coming so late in the day —just

a decade before the Unification of Europe in 2009" (15). As the story is set in the future, to talk overtly about the Scottish political situation at the turn of twenty-first century, when the collection was published, minimises the political charge of the story, since the futuristic context allows for the expression of a half-concealed opinion on the issue of Scottish nationalism without being too polemical. Nevertheless, it would seem clear to the careful reader that the story conveys a certain critique of Scottish nationalism in the second millennium, as it goes against the grain of the European tendency towards globalisation. Scotland, with five million inhabitants in 2001,[6] would not have the political strength it has nowadays in Europe, if it were not united to the power of England, as Scottish Prime Minister Gordon Brown's present role in Europe shows. Consequently, Scottish identity seems to be redefined under these contemporary circumstances.

Moreover, the story is ironic about the issue of Scottishness, which, in the future time of the story, appears as something artificial and even ridiculous. The main character has access to his ancestors through *The Human*", an Orwellian Government that provides all the information and goods required through the web, and where users can buy anything from music to genetically-chosen body implants. Jack has done some research in order to choose those (artificial) parts that he might have inherited from his ancestors: "His male ancestors —from Scotland, before the Unification of 2009, the Genie had been pretty clear about that— were paled-skinned people" (17). Jack has chosen a new "3-Gs —genetic genital grafts", an "authentic" Scottish cock that "was certainly a vast improvement on the one he had been born with" (17). The traditional association of Scottishness with masculinity is here parodied.

There has been a tendency in Scotland to focus on mythical kailyard men and, in the last decades, on dysfunctional urban male characters, who relate mostly to other men at work or in bars. These stereotypical "hard men", forged by a harsh environment, are usually coupled with stereotypical feminine passive mothers and housewives. Nevertheless, in the last decades, this "hard man" stereotype has become ridiculous, as Scottish men do not suffer epic losses, as in the film *Braveheart*,[7] but rather live their little daily routines and conflicts. The female stereotype has also been shattered in contemporary literature, as the works of the writers cited in Chapter One show.

If we understand the self as a performing entity, then, masculinity becomes pure performance, just a role (or roles) to be played. In "Something New" there is no real "masculinity crisis", and there is no "Scottishness crisis" either, as, in the

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6. "The 2001 census confirms a fall in Scotland's population to 5,062,011" (Finlay, 2002).
7. Hollywood film based on the life of the Scottish hero William Wallace, directed and played by Mel Gibson in 2005.

postmodern era, both concepts are portrayed as commodified constructs with can be chosen, acquired and then discarded. There can be, however, an identity crisis, as the self is being liberated from many labels and assaulted by undecidability.

The bodily changes that the protagonist orders "were so many, it was sometimes difficult to remember which parts of his body were his own" (17). A univocal and fixed identity associated with the integrity of the body is thus erased by this posthuman pick'n'mix identity, something that could be extrapolated to the whole of Scottish society, which has become a melting-pot of different cultures and even races, as pointed out in Chapter One.

The artificiality of the character's body and the rapid and constant changes he compulsively acquires, eventually affects his sense of self:

> His face had undergone so many changes he sometimes accessed and enhanced ancient facial images of himself, searching for an original face. It was impossible to find his real face, because ultimately all that came up was the face he'd had as a baby, before his carers modified it according to their version of it, according to their tastes. (17)

Echoing Dr Jekyll's bafflement after his metamorphosis into Mr Hyde, the protagonist feels increasingly "disconcerted by the way a new body part could be grown with such alarming speed" (16). The rapid growth and change of his body becomes an emblem of the threat of instability and change affecting the (Scottish) body politic, since both the individual and the political bodies are constructs reflecting the ideology of normative social groups.

Ironically enough, the protagonist's obsession with the reshaping of his body is based on a nostalgia to recover the past, and the impossible and naïve attempt to get at the origin of things: "It was difficult to remove himself from their version of him, without a very expensive search" (17). This nostalgia paradoxically leads him to opt for an artificial recovering of his —imagined— cultural and genetic past: "He laid the pills out, poured two glasses of highland water, selected some ambient Scottish Music—it sounded like a personal alarm device that wasn't working right—dimmed the lights, then pulled the sheet over his breasts" (20). His pathetic attempt to reproduce artificially his "true" Scottish cultural and genetic past, like Dr Jekyll's attempt to liberate his repressed id by chemical means, only produces a monster. Without the constrains of the given body, as opposed to the chosen body(ies), gender identity is blurred with bodies taking hybrid forms. Thus, the protagonist's new breasts "were modest, small and firm and pink-nippled, with a delicate purity that made him think of rain and Scotland" (18). With these delicate pubescent breasts, which have sensorial memories, the protagonist can feel those that could have been "his own mother's breasts" (21), and he experiences/remembers the/his breasts feeding a baby that could be "his own baby image" (21).

For all its apparent strangeness, this futuristic society continues to make the same mistakes that characterise our present society. It tries to artificially recover the past in order to gain a sense of self or to establish some identity in terms of permanence and fixation, thus adhering to and reinforcing the racist and nationalistic myth of (Scottish) origins that defines Scottish identity in only white, masculinist terms.

As Jack[8] states, genetics "was the future", but "[w]hat most people didn't realise was that it was also the past" (2001: 16). As he explains:

> When you asked the Genie—the gene-searcher—for a new body part, the search offered you something from the past, even if it used genetic elements from many different generations. What you were getting was a finger from the past, if a new finger was what you had ordered. (16)

The new is, thus, the old. In history, as in writing, the newest is nothing but a recombination of the old basic ideas, elements and units.

In a futuristic environment where real touch has been replaced by virtual contact, some miss the old physical intimacy: "People didn't do real touch, or at least they didn't usually admit to it, but Jack was sure it was more common than *The Human* would have people believe" (19). As he thinks about trying "something new" with her wife Jill, maybe some real touch, she proposes him "to choose a baby" (22). A new human being made out of old genes taken from the Gene Bank. The banning of affects this scene conveys is strongly reminiscent of the dystopian world of George Orwell's *1984* with its prohibition of love and sex and its constant remaking of the past in the Ministry of Truth. Even though the short story is about the coming of something new, there is a strong sense of loss in the story, but it is not the loss of identity that the protagonist feels nostalgic about, but the loss of real touch, of direct and physical self-other(s) relation.

The next sort story, "Losing It" (2001: 23-31), continues exploring the relation of human beings with the virtual world. It presents the story of a man —"who depended on computers for his living" (23)— just after he has smashed his computer monitor in a fit of anger. The reason for this act of violence was that he had lost all the "detailed work" he had been doing in the last months: "Almost a year's work had gone, had vanished into cyberspace in a split second" (24). The title thus refers both to the losing of information and the losing of self-control:

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8. It is worth noting that the man in "Where I'm From", included in the collection *In a Dark Room with a Stranger* (1993), is also looking for his past in order to gain a sense of self, and is also called Jack.

"He stabbed a finger at the monitor, as if to say it had got what it deserved. Then he began to shudder with a strange laughter" (24). As in many other stories by McCabe, (temporal) madness or the relaxation of the superego are associated with non-social laughter, that is, with uncontrollable hysterical laughter: "it burst in his chest like an underwater explosion and his throat was crowded with it as it rushed to his mouth and spilled out in a froth of giggles" (24). As in other stories, such as "Strange Passenger", laughter possesses the individual, it takes control, or, rather, the individual no longer feels in control of his or her behaviour: "Possessed by this glee-less laughter, he marched back and forth in the room, shaking his head and flailing his arms as if having to swim upstream" (24).

Even if "[h]e was completely fucked" because of the incident and because he would have to do all the work again, "like Sisyphus and his stone", he believed that there was a choice: like Sisyphus,

> he can either jump out of the way and let his stone go, or he can stay where he is and keep pushing, in which case the stone will crush him in a downward path. [...] And every time Sisyphus gets to this point, it occurs to him that there is this choice between life and death. (25)

This existential thought can be quite liberating for, although it may sound somewhat pessimistic, in fact it is not, since the "rolling a fucking stone up a fucking hill" means choosing life over death (25).

The protagonist thinks that "[m]aybe now it was time for the downhill stroll" (26). And he admits that "it felt good to have let his anger out, let go of it completely" (26). He resets his mind, so to say, in order to start again. At this point, like other McCabe's characters, the protagonist gives the particular incident that has brought him to a "threshold position" a paradigmatic entity. As he recognises, "maybe it wasn't the computer, maybe he'd lost it with himself" (26). After this, readers may interpret metaphorically his remarks about the machines that have to be fixed —the broken interface, the car—, the "limbo files" (29), the "noise" (29), the messages that do not "get through" (28), the "lost signal" (31), as referring to his mental state, to his existential condition.

The computer without interface or Jack phoning his own number and getting his own voice on the answering phone could thus be interpreted as signs of the isolation he is experiencing. As he wants to tell her daughter Scarlet that he will be late, he picks up a phone, sends a numbered message to her pager, and wonders: "Would Scarlet have her pager switched on anyway? Would she switch it on, when she got out of school? Would she remember the number code? Would the message get through? Even if it did, what difference would it make?" (28). Real communication with the others is, then, as difficult as ever in the age of communication.

The story's protagonist still believes that his work cannot have simply vanished and that it "had to be out there somewhere still" (29). However, as he phones his own number again and gets the answering phone:

> He heard his own voice trying to sound as neutral as possible as it told him: "Hello, this is John. I'm sorry you got the machine. If you have a message for me, Louise or Scarlet, please wait until you hear the tone." He waited until he heard the tone. He was about to leave the message when he lost the signal completely. (31)

Losing the signal means to him losing himself and losing the line and the machine. Even though he differentiates between himself and his voice on the answering machine, he cannot differentiate the loss of the signal from the loss of himself.

It is left to the reader to interpret this loss as a Luddite break from his dependence on machinery or as the death of his answering-machine *Doppelgänger*. In both cases the protagonist would have made himself free from the splitting caused by contemporary technology. But it could also be interpreted that what he has lost is in fact real human contact, the ability to establish a dialogue with an other and with the other(s) within himself. He would, thus, have lost his mind too, as he would not be able to establish any contact and would be absolutely isolated. As mentioned above, Brian McCabe's stories have a tendency towards ambiguity and usually allow for various readings and possible interpretations, which prevent either-or interpretations and suggest the existence of various layers of meaning.

The next short story, "The Host" (2001: 33-44), starts precisely with the difficulties a man has to communicate with others: "SO. HOW. WAS. The. Film" (33). His utterances seem disconnected, and the subject is aware of this dissociation. As in "The Sky", included in *The Lipstick Circus* (1985: 109-118), mental, physical and linguistic dissociation go hand in hand, since language is one of the basic means by which the self establishes contact with the other(s):

> I was speaking in words but I didn't know what I was saying and my voice sounded thick and moronic and my mouth was dry and my heart was hammering and my skin felt like a cold chamois leather as I touched my face with my fingers —no doubt the way I would normally touch my face with my fingers if I was asking somebody about a film they'd been to see. (2001: 33)

The man seems to be agoraphobic, since he does not dare to go to the movies, although he likes films: "what was it like to go and see a film, to sit in a place in the dark with . . . a crowd of other" (37)—, and this not only affects his relation to others but also his self-image, as we shall see. His attempts to communicate obtain no immediate answer from the others, he harbours doubts about himself and about the reality of his perfomative actions: "Had the words come out of my

mouth at all or had they come out sounding so strange that no one could make sense of them?" (33).

The dissociation he feels materialises in the form of a fantastic creature that appears in the room: "a man with two heads" (33) who is, apparently, only observable by himself, as the other men and women in the room, brought by his friend Jim, act "as if nothing was out of the ordinary" (35). The materialisation of this two-headed man then be said to represent the fragmentation of the protagonist's self. The fact that the other characters act as if nothing extraordinary were happening adds a touch of uncertainty in line with Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic,[9] as readers never know if the double-headed man is really present or if he is just a figment of the subject's imagination.

The protagonist of McCabe's short story cannot ignore the presence of the two-headed man, as his smaller head starts talking to him, with "the dark eyes look[ing] directly" at him: "That was very interesting. [...] I don't mean what you were saying, but the way you were pretending to cough. Most people don't cough unless they have to, do they?" (38). This naturalness of the strange creature's behaviour and the story's "fantastic realism" echoes Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Double* (1846). Its protagonist, Mr Goldyadkin, who is extremely self-conscious and a bit paranoid, encounters his double at the office where he works, sitting on a seat opposite him. Utterly paralysed by shock, he starts doubting his own identity, whereas his double sits peacefully in front of him (Dostoevsky, 2003: 53). Later, his double visits him and tells him his long story (66).

The main character in "The Host" is also paralysed and astonished, since the smaller head, which seemed to him an inert appendix of the bigger hear, is in fact "a thinking and feeling being [...] a person" (McCabe, 2001: 40). The smaller head tells him that he was once a normal head with a normal body, but that the other bigger head, called Douglas, had appeared one day and that he grew out of him, usurping "the other's head place" (41). As in Dostoevsky's *The Double* or in Nikolai Gogol's "The Nose" (1846)[10] the apparition of the double destabilises the subject's identity and threatens with supplanting him and usurping (destroying) his identity. But the subject cannot react and does nothing. He, like Goldyadin, is a passive and pusillanimous character (Herdman, 1990: 107)

As the protagonist's friends and the two-headed man all go to their respective homes and he is left alone, he "breathed more freely" (McCabe, 2001: 43), and he

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9. "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature confronting an apparently supernatural event" (Todorov, 1975: 25).

10. Gogol's story —where Assesor Kovalyov wakes up one morning without a nose, because it wanted to be independent and live its own life as a whole person— mixes social satire, fantastic humour and aberrant psychology (Herdman, 1990: 99).

observes that the room "became familiar again" (43). The man's bond with the world is damaged, and it is then, when he is feeling "exhausted by the evening's events" (43), that he sees his reflection jump out of the bathroom mirror (43). As he is astonished to observe,

> It was there, no mater how often I wiped the condensation from the mirror with my sleeve, a mushroom-like swelling on my neck: the face was not fully formed, but already I could make out the mildly interested eyes and the constant, rather vacant smile. (44)

His self-image is affected by his mental state, by his agoraphobia and his problems to establish a bond with others, and his double seems to be as paralysed and "vacant" as himself.

In the light of the protagonist's chronic paralysis, it could be interpreted that the main character is traumatised by the apparition of his double, who is also paralysed and inert. The excessive presence of doubles —two pairs— could be interpreted as a parody on the *topos* of the double, so relevant in Scottish literature.

Alasdair Gray has also parodied this *topos* in "The Spread of Ian Nicol" (1956). In Gray's short story, the literality of the Scottish split self —"'No doubt about it, Nicol,' said the specialist, 'you are splitting in two down the middle'" (Gray, 1997: 4-5)— leads to a grotesque proliferation of doubles fighting with each other, which could be interpreted as a *reductio ad absurdum*, whereas in McCabe's story, it seems to lead to a silent and passive and absurdly unnoticed proliferation of doubles. In this line, the short story could be read as a parody of the figure of the double where the protagonist's passivity, as opposed to the activity of Gogol's and Gray's protagonists, is being criticised.

As already pointed out, Scottish identity became deeply affected by Presbyterianism. In the realm of literature, the weight of guilt, associated with repression and the control of the passions, became associated with the *topos* of the double. As Claudia Eilers has explained, the fear of the imperfect self produces a fearful self, and shame produces aggression (2007: 68). The imperfect self would split, under the pressure of guilt, into two parts or characters, one, the materializsation of a shameful part or character, the other of shame. From this perspective, the short story's protagonist would incarnate his passive and fearful facet, and his tiny double his shameful part.

We will further analyse the *topos* of the double in Chapter Eight, and will pay special attention to the ways in which the figure of the double, as developed by Hogg and Stevenson, is reworked in contemporary Scottish writing. As stated above, religious dogmatism lies at heart of this *topos*, like the splitting of the self into an ego/id binary pair based on the opposition of good *vs* evil.

The short story "Petit Mal" (2001: 45-53) is also focused on the impact of Presbyterianism on the self. The protagonist of the heterodiagetic narration is a young man who tries to finish his thesis on "predestination and the eternal recurrence" (45). As he recognises, he had grown up with the theory of predestination of Presbyterianism. At present he is somewhat disoriented since his girlfriend had left him some months ago and he is stuck with his writing, so he decides to go to a farmhouse to have some peace and finish his dissertation (45). His intellectual work logically affects his perception of the world:

> He watched the rain sweeping over the landscape in a series of waves, a pattern that must be caused by something. If everything was caused by something apart from a First Cause, then everything was random. Or rather, everything formed a kind of logical pattern, but this pattern was based on something quite random and unpredictable, if it was based on religion. (46)

The character's observations of external reality allow the reader to deduce his personality. He "had stopped believing in God", but he is nevertheless obsessed with pattern, and cannot help asking himself about the meaning and origin of patterning (46).[11]

The young man in "Petit Mal" suffers from fits of epilepsy that throw him into spells of chaos and darkness, during which he cannot control or remember anything: "'Chaos is everywhere, and we fool ourselves if we think that our order has made sense of it.' […] The thoughts surrounding this sentence in his mind, the ones he had yet to put to paper, had been erased forever by the fit" (47). After being "robbed of consciousness" by his *petit mal* while being outside the farm, he feels like "a blind man in a strange room", a recurrent image in McCabe's fiction, as the title of the previous collection suggests. As a child, "he'd thought they [the fits] were caused by God, that God was sending a bolt of electric wrath through him as a punishment for something he'd done or had not done" (48). Calvinism, strongly based on antinomialism —a doctrine that defends that salvation "depends not on faith but on justification by grace" (Herdman, 1990: 69)—, believes that madness and epileptic fits are caused by moral depravity. When he recovers, he returns to the farm and sees "that the entire room was different" (McCabe, 2001: 49). He even finds a note that said. "I don't hate you. I love you" (49). The character does not realise he is in the wrong house, in the neighbours' house, and cannot help interpreting the whole misunderstanding as part of his destiny (49). Although he eventually realises his confusion he continues "clinging to the impossible" and still believes "that this was a message for him, even if it had been

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11. This obsession with pattern and randomness is also shared by Brian McCabe, as he has devoted many a poem to chaos and order, especially in his latest poetry collection, *Zero* (2009).

intended for somebody else" (50). Thus, for all his lapse of faith, the protagonist's Presbyterian upbringing shows the force of its hold on his unconscious.

Later, his neighbour leaves him a note in an envelope with a key, asking him to water the plants while she is away "for a couple of weeks" (52). As he enters her house again, he has the sense "that this mistake was something predestined. Something had fated him to come into the wrong house" (52). He takes this as some kind of allegory on life and concludes that in that house, where "[t]here were so many good things […], it was going to be difficult to make a choice" (53). As in "Losing it", life is understood in existentialist terms, as having to make choices. He, like Camus' Sisyphus or the man in "Losing it", can choose what he wants in life, even with a Presbyterian upbringing.

The next short story in the collection is entitled "Conversation Area One" (2001: 55-67). The story deals once more with the topics of madness and communication, like other short stories in *The Lipstick Circus*. A woman visits his son, Michael, who is in a mental asylum. A "boy who thought he was God" tells her that her son "is in Hell" (56, 57). "Michael is in Conversation Are One", she is told (57). As she arrives there, she finds him "sitting with his eyes shut and his earphones on" (57). His mother, Mrs Houliston, believes "a personal stereo was a very good idea for somebody with mental problems. It was just a way of cutting himself off from the world around him and hiding behind whatever he was listening to" (57). This remark acts as an ironic proleptic comment on the inadequacy of the mother's principles and thoughts, an idea that will be further developed in the story. The mother's prejudices against madness —"it was terrible to think he might be mad. There had never been any madness in her family" (57)—, and the intelligence and apparent sanity of Michael —shown through his reasoning and puns, perceived by the sensible reader and ignored by the blunt Mrs Houliston— are constantly fostered by the narration's concealed irony. This irony can be found, for example, in Michael's reaction to the present she has brought him, a jigsaw with a picture of Van Gogh's "Sunflowers", painted during one of his spells of madness:

> When he took it out and saw the picture on the front, he looked like he was reading his own death sentence.
> "What's the matter, Michael—d'ye no like it? It's called 'Sunflowers'. It's by Van Gogh". (65)

The ignorance and stupidity of the mother contrasts with the education of Michael, who had studied philosophy, especially Nietzsche —like the character in "Strange Passenger"—, something that, according to his mother, had "changed him into somebody you couldn't have a normal conversation with" (59). Michael

had forgotten what day it was and, as his mother points to a notice board where it is written that "it's Thursday", he tries to explain her that "it always says that", but the mother does not understand what he says:

> "Oh . . . ye mean it always says it's Thursday? Ye mean it's wrong?"
> "Not always, Ma."
> "That's a relief. Ye mean it says it's Thursday when it's Thursday."
> [...]
> "It says it's Thursday when it's Thursday, ma. But it isn't always Thursday. But since it always says it's Thursday, it's not always wrong. It's once a week, Ma —when it's Thursday". (61)

She does not get the point and the conversation becomes absurd. The absurdity is not caused by the boy's madness but by their miscommunication, which is due to the different intellectual perceptions of the characters. Both mother and son have different ways of thinking and feeling, so that madness is associated with incomprehension and isolation. This idea is emphasised by the fact that he is deprived of his walking privileges because he "had a disagreement about the nature of human condition" with a religious nurse (65). The mother cannot understand what he means as he says that "god is dead", as her answer shows: "He did not, did he? That's a terrible thing to say. It should be banned, if ye ask me. [...] He's eternal and everlasting, everybody knows that. Even I know that" (66). Clearly, in this short story, the issue of sanity has to do with the acceptance of general assumptions and behaviours.

The mother lives in a prescriptive either/or world: "Either it's right or it's wrong" (61), while the son, who has read *Beyond Good and Evil*, cannot abide by her simplistic moral categorisations. It is this radical difference in world-view that makes communication between mother and son impossible.

The narrator's ironic remarks on the mother's position might be read as a rejection of dogmatism and the defence of ideological freedom in the definition of moral categories such as good and evil. The world cannot be reduced to strict either/or categories, as there are events —like the Thursday-note on the board, or a watch that has stopped working and that, consequently, is wrong except twice a day—, that beg for a reconsideration of the world in post-Newtonian both/and terms. But the fact is that the young man who sits in the quiet conversation area is powerless and cannot really make himself heard or establish a dialogue with others. He is, thus, an isolated misfit who has been unjustly put in a mental institution because of his inability to adjust to the normative values of the ones in power. In short, McCabe's short story —like in "The Full Moon" and "Normal and the Man"— highlights the power-relations at work in mental institutions and puts into question the objectivity of diagnosis and the treatment of mental illnesses.

"Waiting at the Stairs" (2001: 69-73) is the story of a man who needs help to go down the stairs every time he goes to a sauna set in a basement, because he is in a wheelchair. On one occasion, as he is waiting for help, he collides with another man who is hurrying down to the basement (70). Both feel so embarrassed, that the crippled man does not ask him for help. As he reflects:

> In an ideal world, he might have asked that man to bump him down the stairs. There were going to the same place for the same thing after all. But of course he couldn't ask him, because no normal, able-bodied man would want to see themselves as being in the same position as somebody like him. (70)

Society is based on the exclusion of "abnormal" individuals, and most people would not want to identify with outcasts and feel empathy towards them, as happens to the man at the chairs. Some try to give him money as if he were a street-beggar, just because he sits there waiting outside in the wheelchair (71). But they would not accept him as an equal, as a non-stigmatised individual. Consequently, those apparently "normal" individuals who may also feel lonely would not unproblematically accept the man's desire for trying relief from loneliness by having sex.

The man feels bad for having to wait at the stairs until one of the girls bumps him down, or, after the service, by having to wait for the taxi to take him back home, because there in the street he feels exposed, "a spectacle for people who were passing by" (71). Yet he prefers waiting there alone instead of "being unloaded from a taxi and dumped into a sauna", like a human parcel (71). The fact is that he can see disgust on people's faces as they see him waiting there, "[n]ot disgusted with him. Not disgusted with the sauna. What they were disgusted with was the idea of somebody like him having sex" (71), as if he were an animal or a monster.

This points to the stigmatisation of certain subjects —physically deformed people, mental patients, drug addicts, prostitutes, homosexuals, etc.— who are unable to conform to standards that society calls "normal".[12] These individuals must constantly strive to adjust to their precarious social identities. Moreover, the image they have of their selves/themselves must daily confront and be affronted by the image which others have and which they reflect back to them. Significantly, only a prostitute playing her role will allow him to feel "normal". He describes what happens in the sauna with such an ease that it is clear that he feels most relieved by the normalcy of physical contact with her:

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12. Edwin Goffman has pointed to the link between strangers and stereotypes as follows: "There is a popular notion that although impersonal contacts between strangers are particularly subject to stereotypical responses, as persons come to be on closer terms with each other this categoric approach recedes and gradually sympathy, understanding, and a realistic assessment of personal qualities take its place" (1974: 68).

Nina asking him where he'd got the tan, and he'd tell her, at the solarium, then she'd ease this T-shirt over his head and she'd see his medals. She'd lift them by their coloured ribbons over his head and place them carefully on the locker beside the bed, then she'd oil her hands and get down to work. (73)

The medals he is wearing suggest that he is a war veteran, a hero who sacrificed himself for the common good and who is now repelled by the society he served. This adds a bitter ironic touch on everything, as it is revealed that the (moral) monsters are the hypocritical members of society rather than the handicapped and marginalised individual.

The main character does not look for authenticity during his intercourse with the prostitute, as his experience shows him society's constant role-playing, with the "normal" others constantly acting artificially towards him just because he is a cripple. Natural role-playing will do him some good for a while, but then "he'd be here again, waiting for the taxi" in the outer world, exposed and feeling uncomfortable again (73).

Thus, the story denounces the hypocrisy of a bipolar and contradictory society which turns its back on those who have served it, and which creates structures and institutions to help those whom it marginalises. As McCabe has stated in an interview, this bipolarity or antisyzygy cliché is a reality, as there is the very polite and civilised Edinburgh of old ladies in fur coats who look through their net curtains at what is going on in the street, and there is also the "underbelly of Edinburgh", the marginalised sort of Irving Welsh side of Edinburgh (see Appendix). But as the short story suggests, these roles are not dependent on individual ethical values, they are rather constructed by power relations.

The next short story, entitled "Out of Order" (2001: 75-79) has a different style, unusual in McCabe's work. It takes the form of a soliloquy directed to a friend who never speaks, and whose reactions are never directly described, so that readers can only deduce that he is present because of the unanswered questions the speaker asks. Thus, it resembles the situation fictionalised in "Say Something". Theoretically, conversation typically requires two roles: that of listener and that of speaker, and both should be interchangeable in order to achieve its aim of exchanging of thoughts and feelings. Without this, self and other(s) will not relate to each other in a satisfactory way.

The autodiegetic narrator tells this implied narratee an anecdote about his friend "Eddie Leckie", who has "got a problem" (75) or rather, several:

a drink problem […], he's got problems with his relationships with women […] he's in debt […] an he's wondering what the fuck his life's about. And he hates his job, cannae stand his boss. And he's still got this problem wi his upbringing and that,

I mean his dad was a transvestite Elder in the Wee Free Kirk […] he's still a fuckin Presbyterian prisoner. (75)

As the reader may deduce from this unflattering description made by his "friend", Eddie is a Scottish man in crisis. The narrator went with Eddie and Tony to play snooker, but as he further explains, snooker is "a play for two people", Eddie was not very happy about their being three.

The narrator goes on talking without any interaction on the part of the addressee. He continues explaining that it was the narrator's and Tony's turn to play, Eddie went to wait at the bar. When the game was over and they joined him, Eddie asked them: "where's ma jacket? Where's ma new leather jacket? (78). They did not take it with them, and Tony says he is sorry, but the narrator says it was not their responsibility and that he is "seriously out of order" (79). He does not care about Eddie, nor does he care about the listener: "Yes, I am aware that it is late. But d'ye no want to hear what happened? I mean, are we communicatin here or what? I know we can communicate in the morning. But we'll not. We'll not communicate in the morning" (77).

The narrator does not understand what communication or friendship mean, as he cares nothing for the others. Consequently, there is some hostility and egoism reflected in his narration about friendship. His selfishness contrasts with his final words —"What? Sorry. I've been telling you this because I love you" (79)—, which makes the character even more hypocritical and unreliable.

If the previous story dealt with social hypocrisy, this one deals with individual hypocrisy and selfishness. The lack of communication seems to be one of the maladies that worsen his problem of socialisation, as he is cannot empathise with and relate to the other(s). His personal crisis cannot be solved without giving up his selfishness and reconciling himself with the world. Again, the story seems to ask for respectful relations based on an ethical engagement self-other(s).

The next short story "Shouting it Out" (2001: 81-88) is almost the opposite. We are offered a beautiful story about the beginning of love, understood as the development of intimacy between two individuals: "He could do it in the dark, with Christine there beside him, surrounded by everybody just sitting there watching the film, when the only sound was the soundtrack, so loud it was like somebody whispering in your ear" (81). The young boy wants to shout something funny in the cinema in order to impress his girlfriend and to make her laugh. The paradoxical intimacy of the cinema allows the character to get closer to his girlfriend, Christine, while they are surrounded by other people. As suggested in "The Host", cinemas are places were people can establish some kind of intimacy, were they can react communally to a film.

So he enjoys the idea of shouting something funny during the film, and that she may hit him as part of the joke. As he explains, "[t]here was something very light and playful about it —it made him feel bigger and stronger that he was" (81). This is some kind of routine where each plays a role, a flexible role based on the pragmatics of communication. As he starts "laughing silently to himself" —because of the thought he has had while remembering the film *The Time Machine*,[13] which had provoked him nightmares about the Morlocks— she asks him what it was he was laughing about. As he refuses to tell her —because "it was too long and complicated" (84) to explain—, "she pretended to be annoyed", as if she were acting (84). This acting or role playing is a way of interacting, of communicating:

> Acting was something they did together all the time. [...] It wasn't like real acting, the kind of acting they did in films. It was a different kind of acting, because the feelings were real, but it was like the two of them were trying the feelings on size, like cloths to see if they fitted, and to see if they suited them. (84-5)

The role-playing helps the characters test and improve their pragmatic responses to each other. As the boy further explains, [m]aybe it wasn't all acting, even if they didn't know how they should do it or say it" (85). When establishing a sentimental relation, they must open to the other, and play the role required by the situation: "She acted sad; he acted concerned. Or he acted moody and she acted cheerful. Or she acted annoyed and he acted like a fool to get her out of it" (84-5).

While they are together, the boy paradoxically feels as if he were "acting in a film but the part he was playing was himself" (86). The feeling that he is being himself makes him comfortable and willing to share his happiness with the whole world: "sometimes when he was with her he wanted to shout something out but he didn't know what", because the feeling is new, it is not something he has tried out before (86).

The evolution from childhood to youth and the discovery of the relation self-other and of self and world are closely associated in many of the author's short stories, as we have seen, especially those in the previous collection, *In a Dark Room with a Stranger*. In "Shouting it Out", the boy who is watching a movie in which David Bowie falls to planet Earth[14] suddenly realises he feels the same:

> Sometimes he would even feel that he really had just fallen to earth, like when he looked along the row and saw all the faces staring up at the screen. It was like seeing people for the first time. Not one at a time, the way you usually looked at them, but sitting there in a row, like a line of aliens, like the zombies of paradise. (87)

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13. Film based on H. G. Wells' homonym work, directed by George Pal (1960).
14. *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976) by Nicolas Roeg.

The boy feels sometimes out of place, or rather, astonished by the world, a feeling that is spurred by his fertile imagination. Adolescence could thus be interpreted as a "threshold period" where individuals can feel disoriented and are discovering a new adult world.

At one point, the boy wants to tell her girlfriend something he'd never told anyone else, but the words do not come out, until they part, and she gets on the bus: "It was only when the bus started to pull away from the stop that he panicked inside and he didn't care who heard as he shouted it out" (87 and 88). He has tried to establish some profound communication with the girl, but he still is too shy to tell her directly in the ear. He finally manages to break his shyness and runs the risk of mockery, by showing his inner feelings in public. By doing so, the boy has gone a step further in his self discovery and in his relation to his girlfriend: as their bond has been spoken aloud, it becomes something more real and adult.

The following story, "Out" (2001: 89-94), presents the experiences of an adolescent boy who feels trapped in his environment. He lives with his mother in Murkirk, a small town near Edinburgh. It is Friday evening and he is getting ready to go out. He is preoccupied with his appearance and argues with his mother about it; she wants him to wear a tie, but he does not want to "look like a schoolboy" (90).

Their relation is not at its best, as the irony in his stream of thoughts shows: "[h]e didn't want to knock her over accidentally—she could bang her head on the corner of the table and die. The jury would find him guilty of manslaughter" (90). His father has died and he thinks his life is "pathetic" (91). In order to go out, he has to catch a "bus to town, meet Louise at the station, then take the train to Edinburgh" (91). "[T]he important thing" he thinks, "was to get out, go somewhere else, get away from Murkirk for a couple of hours" (91). This desire to go away from a little village is present in many of McCabe's stories, and many of the characters manage to do so it as they go to college in Edinburgh, as the author himself did.

As the boy is waiting at the bus stop, two other characters appear: Jimmy Kidd, nick-named Gym-kit, and Caspar. The boy knows that he is going to have problems with them. They call him "[t]he queen of park Street" and "Queen Victoria", suggesting that he is not macho enough (92). As they hit him and his lip is bleeding, he worries about having "to go through the whole stupid episode again" (93): "She'd sympathise, but it would just confirm something for her [...]. He'd been telling her for so long that he wasn't like that, that he just liked clothes and wasn't into being macho. Maybe tonight he'd tell her the truth" (93-4).

The careful reader will realise at this stage that the boy's homosexuality is not an easy thing to make public in a little village like Murkirk, and that he would

have to go away in order to come out of the cupboard. The boy knows that "[w]hen he came home, Gym-kit might be there again" to hit him, but "[i]t didn't mater, none of it mattered. All that mattered was that it was Friday night and he was out" (94). The feels clearly trapped in the small village because his deviation from normative heterosexuality condemns them to the margins of society. At least he can escape from the claustrophobic environment for a while.

The title, as in most of McCabe's stories, gains a new meaning as the reader finishes the story. The boy is a marginal figure, an outsider, in the village because his sexual orientation is seen as an otherness in the light of the masculine image of the Scottish normative male. The stereotype of the Scottish macho is thus revealed in this story as terribly oppressive and negative for the boy's —and Scottish homosexuals— self-esteem. As other short stories such as "Anima" show, McCabe endorses Jung's view that men have both masculine and a feminine facets, and also the position of gay and lesbian critics that sex and gender are not the same and that sex does not respond to predetermined physical features, but rather respond to complex cultural and social rules and taboos, which are by definition changeable and provisional. As McCabe's fiction illustrates, the world and human beings are never monologic and fixed, by dialogic, hybrid and mutable.

The character in the next story, "Relief" (2001: 95-101), also looks for a temporal escape or relief from his daily routine. The protagonist of the story is a priest who is going to a sauna in Edinburgh, like the crippled character in "Waiting at the Stairs". He tries to justify his act to himself: "The sins of the flesh are innocent, compared to some" (95). Some of his —Presbyterian— thoughts are similar to those of the young man in "Petit Mal": "Could you have thoughts without thinking them in the first place? Maybe thoughts arose of their own accord, or were set in motion by external forces" (95). He feels different from the rest of people, and attributes this to his celibacy: "He suspected it was something that set him apart from them, had always set him apart. But what was that? [...] It was a kind of respectability people didn't trust. They could recognise the thin, astringent smell of his ruined celibacy" (96).

This is why he does not feel bad for having sex with prostitutes, rather, he feels how "[a] delicious guilt ignited his innards" (96). He finds his transgression pleasurable, but as he goes that Sunday to get his ration of relief —"relief from his position, relief from the instinctive distrust people felt towards him" (98)—, he did not feel as happy as usual. As he entered the "inner sanctum", he realises that this time, the music, the massage, ... "[n]othing was working" (96). As the girl asks him to turn over, "[h]er voice had a shadow of something in it, behind

the professional politeness" (96). "There was something wrong here. She seemed nervous", he thought (98). The reason for this is that she knows him, she knows he is a priest: "Is that slow enough, Father?" (99). He then feels terribly uncomfortable, as if he were on a "doctor's examination table" (99). She tells him to relax, "Father", and even though he comes, he knows "[t]here would be no relief" for him (101). He cannot escape his position and how people see him.

People do not trust a priest who has sex with prostitutes because this fact will shatter the firm image they may have of a priest, as a celibate man who devotes his life to God and to helping the others. The girl feels uncomfortable because she knows him and because she probably will have heard him talking about the sins of the flesh. In this new situation, she has come to know another facet of him which clearly contradicts his holy facet. His hypocrisy makes her feel uneasy, and her knowledge, their physical relation, makes him feel guilty and uncomfortable. The Father's discomfort is due to the fact that his own self-image is altered by the girl's perception, as our self-image is dependent on the gaze of the other. The intimacy of the situation has changed their social roles —client-prostitute and Father-parishioner—, and have become much more complex and blurred. The encounter, then, undermines the neatness of their social roles and presents them as complex individuals with many facets. Therefore, the story invites readers to go beyond the hypocrisy of certain either/or social positions, and to consider the different levels of role-playing and stereotypes, the contradictions of individuals and the complexity of human relations.

Another story that analyses the influence of one's profession on the definition of the self and the relation self-other(s) is "An Invisible Man" (2001: 103-110). The main character in the story is a detective who works catching shop lifters. He watches the clients even "before the doors were opened: pressing their hands and faces against the glass, a plague of moths" (103). But, as the character recognises, "you couldn't look at them like that, [...] you had to get in among them, make yourself invisible" (103). The detective has to become part of the public, play the role of client, in order to observe them without being noticed, maybe as a realist writer would do to get inspiration for his characters.

He suspects an elderly lady who is at the pay-point, "[a]n amateur tactic. It was easy to catch someone with a conscience, someone who wanted to be caught" (104). He follows the lady, who had taken some seeds, and she asks him to arrest her, "[b]efore I do something worse" (105), feeling terribly guilty. The lady reminds him of his mother and he feels pity as she wiped "the tears from her eyes" (107). She opens to him and tells him that her husband had just died, and that the funeral had led her into "financial hardship" (107). The man cannot help being

empathic, as her mother had also died not long ago, so he lets her go, absolving "her with a wave of his hand" (107).

The story is full of religious symbols, as the detective's upbringing seems to be influenced by religion, even though he does not seem to be a religious person. Thus, for example, as he takes the lift, "he realised that the lights weren't working. The doors hissed together and he was alarmed to be shut inside a box of night. He crossed himself without thinking, although he hadn't done so for years" (107).

His mental associations make him imagine "that the lift was his coffin and that he was descending into the earth" (107). While he is in the dark, he thinks about his mother, about how she "died in public, in a ward full of strangers" (109). As the lift stops, he imagines he "could be in the confessional, except that there was no one to confess to" (110). "All you had was yourself", he concludes (110). Then, the lift ascends, still in the dark, and he imagines himself "like a slow missile launched into the night, or a soul departing the body" (110). Once again, the influence of Presbyterianism on a Scottish character is made evident. Not in vain, "he'd turned his back to priesthood" (108).

The man, whose work obliges him to be invisible for the rest of people, associates the elevator with his mother's death, and this association makes him wonder about the (public) visibility of her death. The encounter with the lady has reminded him of his mother and may have triggered a feeling of guilt, for not having become finally a priest, and maybe because of his mother's senile dementia —"She was right—they [the people at the hospital] were spies" (109). The thought of death, there in the dark elevator, makes him think about his loneliness —or invisibility— and he seems to realise that he is afraid of dying alone.

"A Date with My Wife" (2001: 111-123) is a story that starts with the main character in bed, like the short stories "Media Studies" and "The Gargle", both included in the previous collection, *In a Dark Room with a Stranger*. The protagonist has just woken up and remembers that he "didn't have to get up" (111). The readers soon learn that he had been looking forward this day all week because he had agreed with his wife to have sex (111). To the protagonist, this is "a rare pleasure to be savoured" since both of them are very busy, and have to timetable it (117).

The protagonist, who is an advertisement canvasser, seems to be rather stressed as he cannot help thinking about the last storyboards he had "put together for a series of mouthwash ads" (112). As he recognises, "It was the first time in weeks that I had been alone in my own home. I should be feeling a sense of luxury, but I felt guilty" (115). His responsibility as father and husband, as well as his work, seem to have created a strong routine, and the breaking of it makes him feel guilty, although he does not exactly know why. The feeling of guilt suggests

again the Presbyterian influence on these Scottish characters, while the transformation of affective and sexual relations with his wife into a scheduled routine points to the dehumanisation of life based on duty and the Puritan idea that "God helps those who help themselves".

The male protagonist seems to be undergoing a crisis: too much work, too many responsibilities, the necessity of timetabling everything, etc. As he recognises, prearranging sex encounters had its advantages: "it did away with the doubts, the uncertainties: Is she in the mood tonight? If I make a move, how will she respond?" (117). Still yawning in bed he thinks he should start new routines, improve his physical condition: "a new effort to get fit or, at any rate, less unfit, at least to combat the rot that was setting in now that I was forty" (117). Age is no doubt something he is worried about, as this is what happens to individuals in a consumerist and hedonistic society: "The magazine articles all said it: from now on it was all down-hill, unless you did something about it" (118). But in fact all he does that morning is to stay in bed and dream. The reader can find in the narration of the main character's dream many symbols that express the type of crisis he is undergoing: he sees a suntanned and muscular young attendant at the pool who is talking to someone on the phone. The character wonders whether he is "arranging a date" with a mysterious "someone", as he believes it is a woman. Then he imagines this woman could be "someone else's girlfriend" or "someone else's wife" (119), and feels envious of the young attendant: "*you vain little bastard, you, you will never know the suffering you have caused*", he thinks (119, original emphasis). He then realises that the sounds in the pool "seemed ugly and distorted"; he takes his clothes and glasses off and when he is about to get into the pool he notices that there are no women in the water: "Had I stumbled on a 'men only' session?" (119). The character immediately associates the absence of women with male homosexuality: "If they had a 'men only' session, wouldn't it quickly become a 'gay men only' session?" (119). But then he looks at the swimmer and thinks that "[n]one of them looked like a sexual being at all. [...] [T]hey all looked exhausted and overweight —unhealthy men doomed to swim lengths interminably as a punishment for letting themselves go. Men like me" (119).

In this Sisyphean nightmare, the narrator-character projects his guilt, a guilt that stems not so much from a Presbyterian upbringing as from his social environment, especially from the influence of the media, in particular the glossy magazines that prescribe unattainable standards of beauty, fitness and health. Then, the dream changes and he sees the poised body of his wife Vivienne rising "above the swimming-pool like a dark question-mark.[15] The image, with its par-

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15. The eroticism of this "dark question-mark" shows some resemblances with McCabe's poem "Slug", especially the lines: "Watch me arch my agile back, / show my underside's pale line — / like an inky, questing tongue" (McCabe, 1999: 4).

odic allusion to Boticelli's Venus rising from the sea, gives him an erection that he tries to control by thinking about timetables. But again, a younger and more macho man appears, threatening him: "He stood with his back to the wall, naked, his long dark cock sprouting from the crevice of his groin like an outcrop of rock in a waterfall. [...] How come this Greek god was here?" (121). The answer is, of course, that Venus' partner is Apollo, not him.

In what may be described as the ironic climax of his wet dream, the protagonist then jumps into the water in pursuit of his wife/goddess only to loose his trunks, impotent and ridiculous, while his wife turns her attention to the Apollo-man "in a position of delicately arranged intimacy" (122). He wakes up from his hallucinatory dream when he realises that the water in the pool is pink, like the mouthwash in the advertisement he was making. It is at this point that he realises that he had not gone swimming, that he had simply fallen asleep and had dreamt it all. As he hears his wife downstairs he wonders whether he should tell her that he had done nothing at all, that he had wasted the morning in bed.

As the dream suggests, he is undergoing both an identity crisis and a more specifically crisis of masculinity, which probably will have to do with his age and his life-style. The pressure of consumerist society, the lack of free time and the need to satisfy his wife and his clients make him feel pressured and depressed. The references in the dream to homosexuality and to the virility of the young Apollo who is with his wife at the swimming pool clearly show his preoccupations regarding his sexual potency and keeping his sex-appeal. The reference to the mouthwash provides evidence of his working stress. Therefore, breaking his routine and having sex with his wife in a planned way, with no hesitations, doubts or hurries, would help the protagonist and his wife feel better, more relaxed, desired and self-assured.

The parallelism in the titles of the next two stories, "The Start of Something" and "The End of Something", suggests some kind of link between both stories. "The Start of Something" (2001: 125-141) is reported by an external narrator focalising through the main character, a writer called Rafferty. The mechanisms of his mind —associations of ideas, dreams, memories, sensations— are reported in free indirect style. The writing process is described, as Rafferty "was hoping to write something about a memory which had come into his mind as he was falling asleep the previous night: as a boy, going to the shows only with a couple of foreign coins in his pocket" (125). The writer believes that this memory "was just the start of something":

> It was just the start of something, he didn't know if there was a story there or not, but he wanted to describe the shows, and the boy walking round with the strange

coins in his pocket. He didn't know what it was about, but he wanted to get started on it before he went the way some stories had gone in the past. (125)

Then the narration jumps to the character reheating some coffee and going through the post. He wonders what the mail could be about, and his thoughts inevitably lead him to the memory again: "So they were Irish coins. Had he remembered that or decided it?" (126). The self-addressed question points to the writer's awareness that the act of remembering involves a certain creativity, since human beings tend to re-actualise past events according to newer information, that is, the meaning of events changes subjectively in time. Human beings have a constructive episodic memory that continuously evolves, as it is related to our strategies for coping with reality. As Karen Lawrence notes,

> Social psychology and neuroscientific studies have revealed that because of the malleable and fluid process that takes place when memories are formed or replayed, the act of thinking about an experience is less like a rerun of a video and more like a live improvisational skit. (2009)

Imagination and memory inevitably influence one another. This does not affect the reliability of the narrator any more than it affects our own reliability. The self is thus exposed as a complex set of conscious and unconscious interacting mechanisms that are very difficult to distinguish. As we shall see, this is also applied here to the act of writing, which is a combination of memories and imagination where these mixed elements are not clearly distinguishable.

Sipping at his coffee, Rafferty reads a letter from his accountant, Long John —significantly also called "Silver" (McCabe, 2001: 125),[16] which suggests either that the accountant is unreliable or that he is not real but invented by Rafferty, thus reinforcing the idea that memories and imagination go hand in hand in thinking and writing. The accountant writes to warn him that he is going to be inspected by tax officers. The issue of money interrupts the writer's act of remembering and provides the reader with factual data about the character, as he revises the incomes of the past years. Thus we learn that he had been unemployed some of the time and had been writing badly paid book reviews (127). We also learn that he had spent a year in Canada on a cultural exchange fellowship teaching Creative Writing (127).[17]

After this, Rafferty starts writing about the boy at the fairground, but he is unable to do so because he cannot stop thinking about tax inspection. His preoccupations slip into his writing until he feels split into two: the man who has to

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16. Needless to say, his name alludes to R. L. Stevenson's pirate in Treasure Island (1883).
17. Like Brian McCabe himself, adding a personal note to the metacomment about the merging of reality and fiction.

search "in drawers and cupboards for his remittances, receipts and bank statements" and "[t]he writer in him" who "observed himself sitting in defensive attitudes, shoulders hunched, head lowered, and entering the room furtively, like a child afraid of being scolded" (129). The act of writing could be compared to the act of doubling. The short story may be said to parody T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), where Eliot famously distinguished between "the man who suffers and the mind which creates" (2000: 94).[18] In "The Start of Something", Rafferty's worries are not of grand religious or spiritual troubles, but those of a poor and unrecognised writer, struggling with tax inspectors. Indeed, the question of the tax officers produces in the writer a degree of anxiety that leads to symptomatic reactions: "He began to feel vaguely ill. There was a persistent, pulsating tightness in his left temple—a nerve, or a vein? Was it neurological or vascular? The prelude to a stroke?" (McCabe, 2001: 129), and even to paranoiac thoughts: "They [the Inland Revenue] could search your home. They could take you to court. They could seize your assets, make you sell your house. [...] It seemed they had more power than the police" (129).

Ironically, the real question of taxes does not block his process of creation, on the contrary, it calls it forth, as the narrator "began to invent stories to account for his pay-ins" (130). Thus, reality and fiction, present and past, the man who suffers and the artist who creates, are combined to put an end to the character's writing bloc and create a single narrative: "This one [coin] was a gift from my father, who empties gas meters and brings home sacks of foreign coins" (130). Even when he is talking to his accountant, the dream-like memory of the fairground boy slips into reality: "He put his hand in his pocket and jingled his change. He thought of the boy with the coins in his pocket. What was going to happen to him? Who was he?" (131). This use of third-person singular emphasises the similarity of both figures, the writer in the story and his character at the fairground, suggesting a further meta-narrative play.

Rafferty has difficulties in understanding the abstract concept of money —"The only money he could relate to was the money in his pocket" (136)—, so he turns it into something concrete, such as the boy's Irish coins at the fair. Brian McCabe has pointed out that his stories usually come from concrete images or events rather than from abstract concepts.[19] Both Rafferty's reality and his fiction get intermingled in this short story as the narration constantly jumps from the person's reality to the writer's world.

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18. Plenty of writers have associated the double to the act of writing, such as Jorge Luis Borges, cited in Chapter Eight.
19. Interview with Brian McCabe (see Appendix).

But the fact is that this division is not clear-cut; being a writer, Rafferty cannot help interpreting reality by means of fiction, as this description suggests: "The tax office is very dark, like a ruined castle inside, and the gaps in the outer walls allow the breeze to come in, making the coloured lights sway in the wind" (137). The Gothic element in this literary description of a tax office may seem somewhat exaggerated. Then, just as the reader acquainted with Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925) may be questioning his or her own interpretative mechanisms, the narration turns dreamily surreal —as in the previous story, "A Date with my Wife"— and the reader is bound to deduce that Rafferty is dreaming about the investigation and the fairground, both mixed up in the tissue of dreams: "There are corridors of a kind, with muddy carpets, and windows into offices full of teddy bears and coconuts and goldfish in plastic bags [...]. When Rafferty tries to knock, the door becomes a tentflap and he pushes it aside" (137). As the web of the stories is unfolded, the writer asks himself if he "would even write something about it", and if "such an experience" was the stuff of fiction (137). Hence, the whole story could be read as a meta-story, as a story on the process of writing and representation, as the reference to T. S. Eliot suggests. This interpretation is enhanced by Rafferty's reproduction of Rene Magritte famous painting *The Treachery of Images* (1928-9), hanging on Mason's wall: "It was that Magritte thing of the pipe, and under it the words: '*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*'" (139). The painting leads him to the question of truth in the representation of reality:

> He though he understood what Magritte was saying: this is not a pipe, this is the representation of a pipe. But it was why Mason had chosen it that got to him: Mason dealt with duplicity, so he liked having a neat reminder on his wall that truth did exist, though it might not at first sight look like the truth. (139)

The writer understands that representation is not the same as the real thing, and that this fact implies a duplicity which, however, points to the existence of the real thing. After his encounter with the inspector, the protagonist goes back to his writing, since he needs to earn a living. The boy at the fairground is brought into existence, into reality, again, and the short story ends with the start of a story that has been written:

> The boy leaves the fairground and walks off into the darkness. He listens to the music and the noise of it fading with every step he takes. He walks home along a path over a dark hill, and at the top he turns to look at the fairground below. It looks so tiny now, he reaches out and cups it in his hand. (141)

The writer may not be able to control the situations in his everyday life, but he can allow the character-boy at least to control and dominate the fictional world he has created. The writer reconciles himself with his alter-world through his fictional young alter-ego. This creative conception of the double and the positive

and optimistic end show that those opposing worlds are not aggressively exclusive but parts of the same coin.

"The End of Something" (2001: 143-153) presents the end of a love story between two musicians who lived together. The male protagonist, who is a cellist, complains about hearing too much, about becoming "the opposite of deaf" (143). He cannot concentrate because of the intrusiveness of sounds, in the street, in the room, and even inside his own body —"my breathing, my throat swallowing, my heartbeat, the hum of my blood" (143)—[20] and, since the character is affected by his personal situation, the reader may feel tempted to associate his increased hearing with psychic stress:

> I began to hear the music of the traffic jam, instead of the piece I was trying to compose.
> The same thing had happened last night, with the mice. The mice had moved in when Claire had moved out, and now they were multiplying. (144)

As his girlfriend leaves, the noises come, so it could be argued that his increased hearing or rather his acoustic hallucinations have a mental origin, related to psychoneurosis. The term "neurosis" was coined by the Scottish doctor William Cullen in 1769 to refer to the disorders of sense and motion caused by a general affection of the nervous system. After him, Freud, Jung and other psychoanalysts have studied the phenomenon in greater detail. To Jung the triggering element in the development of neurosis is the inability to provide adequate answers to the question of the meaning of life on Earth: "frequently [...] people become neurotic when they content themselves with inadequate or wrong answers to the questions of life" (1989:140).

In this light, the character's acoustic hallucinations could easily be related to his personal crisis and unrest. As he is working on a piece, he has serious difficulties with concentrating: "I went on, humming as loudly as I could to drown out the cars, but even my humming had become discordant and strident" (McCabe, 2001: 145). His hearing perception had been altered by his neurosis, and now the subjects is incapable of selecting sounds, or rather he is overwhelmed by the indiscriminate selection of all available noises and options in his life. Metaphorically speaking, all these noises stand for the raw material of life, which has to be meaningfully organised.

As his ex-girlfriend, a violinist whom he plays with, comes to take some things and to talk to him, they have a tense conversation because he had not appeared

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20. This obsessive hearing will remind some readers of Edgar Allan Poe's classic tales "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), where the narrators are driven to hallucinatory experiences by their feeling of guilt.

at the rehearsal. They argue about it while he is selecting their books and putting them in two boxes, one labelled "HIS" and the other "HERS" (149). It seems as if he were trying to avoid the "silence growing between them, the tension building" as he focuses on the sounds coming from the neighbours' flat (152). He tells her to listen: "'They were having a row before you came', I whispered. 'Now this. Silence.' 'That could mean anything. They've probably gone out'", she answers (152). And he invents a story for those sounds, he makes up a narrative: "'Oh, no, they're in. She's lying on the bed, face to the wall. She's pulled the cover over her face. She's angry, silently fuming. Her eyes are wide open in the dark'" (152-3). The girlfriend seems interested in the story, as she realises that it is applicable to them: "it's us you can hear, isn't it?" (153).

It is quite clear that the narrator-character perceives and understands reality by means of sounds. Thus, the fact that she is going to leave is experienced by him as a closing snap, which is both metaphorical and literal, conceptual and sensual: "The violin and bow went back into the case. I closed my eyes and waited for the snap of the catch" (153). Now, it is entirely left to the musician to pick up the multitude of sounds/options available in his environment, to choose among them, and to carefully arrange them in order to make a symphony, that is, to arrange the unconnected parts of his life, which cause his neurosis, into a meaningful and happy life.

The link between this and the earlier story is that both the beginning and the end may be read as sides of the same coin, and that in real life and in fiction they follow one another.

The next short story, "The Night" (2001: 155-161), takes up again the topic of mental abnormality as strangeness, through the main character, Joe, who does not seem to be mentally mature. He is in a pub reading a newspaper and listening to the noises outside: "he would look up, suddenly alert, and cock his ear in his hand" (155). Joe's difficulties in relating to other people turn him into a mysterious character, as the extradiegetic narrator does not give us access to Joe's thoughts. As the other men in the bar, the reader does not know what Joe is talking about: "Suddenly he said aloud: 'The night. What about the night?'" (156). Like the other characters do not seem "to have heard him" and do not ask him about it, the mystery remains: "He put his hand behind his ear and cocked it to listen [...]. After a few moments, he said to nobody in particular: 'There it is. Ah can hear it'" (156). When he starts talking to the barman about work, the topic of taboo is raised, without being mentioned. Joe, who has motioned the barman to come closer, speaks into his ear through his cupped hand:

"Ah'm different," he said.

"'We're all different, Joe," said the barman.

"No you're no," Joe said. 'No like me.'

[…] Through his cupped hand, Joe whispered something into the barman's ear. The barman stood up quickly and fixed Joe with his eyes. […] "You're not supposed to call it that nowadays, Joe. You're supposed to —".

"Shh! Joe opened his eyes wide and put a finger to his lips". (159)

This strategy of not mentioning the central issue resembles that in "Say Something", as the topic is a taboo, which cannot be mentioned. The taboo in this story may be Joe's retardedness. The reader understands then better why the other characters do not respond to Joe's comments or ask him questions normally but always strangely. The mystery about the night —"The night. What's on the night?" (159)— eventually reveals itself as a communication gap caused by the abnormal attitude of the characters towards Joe, rather than as a mystery in itself. Nevertheless, the mystery remains unsolved, open, for all us: "'The night,' said Joe. 'What about the night?' He turned to stare at the men standing at the bar, as if waiting for their opinion (161). The mystery of the night itself, maybe, that of nature without a narrative explanation. The night could stand here for the darkness surrounding human life in a post-Newtonian world ruled by randomness, or for the utter otherness of the other(s). This Other —commonly associated with silence, madness, the unconscious, etc.— could also be associated with Joe's otherness or stigma, as he has been excluded by the group that fears his alterity, just as Joe fears the inscrutability and darkness of the night.

"Bad Boy" (2001: 163-167) is another short story that explores the perceptions of a child. Feelings of guilt, fear, misunderstanding and curiosity arise as the main character is living the process of discovering the world, the nature of things and social norms. As we have already commented, the feeling of guilt is associated to the Calvinist stigmatisation of pleasure,[21] which had a strong influence in Scotland.[22]

The boy is already capable of empathising —"He imagined his dad meeting the other workmen and smiling, proud of his hard shirt. But maybe his dad wasn't proud of it. Maybe he would be trying to hide the hard shirt under his jacket, in case anybody saw it" (163)—, but he yet does not have the full capacity to understand certain things because his "theory of mind" seems not fully developed, as

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21. As Claudia Eilers has stated, from a psychological point of view, Calvinism would be an "ahedonic" religion, that is, incapable to experience pleasure (2007: 122).

22. As the protagonist of A. L. Kennedy's "Naked" humorously states: "We Calvinists are great at shame, and I have a lot to be ashamed of (in Eilers, 2007: 122).

he imagines his dad acting like a child, like himself, and not as a different individual or as an other, as an adult person.

The boy's musings suggest that he feels guilty, without knowing exactly why —"Sometimes you didn't know you did wrong even when you did" (164)—, or because he cannot help being a "bad boy" —"But sometimes you did something wrong even when you knew it was wrong" (164). Then it is clear that the boy has a distorted idea of evil and punishment, inculcated by somebody as a way to control his behaviour:

You knew it was wrong and you shouldn't do it but you did it anyway, because you were a bad boy and you didn't care if your dad went to prison because you didn't wear your glasses, because you smashed them on the first day you got them, because nobody was going to call you four-eyes. (164)

These thoughts about being or doing evil are presented in a second-person singular, thus suggesting that the boy is carrying a conversation with himself, with the ego telling the id about his bad behaviour. This fragmentation of the protagonist's self adds to the traumatic character of the ideas on evil and punishment inculcated in him by his educators.

The story shows certain resemblances with the short story entitled "Interference", included in McCabe's first collection, *The Lipstick Circus*. The boy —with "abominable behaviour" (1985: 31)— is also a child traumatised by the effects of social pressure, who also feels isolated and guilty for having done or failed to do things he does not fully understand. As the boy in "Interference" explains, "I got specs, but I smashed them on the way to school because everybody was calling me four-eyes. Nobody's going to call me four eyes" (1985: 35).

Significantly, the child in "Bad Boy" associates wrong-doing with adult witnessing, not with the deed itself, as he is taught what is wrong through punishment:

That was the good thing about getting sent to your room because your room was good. […] You could even do something wrong if you wanted because nobody knew about it and nobody could send you to your room for it either because you were in your room already. (2001: 165)

At a certain moment, the boy is worried because he has broken some toy, a magnetic board for drawing, but his action was not evil-intended: He put the metallic pen in one of the "three holes in the wall where his mum plugged in the hoover" (167) because "[h]e wanted to know what was inside it, he wanted to know how it worked" (166). As he feels the electric discharge he does not understand what is happening: "he was inside the giant and it made him shake all over and he could still feel it running up and down his arm" (167). At this point, the narration accelerates into a series of images that follow one another:

he didn't know how it worked how the hard shirt froze on the hot tank or the black dust stood up like angry cat fur on his fingers or the giant's thumb in the warm dark cupboard swelled up like the dead goldfish upside down in the cat's mouth in the cracked fish tank in the smashed glasses with the broken toys [...] because he broke [them] because he was a bad boy and because if he cried loud enough he knew somebody would come. (167)

Readers can nevertheless interpret these images, as they have been following the child's perception of the events described in them through his childish eyes. Consequently, the readers, who share the child's fascination through the defamiliarised descriptions of things that adults take for granted and no longer question, can be empathically unsettled with the boy's perspective and with his notion of guilt, punishment, education and moral.

It is made clear in the story that the boy is quite young and that his bent for destruction is nothing but curiosity and playfulness, not a badness to be repressed. As Brian Boyd has suggested, children feel a fascination for destruction not because of an innate evilness, but because by means of it they can test their own agency upon things: "children have discovered they can make more of a difference to their world more quickly by destruction. [...] In story as in play, destruction is a way of causing maximum impact for minimum effort" (2009: 185). Destruction is, then, a form children have of discovering their effect on the world, and of testing the relation to others. Once and again, the strangeness of the perspective in the short story allows readers to question received ideas about normality and strangeness and about ethics and morality in personal and social behaviour.

The last short story in the collection, "A New Alliance" (2001: 171-244),[23] is divided into two parts: "A Better Place" (171-209) and "See My Friend" (211-244). It tells the story of some boys from Dryburgh, Scotland, and some boys from Sense, France, who participate in an exchange programme. The first part is devoted to the Scots' visit to France, and the second to the posterior visit of the French to Scotland. Cultural differences and similarities, and the discovery of new (old) things are the core of this longer than average story.

The main character is a young Scottish boy, Dougie, who goes with his rugby-team partners to Sense to stay for a week with Antoine's family. He brings some pop records to listen with the French boys. Music is an important element in the story, with many overt references to singers and groups like The Animals,

The Rolling Stones, Johnny Halliday, or The Kinks. The Scottish boys do not listen to Scottish bands, and the French do not listen to French groups; they listen more or less to the same music, that is, U. S. and English pop and rock:

> You have brought some Scottish discs?
> He put on "Not Fade Away" by The Stones —Christian seemed to have his own record-player in his room— and they all sat and listened to it. Then Neil put on one of his favourites —"She Loves You". When it was finished, Antoine said that he preferred The Beatles.
> "Me too. Moi aussi," said Neil. (193)

Their alliances are not based on nationalistic grounds but on musical preferences, such as The Stones or The Beatles: "You must decide, Christian. Which do you prefer?" (194).

As pointed out in Chapter Two, the Scottish writers known as the Lost Poets had grown up with English and U. S. television, films and rock music. As children, they were especially preoccupied with what was and what was not "part of rock 'n roll" (Greig, 1996: 64). And the same happens with the children and youngsters in McCabe's short stories, who are not preoccupied with Scottishness at all. Nevertheless, none of the Scottish boys in "A New Alliance" has ever been abroad —"All right, how many of you have been abroad? Not one of you?" (McCabe, 2001: 177). The only places they have been to are Craigmillar —a town near Edinburgh—, and Portobello —a part of Edinburgh that is by the sea. The reasons for this are neither cultural nor nationalistic but purely economic. The financial differences between the French and the Scottish families are evident. As a consequence, what they consider "normal" or not is not culturally but economically determined.

As Douglas explains, his family members use the mirror in the kitchen to shave, put on their make-up and do their hair "rather than in the bathroom because the kitchen was warmer. He wondered if other families used the oven with the door open to heat the kitchen in the morning. It didn't seem like a normal thing to do" (171). He would like to be like the other boys economically speaking, as at his age he desires to fit in, to be considered an equal: "Why couldn't his mum have an electric cooker like Neil's mum? It was yet another example of all the things that just weren't good enough in his life" (175). As they go to France, they realise that their French friends do have better houses and can spend more: "because you see my mother has a very expensive floor —*tu comprends?*" (185, original emphasis). And as the French go to Scotland, they also realise, as Douglas and his mother discover in a postcard from Antoine to his mother —translated by Douglas— that the Scots are different from them:

> "Dear Mum, Scotland is very cold, although" . . . no, eh . . . "despite the summer. The people are so poor. They have no elegance. They drink with the food no wine,

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23. The title is a play on the "Auld Alliance" between France and Scotland, which was valid from the end of the thirteenth century until the Treaty of Edinburgh in 1560.

but tea, tea and more tea. […] It's all the time boiled chicken, boiled meat, boiled cabbage and boiled potatoes". (229)

Food is another of the elements that strikes both the French and the Scottish. The French *cuisine* is very appreciated by most of the Scottish boys: "The cake was like no cake he had ever eaten. The nearest thing to it in Scotland was called vanilla slice. […] The custard in the middle wasn't just custard but had a soft, creamy feel and tasted of something—maybe it was real vanilla" (185).[24]

They cannot help making comparisons, and translation becomes a key issue in their relationship. Language is more complicated for the French boys who have studied English, as they realise that in Scotland there is another kind of language they do not understand: vernacular Scots. Already in the first part of the story, the adult who is going with the rugby team, Pezzle they call him, jokes about this issue: "Right, here's your Scottish counterpart, Douglas Maclean. He is also learning to speak English" (181). Later, as the French boys go to Scotland, the difference becomes most obvious:

> "I do not know this 'hack-it'. It is not a proper English adjective, I think. Why do you not speak the proper English, Doogee?"
> "Well, Ah'm Scottish, amn't Ah?"
> "And so you speak Scottish? What is the Scottish language?"
> Dougie had never thought about it. "Words like 'hackit' instead of 'ugly', saying 'ken' instead of 'know' or 'wheesht' instead of 'shh'".
> "Ah, yes, but this is dialect. We have this in France. En France, we have seven dialects. How many dialects are there in Scotland?"
> Dougie thought for a minute, then shrugged.
> "You don't know, Doogee? The Scottish dialect is not the same as the Scottish language, I believe. Does that exist, Dougee?
> "Ah think there used to be . . . a Scottish language. Ah think it was the Picts who spoke it. But now it's just . . . well, some words are still Scottish". (231)

Dougie states that he does not speak English because he is Scottish, and as he further explains to his French friend, presumably there was a Scots language that has disappeared leaving just some Scottish words. But he does not seem to be very sure of what he is explaining.

There are some cultural differences, but all the boys are teenagers, and girls are one of their main interests. Adolescence is a liminal period between childhood and maturity where everything seems to mutate. They are changing and they feel it: "ever since they'd stepped off the ferry at Calais, he'd noticed something different about his friend" (182). Being in another place, in another context, could encourage them to try out other roles. Girls also change their attitudes and their

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24. At present, McCabe is intending to write some short stories on the Scottish *cuisine*.

appearance, as Douglas notices about Marie, a girl he fell in love with when he visited Sense:

> although it was only four months since he'd seen her in France, when he'd watched her getting off the bus he'd thought she looked different. Maybe it was just the clothes that had changed. […] The hair was longer, but that wasn't it—it was the make-up, that's what it was. Eye-shadow. Mascara. Lipstick. She didn't look the way he remembered her at all. (212)

Antoine explains this more poetically: "Changed. Like the bug. The bug . . . you know this? *C'est la metamorphose*. […] But, ah . . . Marie is not the butterfly, […] she is change into the little *araignée*" (213). The boy, whose remarks seem quite adult, makes an allusion to the power the girl has recently acquired over men as a sexual predator, as the spider is an ancient symbol of mystery, power and shrewdness. Instead of a charming and innocent butterfly, she is rather a spider that can weave beautiful webs that are extremely dangerous for other insects, such as the young boys.

Both girls and boys are discovering their sexuality and themselves in relation to the enigmatic other sex. Everything seems new, different and still unique:

> "It's just something about her . . . when we were saying *au revoir*—"
> "Ye'd think she was the only girl ye've kissed. Ye've kissed plenty lassies in Dryburgh—"
> "Yeah, but this was different. Ah've never had a kiss like this before."
> "How—what was different about it?"
> "She put her tongue . . . in my mouth"
> "Eh? Away —she did not!"
> "Ah'm telling ye, Neil. She did."
> "Ugh. That's disgustin." (207)

In a way it could be argued that McCabe's short stories do have both the strangeness and the emotion of the first French kiss.

In summary, as I have tried to show, the stories in the collection expose the strangeness in the everyday, and further develop the necessary encounter with the other, or rather, the essential relation self-other(s). Perception, normality and abnormality are scrutinised, as the processes of affective and logical cognition cannot be separated. This fact makes an ethical interpretation of reality both essential and difficult or complex. The characters in the stories are undergoing some sort of vital crisis or are considered strange, deviant or marginal by other people. Cultural and social forces are put into question with relation to identity, in an ironic and humorous vein.

The effect of Scottish Presbyterianism on various characters' identity can be deduced from their feelings of guilt, restrain, paralysis and self-denial, while in other stories Calvinism, Scottishness and the split self are explicitly and humorously associated with each other. For example "The Host" parodies the Scottish *topos* of the split self, which will be further developed in *The Other McCoy*. The influence of a religious upbringing is both asserted and denied in the collection, as the relation of religion and a damaged Scottish identity is constantly brought to the fore and simultaneously undermined through parodic exaggeration, as happens, for example, in "Welcome to Knoxland", or through the emphasis on the inevitability of personal freedom, as in "Petit Mal".

There are other stories which are set in a futuristic world or which deal with postmodern technologies. By these means, "Something New", for example, ironises on the essentiality of Scottish national and personal identity. The deconstruction of Scottish and of masculine identity reveals those concepts as artificial or even absurd constructions. The notion of a fixed and monologic national identity is further put into question in short stories like "A New Alliance", a story presenting the differences and similarities between French and Scottish boys.

Masculinity is an aspect of human identity that is also deconstructed in this collection, as the "hard man" stereotype gives way to the common man, with little daily routines and conflicts. Both national and sexual stereotypes and roles are presented by McCabe as pure performance, as roles that individuals can choose to assume or not.

Communication among individuals seems not to have improved with postmodern technology. The virtual world triggers off a certain nostalgia for the old physical intimacy. As a consequence, sex is quite present in this collection. But physical relations are not innocent, as social and cultural constructions operate there as well, as in "Waiting at the Stairs" or "Relief". These stories also point to the stigmatisation of certain subjects, such as handicapped people, mental patients, prostitutes, homosexuals, etc., who must constantly strive to adjust their precarious social identities to the social standards of "normality". Besides, their self-image is affected by the image of the others. Thus, McCabe denounces several aspects of social hypocrisy and explores the various ways in which a character's self-image depends on the gaze of the other.

The topic of the strangeness of the self is further developed in McCabe's novel *The Other McCoy*, which is analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight

THE OTHER MCCOY–THE SELF AND THE JEKYLL-AND-HYDE FIGURE

> *We are each time an other,*
> *each time with others.*
> (Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*)

The Other McCoy (1990) is the only novel McCabe has written so far. Obviously, each type of narrative writing —short story and novel— requires different skills, but as some critics have suggested, *The Other McCoy* resembles a long short story.

Boris Tomashevsky and other Russian Formalists differentiated novels from short stories through the different treatment of rhythm, with the short story moving forward in a staccato manner and reaching the culmination of suspense at the end, while, by contrast, the novel alternates various suspense climaxes with stretches of relaxation. However, the rhythm of *The Other McCoy* is similar to the rhythm of McCabe's short stories. The author himself has written in a personal e-mail that he chose deliberately a concrete and reduced space and time for his only novel, "trying to keep things tight, economical and manageable" (McCabe, 2005). One of the main elements contributing to the unity of effect in *The Other McCoy* is, then, the rising suspense. This effect, which traps the reader, characteristic of the work of the best short-story writers since Edgar Allan Poe, is achieved in McCabe's novel by means of an economic and condensed narration, full of symbols, ellipses, and the telling of two parallel story-lines which alternate with each other, conveying a surplus of meaning in their contrasts and similitude, retrospections and anticipations, and the duality of narrative voices.

McCabe has explained how, for him, the essential difference between the short story and the novel has not to do with length but approach. While the novel is built on the accumulation of scenes, characters and events, the art of the short story is the art of selection. When I asked him directly about the difference between writing a short story and a novel, McCabe virtually answered the same in a personal e-mail:

Briefly, writing a novel is very different from writing a short story: the former is an accumulation of characters, scenes, etc., whereas I think the art of the short story has very much to do with selection —focusing on a scene / incident / character / image. It's not always that black and white but generally that is the main difference of approach. So, as a short-story writer, I found it difficult to embark on a complete novel. I decided very early on that all the action would take place in one day —the last day of the year— and that is the short-story writer in me trying to keep things tight, economical and manageable. I thought I might be criticised by reviewers for writing a short story masquerading as a novel, but they praised its economy! I was pleased about that. (2005)

The defining features of the short story, mainly in the classical tale form defended by Poe, are its unity of effect, formal compression and stylistic intensity. And these three characteristics are present in McCabe's novel.

The tale's well-known claimed singleness of effect reflects the unity and singleness of its mythic origins. As the anthropologist Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) stated in his essay *Language and Myth* (1925), mythical thinking focused on a single event: a singular occurrence separated from the everyday experience through intensification of effect and condensation of meaning (Cassirer, 2007). The same could be said of some of Chekhov's excellent stories, which focus on the daily and on details, apparently simple but deceptively accessible. This condensation and transcendence of meaning is absolutely present in all of McCabe's fiction, both short and long. But the longer form of the novel allowed the writer to further refine the issue of identity and the personal relations among characters. The issue of identity and the relation self-other(s) are again at the very heart of the story, as the analysis will show.

As the title itself suggests, the novel presents as one of its central themes the haunting classical *topos* of the double, associated in Scotland with the Dr-Jekyll-and-Mr-Hyde figure. McCabe investigates the notion of identity through the double —through double narration and the figure of the *Doppelgänger*—, inextricably linked to the main character's search for identity. The topic of identity in *The Other McCoy* seems to be closely related to the questions of language, the search for, and the making of the self. Indeed, the analysis of a Scottish novel which deals with identity and the double cannot leave aside the issue of language and the Scottish antisyzygy. As we saw in Chapter One, Scotland's bilingualism has often been analysed as the cause of a psychological splitting.[1] The so-called "schizophrenic" mixing of voices in Scottish literature, seemed to reflect the

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1. Edwin Muir (1887-1959) pessimistically commented on the consequences that bilingualism, understood as division, had both for Scottish identity and literary production in Scotland, and he believed that "Scottish writers were afflicted by the ineradicable psychological damage of a divided linguistic inheritance […], and by the consequent fact that 'Scotsmen feel in one language and think in another'" (in Craig, 1999: 15).

historical facts that led to the dissolution of the Scottish State and the crisis in Scottish identity. As Paul Coates has noted, when the double is explicitly dealt with in fiction, it is often "written by authors who are suspended between languages and cultures", and he mentions Joseph Conrad, James Hogg, R. L. Stevenson, Henry James and Oscar Wilde, among others (1988: 2). The Scottish linguistic fissure is, according to Gavin Wallace, the source of a real and mythical inarticulacy, which has become a central preoccupation in Scottish fiction (1993: 221). As a consequence of this theoretical tradition, the Jekyll-and-Hyde figure has been interpreted as the monstrous son of this Scottish linguistic and identitarian ambivalence.

Some critics have argued that the "problem" of linguistic disunity or so-called Caledonian antisyzygy is often dramatised by means of narration and characters. Moreover, irony, juxtaposition, multiple voices, and habitual counter-pointing are said to be distinctive of Scottish culture, expressing an ongoing crisis of identity (Simpson, 1988: 251). According to this negative vision of Scottish identity as the damaged product of adverse historical circumstances, polarity and fragmentation appear as characteristics to be avoided. However, if the cultural and linguistic diversity in Scotland were perceived as a multiplicity rather than as a splitting, then the Jekyll-and-Hyde figure would not be diminishing but enriching, as McCabe shows in this novel. As pointed out in Chapter One, the traditionally negative diagnosis of Scottish cultural identity started to be challenged by some critics in the nineteen-eighties, thus allowing for a positive reworking of the traditional notions of (Scottish) self and world.

Cairn Craig has fostered this more positive view on the grounds that a Scottish culture which has regularly been described as "schizophrenic" is not necessarily sick. He proposes a view of it as an example of a culture that is engaged in the dialogue with the other(s), a conversation in different dialects, a dialectic that is the foundation not only of persons but of nations (1999: 115). It should not be forgotten that there are plenty of authors, who even though they are not bilingual, have also felt a certain tension in their use of language. Thus, Miguel de Unamuno famously said that dialect is individual in the sense that each of us, each individual, has its own language, which is constantly created and recreated (2000: 18).

As we shall see, *The Other McCoy* expresses this dialogue among individual dialects —a polyphony—, both with oneself and with others, and also manages to give the *topos* of the *Doppelgänger* a comic[2] and positive twist. As Gifford has stated, McCabe "used the theme of rediscovery of self with a sardonically comic turn in *The Other McCoy* (1990), with his protagonist discovering at Hogmanay

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2. This comic turn follows the Russian tradition of the myth of the double inaugurated by Dostoevsky and Gogol, as pointed out in Chapter Seven when analysing Brian McCabe's "The Host".

that he isn't dead, as his friends seem to think" (2002: 942). As the author himself has commented:

> My title *The Other McCoy* is a play on a popular phrase or saying viz. "the real McCoy". When we want to say that something is authentic, the real thing, the original, we say that it is "the real McCoy". There is quite a lot of play with this in the novel, with people asking McCoy if he is the "real" one, etc. and in his mind at one point I seem to remember that he answers: "No, the other one, the other McCoy".... (McCabe, 2005)

The novel tells the story of Patrick McCoy, an unemployed comedian, who wakes up at his meagre shed with a bad hangover on Hogmanay day, the Scottish last day of the year. He gets up unable to remember clearly what he did the night before at a friend's party. In this state of mind he cannot help but think about his present condition, his past and his future. His landlord wants to evict him from the shed, so Pat gets up and tries to make some money by selling spyholes door to door. What he does not know is that his girlfriend Yvonne and his friends are thinking at this moment that he has committed suicide. During his wandering through the streets of Edinburgh,[3] McCoy meets some of his friends, who thought him dead, and they then realise the misunderstanding. In the end, he meets Yvonne and, relieved, they all celebrate the first day of the year together in what may be described as a faintly ironic and wholly parodic recasting of the traditional ending of Plautinian new comedy.

It must be said that Patrick McCoy is a comedian who specialises in impersonating other people and speaking with different voices. But he not only does this on the stage, during his door-to-door trip, constantly impersonating other people, he also speaks through their voices and slips under their skins, while he tries to find out who he really is and who the other people are. This aspect of McCoy's personality brings to mind Peter Ackroyd's "monopolylinguist", music-hall comedian who can speak in different voices and change roles rapidly in the same play (Onega, 2008: 460).

Like Ackroyd's monopolynguist, McCoy does not actually imitate other people, rather he feels as if he really were transformed into whomever he is impersonating; as if he were the other(s). As we shall see in the analysis, the apparition of the double in *The Other McCoy* is not a consequence of a scission in the protagonist's consciousness, as could be said of nineteenth-century literary doubles, but of the difference between the self and its imago, that is, between the person and the image that is reflected by the other(s).

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3. Inevitably, when dealing with a novel that tells the story of a hero (or antihero) in one day while he wanders through the city, the reader of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) will look for similarities with the classic Modernist work.

As a consequence of the protagonist's impersonating compulsion, focalisation, defined as the relation between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented (Bal, 1985: 50), is one of the most interesting aspects of the novel's story for our analysis, since it provides a deep insight into its form and aim. The novel presents a dual —or a doubled— character-bound focalisation. The two main focalisers are Patrick McCoy and Yvonne, who alternate focalisations almost mechanically. These two perspectives do not really mingle but rather complement each other, as each chapter is almost entirely focalised through one of them.

Both focalisations seem to be complementary, although McCoy's perspective predominates over that of Yvonne, since twenty-two chapters —including the first and the last— are focalised through him, whereas the female perspective is used only in seven chapters. There is, however, no essentialist difference between both focalisations with respect to gender, since the novel presents a conception of the self as constructed through the act of role playing. Thus, *The Other McCoy* integrates the feminine and masculine perspectives without making them antagonists. Both their roles are important in the complementation of perspectives and in their dialectical relation. The very structure of the focalisation in the novel reproduces, then, an anti-essentialist conception of the self, in relation to other(s), since the subject is no longer a fixed and stable entity, but is rather conceived as made up of multiple facets which, in relation to the other, conform, construct, the individual.

The novel is narrated by a heterodiegetic narrative instance, which focalises, as already pointed out, through the two main characters. This double narration serves to show how both focalisations and the characters' consciousness sometimes dodge each other. As we shall see, the narrator hides some information to the reader in order to convey a certain feeling of incompleteness and complementation. Each viewpoint is contested by alternative viewpoints. But this complementation is not an ideal one, like that of Plato's split androgynies. On the contrary, it is an earthly or realistic one, no doubt, depicting complementation or the dialogue with the other as positive, but nevertheless partial. It is the reader who somehow functions as a bridge between both narrations, and who has to fill in the information gaps with the aid of his or her imagination.

A striking characteristic of the narration in *The Other McCoy* is its wealth of *achronies* or chronological deviations. The arrangement of narrated events in the story contrasts strongly with the linear chronology that rules events in the fabula and so offers the reader an amusing and rich reading experience. Sometimes the story deliberately hides important information, in order to fully develop the differences in knowledge between the two character-bound focalisers —Yvonne does not know that her lover is alive and McCoy does not know that she believes

to be pregnant— and to increase suspense —both characters try to find each other but fail to meet until the end of the novel. This hiding of information —why do McCoy's friends react so strangely when they meet them? Why does everybody believe he has committed suicide?, etc.— influences the reading process, and is crucial for the creation of the melodramatic urge, suspense, confusion and desire to fully grasp what is going on.

Ellipses are also some of the elements that help create suspense in the novel, as happens, for example, immediately after the passage where Yvonne is in the bathtub, when the reader is forced to follow McCoy's steps without knowing what happened to her. At the same time, ellipses hide some information and thus present the reader a more realistic world, since a too well rounded-off fiction seems no longer realistic in the postmodernist period —an omniscient narrator would not express the experience of a postmodern character convincingly, since our daily experience is made up of fragmentary occurrences that we link and combine subjectively in order to make them cohere into a pattern of meaning. This type of elliptic narration is realistic in that it reproduces the process of perceiving, remembering and knowing. Moreover, ellipses reproduce the nature of communication.

What is more, as John Barresi has suggested, an understanding of self and other(s) involves a sort of integration of first- and third-person information:

> what we do is combine concrete first person information about self, with concrete third person information about another individual engaged in the same kind of activity as we are, in order to understand what it means for self and/or other to engage in that activity. (2002)

Understanding of self and other(s) requires, then, an active participation of the reader/observer of the events narrated. Working on the analysis of the dialogical self, H. Herman contends that the missing information is filled by the imagination. However, as Barressi points out, the imagination can never *fully* achieve this goal, and, thus, self and other are always essentially in dialogue (2002, emphasis added). There is no story which can fully integrate first- and third-person perspectives, and no reader who can fill in every gap in the information available to him or her.

In keeping with this, the ellipses in the novel exemplify the relation between both characters —McCoy and Yvonne— and, by extension, the problems implicit in any communicative act. Relations are portrayed through the narrative act as the process by which one interlocutor gets to know partial aspects of the other, by interpreting some hints. In the author's own words: "You got to know different bits of the other, but not the whole person. The pieces broke up into other pieces" (McCabe 1991: 22). Thus, if McCoy is to mature, he will have to embark on a double process: he will have to try and situate himself imaginatively in the position of Yvonne,[4] and he will have to reconcile the split facets of his fragmented self.

In contrast with the fabula time-span, which covers just one day, we find a very complex ordering of events at the story level. The story is full of internal analepses or retrospections, which are introduced through the reflections of the focalisers. The reader is constantly brought out of what can be described as the story's present —Hogmanay's day— back to some moment in the past of the actors concerned. These analepses have various functions throughout the novel: they serve as tools for constructing rounder characters —with a past and a present—; they sometimes fill in certain gaps in the story and by so doing help the reader construct the fabula and gather a better understanding of the agents' actions; and sometimes they just strengthen certain effects —suspense, surprise, etc.— by teasing or frustrating the reader's expectations.

There, retroversions, which undermine the reader's expectations, are often misleading rather than clarifying. Characteristically, they reflect the focalisers' experience; after all, it is McCoy, as focaliser and as main character, who does not remember what had exactly happened the day before since he has a tremendous hangover, and so has to construct his story by means of hints and fragmentary recollections: "Isolated moments of it [the party] began to surface in his memory, like bits of a home-made video" (28). Thus, the novel's words, like a videotape that seems to be both familiar and strange, with forward and backwards leaps, accurately reflect McCoy's process of remembering as well as his personal odyssey.

The same happens with the prolepses or anticipations; some are clarifying, others pose enigmas which are clarified later, and others simply cheat the reader by breaking her or his expectations or by creating suspense. To see how these achronies work, we need to look at the novel's focalisation, since both narration and focalisation are combined to produce certain effects. Sometimes we find that anticipation enhances rather than dispels ambiguity, as happens, for example, with the anticipation about Yvonne's pregnancy. At the very beginning of the novel we find this comment: "All his [McCoy's] jokes had a knack of turning against him in the end. The one about the holey condoms was one he could have done without: the last one he'd used with Yvonne had burst" (9). Nothing else is added, just a superficial comment; however, later in the novel we discover that the relation between McCoy and Yvonne is not at its best and, in these circumstances, the possibility that she might be pregnant becomes more dramatic.

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4. As Emmanuel Levinas explains in *Totalité et infini* (1961), the ethical act consists precisely of this imaginative leap, what he calls the confrontation with "the face of the other".

Later, in Chapter Twenty Three, the narrator cheats the reader by introducing the issue of death and some razor blades. Yvonne, who thinks McCoy has committed suicide, feels quite depressed:

> They [their friends] would talk about the death, that's all they would talk about. She tugged her clothes off quickly, then had to wait for the bath to fill up [...]. She opened the little cupboard above the sink and saw his razor and a box of blades. She took them out and looked at them. [...] She felt angry with him for this little item of domestic foresight and threw the razor and the blades down on the shelf beside the bath. (148)

Yvonne then gets into the water and lies down in the bath; she starts becoming angry because of his death, which "he had done to hurt her" (149), and the razor blades appear again at the very end of this short chapter:

> Suicide. The bathroom was the worst place in the world to think about suicide. [...]. She reached for the box of razors and took one out. She unpeeled the paper and held it between her finger and thumb. She looked at it for a long time. Then she watched her dark blood clouding the water. (149)

 The next chapter is focalised by McCoy, and the reader receives from the narrator no immediate explanation about what really is taking place. Yvonne's supposed-death —the reader later realises that she thought she was pregnant, but her period had just come, dying the water red— parallels McCoy's rumoured suicide, and both events are hinted at through ellipses, through omissions, as both events are only suggested but not shown or overtly described. It is the readers' task to imagine those suicides out of what is not said, so that they are made to believe, in some way, that they have access to the characters' most intimate secrets and feelings, when in fact they do not. Here, ellipsis functions to draw a parallel between either character's situations, with the readers being offered a false position as spectators of their private lives.

Death, which is presented as an uncanny presence haunting the protagonists, is thus transformed through the narration into a symbol of the possibility of renewal. The event of death, which is not real but metaphoric, changes the characters' attitude towards what is happening to them. In this sense, this passage becomes representative of the novel's central idea of resurrection and change —as we shall see later—, since both die on Hogmanay's day and are reborn to a new life together on New Year's day.

Further, McCoy's focalisation is not a simple one, since he incessantly hears the words of other people "echoed and distorted in his hangover brain as McCoy itched and sweated and retched his way in and out of consciousness" (11). McCoy cannot help impersonating other people, transforming himself into anybody and, in this sense, we could say that his consciousness as well as his unconscious are multiple. Interestingly, he is well aware of his imitating abilities and strategies,

although he may not know how to control them; thus, he feels different voices struggling inside him: "If only the wild laughter inside would go away. It was out of some dark place inside him. Out of control. Out of order" (11). When McCoy impersonates other people, we find other(s) — "minor" characters— providing the reader with second-degree focalisations, through McCoy's flow-of-consciousness.

There is a point in the novel when McCoy is looking through the window at the snowflakes: "He looked at the window. [...] He could see the snowflakes" (27). And then we get a direct report of someone else's thoughts —as we discover later in the same paragraph—, which have to do also with snowflakes:

> And as I watched I realised that every one of us is like that wee snowflake, whirled and spun in the senseless hurly-burly of the modern world as we know it today, and we all get dizzy [...]. And every one of us is watched. Even here in Scotland, or maybe we should say, especially here in Scotland. (27)

Then the narration suddenly jumps to another's thoughts:

> Only the other day, I was walking through the snow, alongside a very famous golf course in St Andrews, when my eight-year-old grand-daughter said to me, "Grand-dad, where does the wind come from?" Well, as you can probably see for yourselves, I'm no meteorologist. So I licked my finger and held it up to see which direction the wind was coming form, the way people do, and I said to her: Leuchars. (27-8)

The reader realises that this cannot be McCoy's own voice, since he has no grand-daughter. This type of narration reminds of Ackroyd's monopolylinguist (see above), since the narrative voice is an impersonating one, which, thus, speaks different voices.

The stimulus that brings about the shift from external to internal narration is an observable reality: the snowflakes. The stimulus that brings about the association of ideas with the situation in Scotland, where everybody is been watched, and the conversation between the grand-father and the grand-daughter is much subtler; the reader cannot exactly know why the focaliser has been transformed or possessed, this is left to the reader's free interpretation. Since the novel's focalisation is constantly a character-bound one, and since the grand-father is no character at all, one may interpret that it is not that the focalisation has really shifted but that the focaliser's mind has shifted because McCoy remembers an episode triggered off by the external stimulus of the snowflakes, and reproduces a dialogue he witnessed between a grandfather and his granddaughter. These snowflakes that have set his train of associations recall William James' definition of stream of consciousness "as a snowflake crystal caught in the warm hand" and his development of "substantive" and "transitive" states of mind (James, 2010).

The meditative contemplation of snowflakes induces in McCoy a state close to an epiphanic revelation —"I realised" (27)— that transmogrifies into a state of possession: "He tried to follow the path of one of them, but it made him dizzy to watch it, as he himself was falling . . ." (27). Through his gaze, McCoy becomes dialogically "possessed" by another consciousness, that of the old man. Following this metaphoric interpretation, one could argue that, since we are all like snowflakes, whirling in the light, mingling with each other, interacting with each other —since following each snowflake independently is impossible—, our paths criss-cross and our isolated entities melt together, maybe for some brief moments. McCoy, in his solitude, would then be looking for a sense of belonging, where individual identity dissolves. This conception of the self had already been expressed in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931), where multiple focalisers engage in what may be described as a systolic and diastolic rhythm, in which identity is devolved to a pre-industrial conception, that is to say, to a pre-rational stage, where the individual is not yet divorced from the community.

In this sense, McCoy's wanderings through the streets of Edinburgh to sell spyholes may be read as an attempt to communicate with other people, driven by the desire to feel happy again with his friends and girlfriend, all together. From Levinas' perspective, they may be read as a parodic and futile attempt to negotiate an ethical encounter with the face of the other, involving a movement outside the self and towards the perspective of the other.

McCoy is not the only character who feels the need of impersonation. It is not a mental illness he has, but rather a more general characteristic that individuals seem to share. Yvonne is a teacher and, as such, she has to:

> stand there in front of thirty pairs of eyes and perform, perform as yourself, nobody else. She knew that was what you had to do, but equally well she knew that she wasn't all that good at it, and that almost always she ended having to be somebody else, someone not herself. That was what was so awful about it, hearing your own voice sounding like someone else's. Shut *up*! Keep *still*! Eyes on the *blackboard*! (55, original emphasis)

Here, role playing and the issue of identity are associated with the concept of voice, of having a voice of one's own.

As we have seen, the issue of language is inextricably linked to identity issues, especially in Scottish literature. In McCabe's novel, the vernacular helps to construct a certain background for the characters and, at the same time, to characterise the community McCoy belongs to. This use of the vernacular reinforces the credibility of the characters' voices, and provides them with a cultural and communal background. As Hart succinctly puts it: "If local realities and affiliations matter, then authentic local speech matters" (1978: 407). The local character flourishes in oral narrative, in provincial speech. Echoing this, the action is pre-

sented in pubs and cafés, where McCoy meets a multitude of common, unknown people, as well as his friends; in them he feels the warmth, the comfort of the crowd, the "sweating swarm of humanity" (McCabe, 1991: 161). But most of the time the action takes place in the streets of Edinburgh, since McCoy earns a living selling spyholes. Dean Bridge, the Steamies, Gilmore Place, Dundee Street, Union Canal, Waverly Station, Princess Street, etc. The narrator shows McCoy in his wanderings through the streets of Edinburgh, the environment of typical Scottish characters. Patrick's actions are, then, set against the background of a social environment portraying the protagonist's community, the common people of his city. This notion of community is very much present in the novel, and constitutes an important element in McCoy's search for self-identity.

The notion of community has always been very strong in Scottish culture due to its strong Calvinistic mentality, which defends an almost medieval sense of community (Hart, 1978: 9). In Scotland —unlike in England and the rest of Europe— the emphasis on the individual, associated to the rise of Romanticism, was in assonance with the Scottish experience and was thus strongly resisted. This fact gave the Scottish fiction of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century a distinctive character: the individual hero was not understood as separated from the community he belonged to.

McCoy might appear to be a solitary character, but in fact he is constantly seeking the warmth of his people. Moreover, his great debut as a Television comedian, which was due to take place at Hogmanay, was important for him because:

> Everyone in The Steamies —the scheme of flat-roofed, centrally heated Council Houses in Bonnyrigg where he had grown up— would be sitting there glued to their seats. Mrs Payne upstairs, Mr and Mrs Schmidt next door. His mother. More, all over Scotland people would be watching. (McCabe, 1990: 12)

Calvinist thought strongly fosters the idea of a community: "A noteworthy feature of Scottish fiction is the moral primacy of community, the belief (some would say Calvinist in origin) that community is the ground of individual worth and a condition of salvation" (Hart, 1978: 401). The Calvinist conception of the individual is then inseparable from the concept of community. Consequently, during the Romantic period, "[i]ndividuality turned not to romantic selfhood but to traditional models of communal integrity, to the reawakening of older, less egocentric norms of heroism" (92).

Further, whether influenced by Calvinism or not, the individual is embedded in a community, that is to say, in a tradition. As Alasdair MacIntyre said in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981), tradition conditions every human experience:

> the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. [...] The possession of an historical identity and the

possession of a social identity coincide. [...] I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of tradition. (in Craig, 1999: 23)

McCoy himself is well aware of these issues, even though, as he shows in his observations, tradition is no longer what it used to be.

In the novel, community is associated to the motif of the double, since the issue of community implies role-playing and the construction of a more or less coherent public image, so that the subject has both a private and a public image. From this perspective, McCoy's slipping into the other(s) can be interpreted as his way of escaping social expectations, of breaking the social rules one is supposed to follow. But this does not make him a romantic, solitary hero, since McCoy, in order to feel good, needs a sense of belonging to that community.

Why does McCoy impersonate, then? Because, as the narrator explains, he has:

> no neighbours with the same leaky radiators as you. No job. Scarce prospects. A mixed bunch of friends and acquaintances. No community. No social fabric. Maybe that was why he needed to be somebody, somebody else, somebody not himself, and maybe that was why he imitated other people. . . Not like an actor, no. His need was different. A new personality, sir? Certainly, sir. (McCabe, 1991: 23)

In this quotation, the notion of community and of impersonating or role-playing are interrelated. McCoy feels comfortable in the café, in the crowd. He wants to be one of them: "That must be why he did it. To be one of them. To be the other. He didn't want to be the real McCoy. He wanted to be the other McCoy" (161-2). Being the other McCoy allows him to feel integrated, to lose himself in the anonymity of the crowd, to overcome his loneliness and to feel close to other people.

McCoy, the comedian, earned his living by impersonating other people in his shows. He started impersonating other people because he believed life to be a comedy —"the comedy of being" (20)—, but then he found himself one day really slipping into the role, that is, performance gave way to fragmentation of the self. In a sense, this Platonic conception of performance and impersonation as being false and inferior to "the real thing", to nature, seems to be very much present in Calvinistic thought. *The Other McCoy* shows no explicit Calvinist traits, but, as Craig has stated:

> Whether or not modern Scottish writers inhabit a consciously Calvinist environment, these traditions shape their conception of the imagination as diabolic antagonist, rather than spiritual representative, of the truths of the world. The imagination can assert itself only in intense doubt about its relationships with the reality that it seeks to re-present, so that there can be no formal stability between the world of representation and the world represented. (1999: 205)

The fissure between what is sought to be the represented and what is represented is one of the many tensions present in Scottish literature, especially in Brian McCabe's work, as we have seen. However, the fact that the protagonist is a comedian who wants to earn his living by representing things for the people, clearly contradicts this fatalistic or negative conception of representation.

Nevertheless, McCoy seems to be well aware of the ethical implications of his acts, since he sometimes feels bad if he is playing a role out of stage, as, for example, when he is trying to sell spyholes:

> But although he felt disgusted with himself, his disgust didn't stop him embroidering the story a little bit more each time he told it, and sometimes he'd come away feeling strangely elated about his latest outlandish departure from the truth, as if his version had outstripped the paper's and had come to its own. The strange thing was that the more unlikely he made the story, the more convincing it seemed to become. (McCabe, 1991: 59)

McCoy is aware that he can wear masks on stage, if the purpose is to amuse the audience, but that he should not use his role-playing tricks in order to gain personal benefits. Still, the line that separates fiction from reality is very thin, and sometimes it becomes difficult for him to discern between both, as he himself experiences when he starts to believe his own made-up stories:

> Stranger still —he himself had started to believe in the story he told him [his potential client], with guess-who in the role of psychopath. When he wasn't appealing to the paranoia of others he was feeling it himself, convinced that the next door would be opened by a desk-clerk from the D.H.S.S. with a photographic memory. (59)

When he impersonates, he slips into the other(s), and by doing so he is able to feel a certain degree of empathy, to reveal and show what is essentially common to various individuals:

> it was one of his best performances . . . but then, at a certain point when he was imitating his father it had happened, he had given himself the slip and stepped into the Other, and the audience had come together for the first time because although they didn't know the father before them and not the son, they suddenly sensed that it was the father in this father they recognised all their fathers and laughed as one. (20)

The Other —which is in fact other(s)— can serve as an abstract entity which people recognise, and this serves them to communicate with each other and feel in company. McCoy also may feel uncomfortable when he is conscious of his performing. He had been praised by the critics for his ability to imitate others. However, he progressively develops what he describes as his "overcoat feeling", that is, the growing fear that there is nothing underneath impersonations, that he, feeling "like being tried on by somebody else", does not have a self of his

own, that there is only "absence" (10).[5] On the other hand, in front of his audience he feels much more reassured, present. One of the functions of the community would then be that of affirming through recognition the identity of the individual.

In Yvonne's case, if we return to the paragraph where Yvonne complains about having to speak in a voice which is not her own, with "your own voice sounding like someone else's" (55), we will see that, although there are some passages in the novel where the issue of language and national identity are dealt with, in this particular case, her complaint has more to do with her job as a teacher than with her Scottish identity.

When dealing with the Scots language and the issue of Scottishness, the aspect of space in the novel becomes essential with regard to them, since the whole novel is set up in Edinburgh. It is significant in this respect that McCoy is presented as a wandering character, who is trying to understand who he is and find his place in the world. His home, which is defined as a "terrible" shed (8), is not warm and protecting, but just a place to sleep in, with the only company of the hungry cat Jinkx, and some rats. Yvonne feels it rather depressing and does not like sleeping there. The fact that his resting place is not comfortable at all shows McCoy as a character who has not found his place yet: "Over the last few years he had been renting one place after another, each one more temporary and basic than the last, ending with this one. But maybe it wasn't the end" (8). When he is in his shed he makes up his mind: "to get up, get out there" and mend his life (31).

Patrick's wanderings through Edinburgh are overtly associated with those of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* in a reviewer's comment reproduced on the back cover of the 1991 edition of the novel: "Brian McCabe has constructed a remarkably pacy little odyssey around the city of Edinburgh, delivered with great gusto, wit and invention". Like Joyce with Dublin, McCabe is often rather ironic and comic in his depictions of urban Scotland, presenting Edinburgh as a teeming and chaotic city, swarmed by people of all types, including tourists, with McCoy in the role of one of these tourists in an endless city tour.

As McCoy gets on a bus to Leith, he imagines himself sitting in one of those city tours where a bus driver gives explanations to tourists in an almost excessive vernacular Scot: "Ahint the Castle, oan a braw bricht moonlight nicht like the nicht, ye can make oot the Scottish Tourist Bureau's latest hologram shroodedin gloomy mist special effects tae gie youz ignorant foreigners the idea it's gey auld" (104).

Stereotypes become destroyed when they are excessive and ludicrous. Then, they reveal themselves as great constructs, as a "hologram" put there for tourists and natives to enjoy what the narrator ironically defines as "the Scottish experience", feeling "authentically" Scottish. *The Other McCoy* presents, thus, a comic and exaggerated Edinburgh, in contrast with other portrayals of it in modern fiction as, for example, Irving Welsh's acid *Trainspotting* (1993), which offers a rather pessimistic vision of Scotland: "Iggy Pop looks right at me as he sings the line: "America takes drugs in psychic defence"; only he changes "America" for "Scatlin", and defines us mair accurately in a single sentence that all the others have ever done . . ." (Welsh, 2004: 75). In Welsh's novel, Edinburgh is presented as a damned hole where nothing good can grow, and where Scots can only hide in order to defend themselves. By contrast, in McCabe's novel, Edinburgh is portrayed comically and offers, in its good humour, some hope to their fictional inhabitants.

As McCoy imagines the bus-conductor telling the tourists, "upstairs o the bus, stoap yer complainin — It's no meant tae hae a roof! Cauld? Of course it's cauld, that's pert and percel o the hale shebang, the Scottish Experinece ye ken!" (McCabe, 1999: 103). If you want to feel "authentically Scottish", wear a mini-kilt and use "the heather-mist cologne an the wisky spritzzers" (103). McCoy, thus, transforms himself metaphorically into a tourist in an invented Scotland, since he presents in a grotesque and sarcastic manner the exaggerated —and by no means authentic— myth of Scotland. Even Edinburgh's most famous places have been constructed to attract tourists; they are no longer "real": even Edinburgh's historical castle "was lit up like a postcard of itself" (103).

McCoy's parodic vision of the stereotypical Scotland undermines the nationalistic disclosure. Scotland is invented, just as any other imagining of the nation is. For, as Cairns Craig has pointed out, national imagination is "an imagining of the nation as both fundamental context of individual life and as the real subject of history" (1999: 9). In other words, it is a symbolic system constructed to provide people with a certain stable unity. This system is called by Anthony Smith a modern ethnie:

> [Modern ethnies] are nothing if not historical communities built up on shared memories. A sense of common history unites successive generations. [...] What matters [...] is not the authenticity of the historical record, [...] but the poetic, didactic and integrative purposes which that record is to disclose. "History" in this sense must tell a story, it must please and satisfy as narrative. (in Craig 1999: 11)

Imagining is, then, intrinsically linked to the notion of narrative —just as the notion of the nation is constructed as a narrative. Thus, McCoy ironises on the authenticity of Edinburgh's ancient tradition and the essentiality of Scottish identity. Still, tradition and authenticity are by no means the same, as the narrator

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5. This conception of the self as only a mask —persona— is shown in a most radical form in Fernando Pessoa's character Bernando Soares, the fictitious author of *Livro do Desassossego*: "I was not an actor, just my gestures" (Pessoa, 2003: 50, my translation).

shows in his sarcastic remarks. Moreover, defending some traditions in an excessively straight way can end up in the absurd, as the narrator mockingly suggests: "An if yez want a translation o whit Ah'm sayin, turn the wee knab oan yer heid set anti-cloakwise tae settin yin, if ye want English, twa, if ye want Americanj and three, if it's a guid auld bit o electric bagpipe music ye're efter!" (McCabe, 1991: 103). Scots, or even lallans, the language seriously defended by many Scottish writers,[6] loses its romantic authenticity with the narrator's sarcasm.

Echoing this, McCabe and his friend Grogan, the philosopher, mock pastoral literature as they talk with MacRae, the writer, a friend of theirs: "I mean for christsake Ian, could you not have thought of a better subject to write about than that? Cattle-sodomy in Perth in 1735?" (153). The past and tradition seem to sell in Scotland, as that is what is expected from the writers by the public. As MacRae points out: "Historical content, that should get it into the tourist shops" (153).

But literary creation cannot grow out of the sheer imitation of previous traditions, it also requires innovation and change, even though, as Grogan ironically puts it, not any change will serve: "Wonderful. Do it from the cow's point of view, Ian, nobody's written anything from the point of view of an eighteenth-century cow in Perth" (153). The romantic sentiment towards the remote past and nostalgia towards tradition that became almost a characteristic element in the Scottish imagination after the Union in 1707, is no longer taken seriously by the novel's late twentieth-century characters, since the remote past has been already commodified. This past can only be dealt with through irony and humour, since, as William Hart has stated, "a distorting or reducing humour [...] is a traditional stylistic energy of Scots" (1978: 43).

This past, which offers national values and icons, is perceived sometimes by McCoy as well as by other characters in the novel as a burden, but Grogan, McCoy and their friend MacRae are still able to laugh at Scotland's mystified past, thus showing an ambiguous relation to it, a kind of respectfully ironic sentiment: "'Ah, the past. To our glorious past in all its solemn cattle-sodomy splendour,' said Grogan with satisfaction. [...] "May the past continue to haunt us as it always has done and always will do,' proposed McCoy" (McCabe, 1991: 155).

The space depicted in the novel gives it a realistic and provincial tone, but the narrator makes fun of the stereotyping of Scotland and Scottishness in Edinburgh. As Gavin Wallace pointed out, by remythologising the symbolic contemporary Scotland, McCabe "succeeds in showing that it is Scotland itself,

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6. Tom Hubbard proposes the term "reintegrated Scots" to define "the reunification of a language which was fragmented into dialects [and] also the reconnection of its unique culture to other cultures at home and abroad: implied in this is a determined response to the urgent questions of man in society and in the cosmos" (in Craig, 1987: 179).

perhaps, and not its hapless, hopeless anti-hero, which is the true impostor and impersonator" (1993: 227).

The idea of everything having a façade is reinforced by McCabe's activity: selling spyholes. McCoy sells spyholes and because of this, he meets many people who live in different parts of Edinburgh. McCoy cannot help making some comments on the social situation of Scotland when he sees other people's living conditions —his economic situation is not very flamboyant either. Some people cannot even afford spyholes in their doors: "None of the doors had spyholes, but none looked as if they could afford to have them" (McCabe, 1991: 44).

The topic of the spyholes serves the narrator to make some reflections —while impersonating somebody else— on politics and social control, which are presented as inauthentic, in the sense that politics and the actions sometimes performed —as some of the excessive social-control measures taken— are just pantomimes which should not be trusted:

> Many confident tricksters are expert mimics. Take the present Secretary of State, sir. If he can fool people, sir, think how much easier it would be for a practised criminal to delude you over a tin tannoy. [...] I don't know how you feel about the Poll Tax, sir, but with this revolutionary, new, scientifically tested breakthrough in personalised surveillance equipment, there is no need to pretend that you are not the responsible person of the household when the Poll Tax Protection Squad calls. Never trust a voice, sir, especially when that voice claims to represent the government, for it may turn out to be genuine. (36-7)

The government may be in the end a fake entity, an impostor. Indeed, the text is clogged with political allusions which explicitly emphasise the novel's ideological commitment. The spyholes, which bring to mind Big Brother's camera eye that sees everything in Orwell's *1984*, serve as a kind of metaphor for more general issues dealing with security and privacy, and thus with ideology and politics. McCoy imagines himself talking to Semple, his landlord, and explaining to him in a mock-convincing tone what he is doing by selling spyholes:

> Security Consciousness, George, that's what the nineties will bring to all of us, and I'm not talking about folk insuring their spare set of dentures against accidental loss or damage. No, George, we're talking about survival, survival in the face of the tidal wave of crime about to sweep over the streets of Edinburgh and every other city in the land. [...] I'll need a few thousand lads from your private army to do a bit of door-to-door visiting [...]. Call it Operation Spyhole. (105)

In this sarcastic explanation we can read a strong critique of Thatcherite policy and the paranoia concerning security that rose to a climax in the nineteen eighties:

> The government? Don't worry about the government, George, this idea comes to me direct from Number Ten. Our lady at the helm is concerned about the mutinous lack of enthusiasm among her kilted brothers and sisters. She told me frankly that

she would have sent in the army but now they're already away somewhere else and won't be back for a while. (106)

McCoy ironically proposes to create a police-State, one in which everything is controlled, or, more specifically, one in which the privileged are "defended" from the poor:

> close-circuit television, armed guards, electronic moats, the works. [...] The haves must be protected from the have-nots and we will make sure they pay for the privilege. As for the riff-raff, we'll launch a scheme to eradicate homelessness: compulsory housing, George. The government will buy it. We will build the best-designed prison in the history of mankind, and we will call it Scotland. (106)

By being ironic on this situation, the character is criticising certain political strategies. One imagines the consequences of McCoy's mock-scheme to eradicate homelessness —compulsory housing— as almost as bad as the ones that the Labour government proposed after the Second World War in order to improve the Scottish housing situation: The Wheatley's Housing Act of 1924. This Act led to too good and too expensive housings, so it offered the Scots no real solutions (Mitchison, 1982: 404).

With his imagining of "Operation Spyhole", McCoy reveals the nonsense pantomime of politics, which thus becomes the scenario for impostors to play a certain role to make people trust them. Everything seems to be on stage. The reader perceives how the idea of "the Other McCoy" as opposed to "the real McCoy" covers everything in the novel: McCoy, other characters, the nature of personal relationships, social constructions as well as the idea of nation, political institutions, and the art of fiction making.

The Other McCoy parodies other previous texts not, however, from what Grogan described as a "cow's point of view" (see above), but through its intertexts, which erupt as other voices in the novel. In this sense, we might say that the figure of the author becomes that of an impersonator,[7] who shows different voices trough the art of storytelling, the voices of tradition, the voices of a community, etc.

Previous literary works in the novel could be interpreted both as haunting presences, as the other —other(s)— made present as the materialisation of the author's anxiety of influence, or, more in keeping with its postmodernist features, as an endorsement of Kristeva and Barthes' definition of the text as intertext.[8] From this perspective, the presence of previous and various voices can also be

viewed in Bakhtinian terms, as dialogues the text is engaged in, in this case with other literary texts, which are internalised and given new "replenished" meanings, to put it in John Barth's terms (1980: 65-71). Further, there is an implicit parallelism between the heterocentric conception of the self, expressed through McCoy's impersonation tendency, and the text as a container of a multiplicity of voices, as a space where previous texts arise with a new life.

McCabe's absorption and recasting of canonical intertexts is wholly creative.[9] In *The Other McCoy* previous texts are old voices which are newly spoken, reworked, played with, in order to construct new meanings. Among these, some are canonical texts, which McCabe parodies and gives a more positive outlook.

Among its many intertexts, the novel has been associated with a previous novel, *Magnus Merriman* (1934) by Eric Linklater (1899-1974), which is a political satire based on Eric Linklater's unsuccessful campaign as a N. P. S. Candidate:[10]

> The Other McCoy is reminiscent, in fact, of Linklater at his undoubted best in this mode in *Magnus Merriman* (1934), with its mock-heroic and teasingly ironic interweaving of authentic and inauthentic "Scottishness". [...] McCabe's novel is in many ways the counterpart of Linklater's wilfully ambivalent portrayal of Scotland's Nationalist and Renaissance 1930s. (Wallace, 1993: 226)

As Eric Linklater's son Magnus has explained, "[his] father, Eric Linklater, who stood as a candidate for the newly formed National Party of Scotland at the famous East Fife by-election of 1933, wrote his novel Magnus Merriman based on that experience" (2005). In it, the self-doubting hero, Magnus, says, "Patriotism and the waving of flags was an empty pride, but love of one's own country, of the little acres of one's birth, was the navel-string of life" (2005). Unlike Eric Linklater, McCoy does not feel any kind of nationalistic sentiment. As he reflects:

> I do not want to be born. Not here. Not like this. Not in Scotland. An idea had come to his mind. Or maybe it had been there for some time and he hadn't noticed. It was the idea that Scotland was a state of mind. He had no idea where the idea had come from, or what it meant. Forget it, but he couldn't. The more he thought of it, the less sense it made, but at the same time the more he thought of it the more important it sounded, like a nightmarish question in an examination paper: "Scotland is a state of mind." Discuss. (McCabe, 1990: 30)

Scotland seems to be a burden to McCoy, something he has been imposed and whose meaning he does not fully understand. Pat criticises through his irony the nationalistic emphasis drawn on Scottishness, but not in a nihilistic way, since, if

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7. The similarity of the role of writer and that comic impersonator is explicitly drawn by Grogan when he tells Pat McCoy about MacRae, the writer: "What he does is no different from what you do. He puts on voices" (150).

8. For a detailed analysis of the concept of intertextuality see Mª Jesús Martínez's article "Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept" (1996: 268-285).

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9. In "The Literature of Replenishment", John Barth (1980: 65-71) describes postmodernist literature in these terms, as managing to absorb the "exhausted" literary forms and recast them in a fully creative and innovative way.

10. The National Party of Scotland.

Scotland is a mental construction, change is possible and people can make the change, although it may not be an easy task:

> "Scotland is a state of mind." He drank. "But if it is a state of mind, it can change." He drank again. "And if it can change . . . how are we to change it?" He drained the glass and set it down. Though everyone seemed to have heard what Grogan said, no one made any response. (190)

This paragraph point to a key issue: all this constructions can be changed by people. Then, the questions is: how can the individual contribute?

Two of the most obvious intertexts of the novel are *The Private Memoires and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1924)[11] and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). James Hogg's masterpiece is yet another novel in the tradition of the figure of the double. Nevertheless, the Scottish work has its own particularities as it differs from the previous Romantic German *Doppelgängern* of E. T. A. Hoffman's *The Devil's Elixirs* (1814) and "The Sandman" (1816), who have a strong Catholic religious background. Hogg's *Confessions* is totally embedded in the world of Scottish Calvinist sects, of antinomianism and Caledonian antisyzygy.

Hogg's work explores, through the character of Gil Martin, the interplay between identity and appearance, between self and other (Blair, 2003: xviii-xix). In this novel, George is haunted by Robert, just as McCoy is haunted by the Other McCoy:

> over the singular delusion that I was two persons my reasoning faculties had no power. The most perverse part of it was that I rarely conceived myself to be any of the two persons. [...] [A]nd I found that, to be obliged to speak and answer in the character of another man, was a most awkward business at the long run. (Hogg, 2003: 106)

McCoy's and George's multiple identity parallel each other. *The Confessions*, which has been described by David Punter as "a detailed [...] account of schizophrenia" (in Blair, 2003: xx), presents the splitting or doubling of the self in a religious context, whereas *The Other McCoy* has nothing to do with Calvinism.

McCabe incorporates Hogg's and Stevenson's theme and actualises it by contextualising it in the Scotland of the nineteen nineties. Therefore, an understanding of the role of these intertexts requires a previous consideration of the double.

The motif of the double integrates two *topoi*: the *Doppelgänger* and the divided self, the difference between the two being that "[t]he first term is generally

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11. The complete original title is: *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner: Written by Himself. With a Detail of Curious Traditionary Facts and Other Evidence by the Editor.*

understood to refer to a second self taking a physical human form" (Abi-Ezzi, 2003: 9). The *Doppelgänger* is related to the divided self in that it is often "the externalised form of this inner conflict" (10). The relationship between self and double —or other self— is based on both connection and opposition, so that the double emerges from this "sameness and difference" (9). In keeping with this, the term "double" "expresses the presence of these conflicting elements conjoined in a single person" (10). In some cases, the double simply is an earlier stage in the materialisation of the *Doppelgänger*. Thus, for example, at the end of Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson" (1840), the *Doppelgänger* is the split-self made flesh:

> It was my antagonist. [...] [N]ot a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of his face which was not, even in the most absolute identity, *mine own*! It was Wilson; but he spoke no longer in a whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said: "*You have conquered, and I yield. Yet henceforward art thou also dead —dead to the World, to Heaven, and to Hope! In me didst thou exist— and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself*". (2004: 48, original emphasis)

In the realm of literature, the doubling process can be traced at many different levels: in the act of writing,[12] of reading,[13] in the issue of representation and identity, etc. Representation deals with two worlds: the "real" and the "invented" and, in this sense, literature itself could be closely linked to the motif of the double. The moment the author' *persona* detaches itself from its author and slips in between the covers of the book, "the Double assumes independent life as the Other" (Coates, 1998: 1). What is more, the writer has to live with the haunting presence of the figure of him or herself as an author.[14] Sometimes, the energy invested in the act of writing, the work of art, is materialised as a golem or an *odradek*,[15] which can live independently from their creators. These imaginary

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12. As mentioned in Chapter Seven, when analysing "The Start of Something" (2001), T. S. Eliot observed in the artist a scission between man and creator (2000: 94). To Eliot, this distinction was essential to achieve the objectivity that would grant significance and value to the individual work of art. The reality of having to perform certain roles and the feeling of having a "split" self are very much related.

13. The act of reading, of interpretation, could be seen as a doubling process: "To enter a work of fiction is in a sense to transform the other into a Double: to discover in the apparent foreignness of another person the lineaments of one's own aspirations and hopes" (Coates, 1988: 1).

14. As Jorge Luis Borges wrote in "Borges y yo" (1960): "Sería exagerado decir que nuestra relación es hostil; yo vivo, yo me dejo vivir, para que Borges pueda tramar su literatura y esa literatura me justifica. [...] Yo estoy destinado a perderme, definitivamente, y sólo algún instante de mí podrá sobrevivir en el otro. [...] Poco a poco voy cediéndole todo, aunque me consta su perversa costumbre de falsear y magnificar [...]. Así mi vida es una fuga y todo lo pierdo y todo es olvido, o del otro. No sé cual de los dos escribe esta página" (1996: 186).

15. Enrique Vila-Matas' novel *Historia abreviada de la literatura portátil* (1985) fully develops this idea of the artist being haunted by little doubles, golems, *odradeks* and other fantastic creatures.

creatures, which take the form of living characters, symbolise the writer's yearning for transcendence.[16]

This embodiment of the writer's faculties supposes a kind of splitting —or multiplication— of the self. This feeling has served many writers to explore the limits of fiction. Miguel de Unamuno's Augusto Pérez exemplifies this radical form of reduplication, since it is the character who confronts his creator. Tired of having to behave accordingly to the wills of their creators, the characters keep giving him drinks, so they can lead their peaceful lives while he is fast asleep. Another case that comes to mind is the confrontation of characters and realist author Dermot Trellis in Flann O'Brien's *At Swimm-Two-Birds* (1939).[17] In these works, an impure, plural self, necessary for dialogue to take place, is vindi-cated.[18] It results, thus, that the tension inherent in an act of writing is immersed in a splitting and doubling process, as already pointed out.

In Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the act of writing seems to be an intellectual and, thus, rational and positive activity, since only a cultivated mind could expose with clarity his thoughts on paper, as opposed to an animal, an un-civilised being. Writing is, then, in a sense, a positive tool against the darkness of the world:

> About a week has passed, and I am now finishing this statement under the influence of the last of the old powders. This, then, is the last time, short of a miracle, that Henry Jekyll can think his own thoughts or see his own face (now how sadly altered!) in the glass. Nor I must delay too long to bring my writing to an end; for if my narrative has hitherto *escaped destruction*, it has been by a combination of great prudence and great good luck. Should the throes of change take me in the act of writing it, Hyde will tear it in pieces; but if some time shall have elapsed after I have laid it by, his wonderful selfishness and circumscription to the moment will probably save it once again from the action of his *apelike* spite. (Stevenson, 1998: 75-6, emphasis added)

We are presented here with a (more or less) rational narrator who tries to avoid the animalistic, destructive force of his alter ego by constructing a narrative, a narrative that must have an end. Eventually, when Dr Jekyll stops writing, he

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16. As Unamuno explained: "Un ser que nace de esa facultad creadora que reside en el espíritu humano está destinado, por naturaleza, a una vida superior que le falta al mortal ordinario nacido del seno de una mujer. Cuando se nace personaje, cuando se tiene la dicha de nacer personaje vivo, se ríe uno de la muerte ¡no se puede ya morir! El artista, el escritor, el mezquino instrumento de esta creación morirá, enhorabuena; pero su criatura no muere ya (2000: 83-4).

17. It is worth noting that the author of the novel, Brian O'Nolan, writes under the pseudonym of Flann O'Brien.

18 "Y yo no defiendo y predico un yo puro, como el de Fichte, el apóstol del germanismo, un yo que no sea más que yo, sino que defiendo y predico el yo impuro, el que es todos los demás a la vez que él mismo. Porque yo pretendo, oh mis lectores, ser yo y ser vosotros y ser algo y en algún momento cada uno de vosotros" (73).

dies: "Here then, *as I lay down the pen* and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end" (76, emphasis added). Moreover, one has to keep in mind that Mr Hyde also dies with Jekyll's end, with the end of writing; Hyde could, thus, be interpreted as an imaginary creature who exists in fiction, in Jekyll's fiction. In a sense, this could be a trace of a certain uncannyness some authors find in the very act of writing.

Some historical and cultural elements seem to have contributed to the gestation of the Scottish double or Jekyll-and-Hyde figure. Linguistic dualism often leads to a dualist representation of identity, in what may be described as an adaptation of the *topos* of the *Doppelgänger*. As Wallace notes, the linguistic fissure "is not a reality confined to matters of narrative method and presentation, but the source of an inarticulacy both mythical and real which has become a cen-tral thematic preoccupation of Scottish fiction since the 1970s" (1993: 221). It is not by chance then, that Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) — should be one of the most representative Scottish canonical works. It seems thus, that there are certain specifically Scottish elements in the Jekyll-and-Hyde figure.

In Scotland, splitting and the double have been traditionally envisaged as negative. As Margaret Atwood has stated: "[a]ccording to Scottish Folklore, to meet your own double was sign of death: the Double was your 'fetch'" (2002: 40). As we have already seen, according to Edwin Muir, the divisions in language caused a division in identity as we have already pointed out, and this division is reflected in fiction. As Kenneth Simpson has noted:

> Irony, juxtaposition, multiple voices, habitual counter pointing —these are charac-teristic of Scottish culture over the past two centuries to an extent that distin-guishes the Scottish among the cultures of Europe; and they derive and express, the ongoing crisis of identity. (1988: 251)

The so called schizophrenic mixing of voices in Scottish literature would reflect the historical facts that led to the dissolution of the Scottish State and the crisis in Scottish identity. The crisis of the sense of self —or the "uncertainty about the reality of self", as Lionell puts it (in Simpson, 1988: 247)— was already present in the eighteenth century. Critics like Lionell or Simpson have claimed that the eighteenth-century Scot was decidedly modern, because this crisis became "one of the hallmarks of modern man" (252). Indeed, these critics suggest that Scottish literature was one of the precursors of the representation of what is now considered to be the modern and even the postmodern self:

> Role-playing and the projection of self-images are commonplace in modern life. Protean man is often regarded as a twentieth-century phenomenon. [...] But in eighteenth-century Scottish literature multiplicity of voice, fragmentation of personality, and the projection of self-images recur with a frequency and an intensity that are quite remarkable. (1-2)

Of course, the idea of a split self and the role-playing individual are not exclusive of the post-industrial age. As David Hume explained as early as 1896 in his *Treatise on Human Nature*, the mind is "a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations […]. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind" (in Simpson, 1988: 252). The self, then, is an actor performing different roles on life's stage.

As regards the discussion of the intertexts *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, there are plenty of allusions throughout *The Other McCoy*. Some are implicit, for example, when Patrick experiences the feeling of having a double: "McCoy felt as if he were being followed a few steps behind by a shadowy figure and he thought again about the other McCoy" (160). But others are explicit as, for example, when John tells McCoy that he had had "a long night last night with Camus' *Rebel*, Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* and the World Service News" (135).

Stevenson, who has been considered a precursor of psychoanalysis, shows in his masterpiece not that one human being is two, but rather that two or more minds or selves inhabit the human being. Indeed, Mr Hyde is not an external projection, but an internal doubling/splitting, which does not seek independence from his host (2003: 107). Developing this, McCabe moves on to show that this doubling/splitting can even be a way of maturation, and that this sort of splitting does not necessarily lead to fatal destruction.

The *topos* of the *Doppelgänger* is explicitly linked to the novel's main character when Grogan advises his friend Ian about how to write: "'Doppelganger, what's that?' 'That's German for something!' said McCoy, 'the accusation whining in his voice. 'Aye', said MacRae, 'it's German for the other McCoy'" (157). But talking about the *Doppelgänger* provokes in the characters no panic, as used to happen to characters in gothic romances. It only provokes laughter, maybe a nervous one, but laughter after all.

It must be noted here that after the German Romantic *Doppelgängern*, there appeared other doubles, especially in Russia, which were humorously treated. Nikolai Gogol's short stories "The Story of the Quarrel between Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich" (1834), "The Nose"[19] (1836) and "The Overcoat" (1842), parody to a certain extent Hoffman's *Doppelgängern* (Herdman, 1990: 99). Fyodor Dostoevsky is more interested in the emotional and psychological aspects of the double, but the Gogolesque element of humour is still strongly present in works such as *The Double* (1846), which combines "the mock heroic, the absurd, sometimes the grotesque, with an inspired inwardness which imparts to the comic

vision an underlying realism" (101). The novel's psychological interest is driven towards the world of neurosis and psychic dissociation and paranoia (102-3). This realistic psychological depth is further explored in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from Stevenson to Chekhov's "The Black Monk" (1893).

This psychological pre-eminence went hand in hand with the new psychological theories developed at the beginning of the twentieth-century. At this stage, the interpretation of the double started to move away from more spiritual and moral readings in favour of other interpretations in the line of psychic disintegration, annihilation of the self and loss of identity.[20] These interpretations became more and more materialistic and led to a certain pathologisation of the figure of the double, which became a symptom of psychic disintegration.

The tragic sense of the double is here understood tragicomically or even comically. The character's attitude is a humorous and hopeful one. Since, as the narrator points out, in life: "There was as much tragedy in it as comedy. It was all in the way it was done" (20).

McCoy's rumoured death carries strong symbolic and ritual connotations. The protagonists' death is found also in many stories where the motif of the double appears. As we have seen, McCoy feels, at the beginning of the novel, haunted by the double: "McCoy felt as if he were being followed a few steps behind by a shadowy figure and he thought again about the other McCoy" (160). The ghostly presence is a burden McCoy will have to get rid of if he wants to begin again. As in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the only possible solution is to bring the life of that unhappy man to an end, to symbolically die and integrate the split facets of his self. In this sense, murder can be an attempt to accomplish wholeness, as can be seen in the works of R. L. Stevenson and Edgar Allan Poe. As Natalie Abi-Ezzi has noted:

> The narrative claustrophobia evident in those of Stevenson's works set in Edinburgh is accordingly coupled with violence, both in the context of identity and of the Double. The contradictions implicit in an act of violence which must sever part of the Self from the Self in order to achieve singleness will become a significant aspect of the motif of the Double in the nineteenth century, where it often manifests itself as suicide. (2003: 29)

Dr Jekyll commits suicide at the end of Stevenson's novel. Likewise, Poe's story "Wiliam Wilson" ends up with the protagonist's death, or rather, suicide, as we have seen. As William Wilson kills his double, he realises that his antagonist and himself are both one and the same, so he commits suicide by killing someone who is and is not himself.

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19. In "The Nose", for example, it is the protagonist's nose that claims a life of its own, independent from its owner.

20. An example of this would be Frederic Myers' essay, "Multiplex Personality" (1886), which provides a mechanical model of the evolutionary maladaptation of psychic responses, and of "self-modification" (Herdman, 1990: 154)

We have already noted that *The Other McCoy* has a comic tone, but there is one particular element in the novel that emphasises this positive and happy outlook on life: the time when the whole story takes place. At Hogmanay, the celebration of the change of year. As the author himself wrote: "I decided very early on that all the action would take place in one day —the last day of the year— and that is the short story writer in me trying to keep things tight, economical and manageable" (2005). Hogmanay reveals itself, thus, as one of the novel's essential elements.

Hogmanay represents both the burden of the past and the possibility of a new beginning; for McCoy, this is an ambiguous day in which past and future, death and life, merge:

> The New Year. It had never been a straightforward, happy time for him, it had always caught at a bad time, a time of uncertainty, a time when the future looked as if it might be harder than the past. The past was hard too, but at least it was over. Or was it? (113)

According to Mircea Eliade, New Year's Eve was important for archaic civilisations with a mythical conception of time as eternal return, since it symbolises the end of a cosmogony and the beginning of a new one (1985: 54). As the narrator himself explains: "The year's wake was a terrible celebration, but it had to be attended to with due gravity", since it is both celebration and mourning (1991: 128-9). At Hogmanay, people celebrate the advent of the possibility of renewal in a catharic feast which symbolises the annual return to primordial chaos. René Zazzo has noted the strong relation of the myths of the androgyne and the twins with the moment of creation (1984: 143). According to mythical thought, cosmogonies are the result of the fight between chaos and cosmos,[21] therefore the creation of the world is brought about by the fragmentation of a primordial chaotic unity, and its division into two identical or opposite and complementary parts (Cortés, 2003: 108). The fictional cosmogony created by *The Other McCoy* shows both these identical parts —the world of "real" McCoy and the "Other" McCoy—, and the alternation of opposed and complementary chapters with the male and female protagonists and focalisers, McCoy and Yvonne.

Thus, in a sense, the mythical Hogmanay and the alcoholic catharsis are linked in McCabe's novel, and both are indispensable for the "communal orgy of regurgitation", where everything comes out "all the despair and the futility of the year, the decade, the century" (83). Only after this orgiastic —and comic— ritual can everything be renewed and return to normality.

In keeping with this comic Hogmanay spirit, the novel offers a grotesque and excessive image of Edinburgh, as a land of drunkards:

> He [McCoy] got off at Bread Street, where he cut through a vennel behind the tenements and came upon a young man crouched by the wall, vomiting over the cobbles. So it had started already. [...] There would be a lot more of it to come, gallons of spewed beer and pucked-up carry-out kebabs, fetid fish suppers and half-chewed chop sueys. There would be dark red rum-and-coke retches and colourless, viscous vodka vomits, little dry sicks and big wet eruptions bespattering the streets of Scotland everywhere, gobbed up in gutters, splattered in shop doorways, coughed into the niches of statues, sprayed over flowerbeds, retched under hedges, boked up in bus-shelters, trailed over windowsills, gegged against gravestones, skooshed on county roads from the windows of veering cars, honked from high bridges, blocking toilet bowls and plugholes all over the land. (84)

In this ludicrous description we get an excessive, Rabelasian view of a Scottish community where alcohol flows like tap water. In the novel's intertexts that we have mentioned —*Magnus Merriman*, *The Confessions*, and *Jekyll and Hyde*— drinking is very much present. What Douglas Gifford has said of Linklater's Magnus —"Certainly Magnus is brought down to earth, but after a drunken debauch he is still allowed his equivalent of MacDiarmid's Drunk Man's epiphany" (2001: xi)[22]— could be applied to McCabe's McCoy. Drunkenness is a special state of mind —a liminal or threshold state— which seems to involve a ritual purgatory act. As expressed in Linklater's Magnus Merriman:

> "I'm fond of drinking, and sometimes I get drunk," said Magnus. "I drink a great deal," said Skene. "I'm a philosophical drunkard [...]. What was the social argument for classical drama? By rousing emotion it purged the mind of emotion. It excited pity and fear, and by exciting them it cleared them out of the system. It was cathartic. Well, drink is a better catharsis than anything that Aeschylus or Euripides ever wrote". (2001: 59)

The Other McCoy explicitly draws connections between Dr Jekyll's and McCoy's drinking. For example, when he is thinking about McCoy's fake suicide, Grogan is reminded of Jekyll and Hyde, "who had a few too many" (McCabe, 1999: 168). And both Jekyll and McCoy start their personal odyssey by drinking a magic potion which alters their minds. Wondering about the reasons for McCoy's wrongly assumed death, Hugh Mitchell says "that's no a suicide case anyway" (168), and Grogan adds: "Isn't it?" (169), and then he reads to them the last sentence in Stevenson's novel:

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21. As pointed out in Chapter Two, when commenting on Brian McCabe's latest poetry collection *Zero* (2009), the author is very much interested in unity and primordial chaos.

22. Another example would be Hugh MacDiarmid's popular poem, "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle".

"'I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end'. And that's Jekyll's own statement. And remember that Jekyll's transformation involved the taking of a drink." He flicked through the pages until he found the one he wanted and declined the quote: "The mixture, which was at first of a reddish hue, began, in proportion as the crystals melted, to brighten in colour, to effervesce audibly, and to throw off small fumes of vapour. Suddenly, and at the same moment, the ebullition ceased, and the compound changed to a dark purple, which faded again more slowly to a watery green". "I'll have one of them," said McCoy. "Make it double". Laughter. "Who's round is it?" "We'll split it". (169)

Drinking seems to be an initiatic ritual previous to their personal quest. In McCabe's novel, this cathartic drinking takes place at Hogmanay and this fact suggests that it has a ritual and spiritual value. As Eliade has explained, almost everywhere, the collective expulsion of daemons brought about by excessive drinking coincides, or did coincide, with the feasts at New Year's Eve (1985: 56). The primordial chaos, or cosmic soup, is thus brought back in order to make the new creation of the world possible. This regenerative reconstruction amounts to a rebirth. In *The Other McCoy*, this symbolism is made explicit as McCoy, who is thought to be dead, reappears on Hogmanay among his friends and renewed (1991: 56). Similarly the whole community seems to awaken during the feasting, or rather to prepare for their ritual death and rebirth. When McCoy wakes up on the last day of the year, he reflects: "everything was cold and silent out there, as if everybody had died" (31).[23]

The circular structure of the novel reinforces the notion of mythical time as eternal return and of primordial time as the moment of creation, and brings about, the repetition of the cosmogony (1985: 56-7). The circularity of the structure is beautifully expressed at the end of the novel, when the characters begin the New Year together "circled around each other" (191). It is worthy noting that in this respect *Magnus Merriman* shows a very similar, positive ending: "And the country that was to share his greatness lay dark and warm beneath the snow, and mediated nothing but the year's new grass" (Linklater, 2001: 308).

McCoy seems to reject both past and future when he feels in a bad mood, but the characters in the novel are aware of the importance of both. This is why the friends toast at the first day of the year: "'to let me think now,' said Grogan. [...] 'And to let me go on thinking in the future,' added McCoy. 'And in the past,' added MacRae" (155). This slightly ironic conception of past and future is positive in

that it both prevents historical and cultural oblivion, and falling into a restrictive praising of the past which rejects change and denies possibilities to the future. This transforms the novel into an instrument of regeneration, a narrative with the capacity to heal the split between self and world.[24]

The work of Stevenson belongs to a tradition that "explains the narrative inability to achieve wholeness in his fiction" (Abi-Ezzi, 2003: 28). In contrast, *The Other McCoy* closes the cosmogonic circle by the actualisation of rebirth. Thus, in some way, it could be said to overcome the Calvinistic religious sense of failure and determinism. The difference between Stevenson's and McCabe's endings is that, whereas Jekyll has to die in order to kill Hyde, McCoy is offered the possibility of been reborn and start again, since *The Other McCoy* is not a fatalistic novel, but a novel of redemption, as death is not presented as an ending but as a change, as a new beginning. As the novel reaches its end, McCoy's conception of the world as an inescapable stage, and his awareness of having a dark facet of the self, other(s) with-in, change and he starts integrating both McCoys —the real and what he perceives as his other(s).

As the analysis has shown, McCabe uses this motif in a very innovative way, both to develop and explore his own preoccupations with contemporary life in Scotland and to position himself within the Scottish literary tradition that has the double as one of its key referents considered. On its own, McCabe's picturing of McCoy as an amusingly unheroic, fragmented protagonist, with an irrepressible tendency to impersonate surrounding or imaginary characters and voices, would lack any representative or archetypal character. It is precisely because he sets his character's troubles and adventures within the frame of the motif of the double that McCabe effectively manages to raise general questions about identity and the way in which individuals relate themselves to others. This self-in-relation or dialogic self necessarily involves ideological issues related to questions of representation, language, politics, personal relations, etc.

Self and other(s) are not only crucial notions for an understanding of the subject and its external reality, they are also essential when dealing with metafictional issues and questions of representation related to the nature of literature and the role of the artist. As we have seen, the novel displays an implicit parallelism between McCabe's heterocentric or dialogic conception of the self and of the literary text as heteroglossic, that is, containing a variety of different languages and voices. It is, thus, through the dialogue between self and

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23. Many stories which deal with the motif of the double or with transformation or metamorphosis start with an awakening and/or end up with death. An example which shows a great similitude with the beginning of *The Other McCoy's* is Dostoevsky's *The Double*, whose opening sentence runs: "It was a little before eight o'clock in the morning when Yakob Petrovich Goldadkin, a titular councillor, woke up from a long sleep" (2003: 5).

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24. The writer could be interpreted in this light as a shaman mediator between two worlds.

other(s), and through the intertextual echoes of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and other literary intertexts, that a textual space emerges, where other voices and previous texts arise with new meanings.

Thus, at the end of the novel, Platonic dualism, the fragmented self, and the split of self and other(s) give way to plurality: the self's internal duality and the duality of self and other(s) are transformed into a hermeneutics of plurality and dialogical understanding. Further, the novel's circularity and McCoy's rebirth work analogically to express Brian McCabe's conviction that is it still possible to renew the Scottish novel, by the creative reworking of the old meanings into new ones. In this sense, it would not be an overstatement to conclude by saying that Brian McCabe's *The Other McCoy* is good proof of the immense potentiality of literature, which will never be exhausted as long as there are writers with the imaginative capacity to transform the old into new literary forms.

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction I brought to the fore the main characteristics of the discursive explosion on the issue of identity in contemporary culture that had taken place in the postmodernist period as a result of the philosophical deconstruction of the traditional notion of monologic identity, and I argued that the decentring of this paradigm and the redefinition of the concepts of personal and national identity in more fluid and complex, dialogic terms constitutes a privileged area of exploration of contemporary art in general and literature in particular. I then went on to postulate as the working hypothesis of this thesis that the representation of identity in dialogic as well as in performative and interpersonal terms is a key recurrent *topos* in the fictional work of Brian McCabe and that, consequently, it sets up an excellent vehicle for the expression of diverse questions related to identity, to the mechanisms of the mind and to the relationship between self and other(s).

The problematics of identity have always been a particular interest of Scottish literature, as the socio-historical and political circumstances of Scotland have rendered the notion of Scottish identity rather difficult to articulate in univocal or simple terms. In the last decades this interest has become almost an obsession, as can be deduced from the great increase in the number of works devoted to the exploration of identity. On the whole, these works reflect identitarian conflicts triggered off by the necessary adoption of the new supra-national sense of identity demanded by our globalised contemporary world.

After the Union in 1707, the English literary tradition was extended to the whole of Great Britain, thus silencing the Scottish and other "minor" traditions existing in Scotland at the time. This erasure materialised in the dismissal of Scottish literature and culture *en bloc* as improper, inconsistent and debased. This outlook on Scottish literature was enforced by such an influential writer and

critic as T. S. Eliot, who argued that there could be no "proper" Scottish tradition because Scottish writers were writing in several languages and believed that Scotland was an "artistic wasteland". The advent of postmodern thinking from the late nineteen sixties onwards signals the beginning of a systematic questioning of this sort of monolithic definition of culture based on the stability and unity of language, reaching a climax at the turn of the twentieth century, when the issue of language and the search for a Scottish voice become central preoccupations. It is at this stage that the intellectuals' belief that the Scottish imagination was "ill" or at least deeply damaged starts to show its first fissures, while at the same time new notions such "hybridism" and "dialogue" start to proliferate in critical and cultural circles.

The changing attitude to Scottish art and literature materialised in the first half of the twentieth century in the so-called "Scottish Renaissance", a period of general revitalisation that went hand in hand with a growing self-confidence in Scottish culture and politics. During this period, many writers, such as Hugh MacDiarmid, George Douglas, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, or Edwin Muir, contributed in different ways to the interrogation of Scottish history and culture. Besides its influence on the literary and cultural scene, the Scottish Renaissance also had a profound effect on the Scottish independence movement, as some of the writers belonging in it set the basis for what has been termed the "Scottish devolution". All this contributed to a newly gained optimism, which allowed for the initiation of a process of "working through" of the Scottish traumatic past and for the proliferation of positive interpretations of Scottish culture.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the literary production in Scotland saw such an important revitalisation that the period is recorded by literary historians as the "Second Scottish Renaissance". This period is associated to writers such as Iain Banks, Janice Galloway, Alasdair Gray, Jackie Kay, James Kelman, A. L. Kennedy, Brian McCabe, Ali Smith, Alan Warner, and Irvine Welsh. For all their particularities, these writers may be said to share an eclectic restlessness, linked to the need to find a fresh starting point for their work inspired in different aspects of the Scottish tradition. The recovery of a certain national self-confidence clashed, however, with the need to adopt a new supra-national citizenship, and this brought about a multiplicity of styles and forms with which to speak for a "whole Scotland". The attempt to formulate a hybrid and dialogic concept of Scotland and Scottishness contrasts with the previous movement, the first Scottish Renaissance, whose aims were not so global or inclusive. Thus, during the second Scottish Renaissance regional accents and local dialects increasingly took centre stage in the literary life of the nation, at the same time as the nation itself increased in importance, thus becoming proudly unitary and polyphonic. The image of this new Scotland that is being portrayed from the last third of the twentieth century onwards is much more fluid and plural, since it is engaged in a polyphonic dialogue between the Scottish tradition and the rest of the world.

This is the socio-cultural and literary context within which Brian McCabe's work should be placed. This task was carried out in Chapter One, followed by a brief account of McCabe's evolution as a writer in Chapter Two. Given the complementariness of his poetry and fiction, it was necessary to include a brief section on the main tenets of his poetic production, before setting to the analysis of the fiction itself. As a prerequisite for this analysis, I outlined the main characteristics of the contemporary short-story genre and its ancestors —the tale, the myth and the fable—, particularly the features concerning the issue of identity, which, in these older genres, is addressed quite differently in form and function from the way in which it is addressed by McCabe. The evolution of the short story is intimately linked to the genre's growing emphasis on identity, as the original weight on plot shifted towards an emphasis on character construction. In general, the short-story form allows for a greater freedom than the novel in the imagining of characters and their doings, as they are not determined by the presentation of an extensive and detailed fictional context. The limitations in character representation may have led to the appearance of "frontier" or marginal subjects, who are in "threshold periods" or "peninsulas", as McCabe calls them. These liminal stages, during which physical circumstances largely determine what can be expected of a character in the way of action and individual choice are quite useful for the exploration of identity issues, as, in these states, nothing is fixed and taken for granted.

As mentioned above, until the turn of the twentieth century, self and nation were viewed in monologic and binary terms, as self-contained and oppositional entities: the self was defined by opposition to the other, and Scotland by opposition to England. The works of George Herbert Mead, Lev Vygotsky, the Bakhtin group in the early twentieth century and, from the nineteen sixties, that of Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, displaced this monologic notion of identity in favour of the notion of self in dialogue or in relation, that is, presupposing an active interaction between individuals, between self and other(s). The dialogic models proposed by these New Critics and Russian Formalists and later refined by the mentioned Structuralist and Poststructuralist thinkers had widespread implications, as they opened up new possibilities of reconfiguring power relations. In this context, the question of the form of the personal becomes the question of the form of communication, which is now revealed as a communal matter. It is at this juncture that literature becomes a privileged medium for all these identitarian anxieties to be exposed, debated and overcome.

In keeping with the fluidity of Being, human begins are constantly impelled to adapt and re-adapt to the world, establishing a dialogue with the other(s). The self is thus understood as a self-in-relation, a self-in-action. Consequently, if the self is defined in relation to the other(s), the Age of the Individual should also be the Age of the Community, as both thought(s) and action(s) bear in mind the transcendence of this plurality of Being. As Jean-Luc Nancy claims in *Being Singular Plural*, dialogism necessarily implies an ethical positioning, as the self-other(s) relationship is both singular —particularly valid— and plural —universally valid. If we follow Hegel's statement that "the I is in essence and act the universal: and such partnership (*Gemeinschaftlichkeit*) is a form, though an external form, of universality" (1975: 31), every singular thought will affect the plural being. There is, thus, no thinking of the self without a thinking of the other(s) and *vice versa*.

The estrangement and aloofness of McCabe's narrators and characters convey a radical perplexity in the perception of the world(s), where individuals seem to have just arrived, a world with complex and invisible rules, both difficult and enticing circumstances, always surprising, and full of sad events, and humour, and always bringing to the fore the difficulty and existential necessity of relating with the other(s). Most of the narrations are focalised through characters, who seem to be undergoing a process of self-discovery, involving both the exploration of the world and the unknown facets of their own selves. In this sense it might be stated that the figure of the stranger is the perfect embodiment of what is presented as an uncanny encounter with the other(s), yet unknown, but familiar in a sense.

In his first collection, *The Lipstick Circus*, the issue of madness is addressed in relation to world-perception and (mis)communication, and thus, related to social and cultural elements. Education and environment are key elements at work when dealing with mental matters, as antipsychiatry has shown. In "The Lipstick Circus", "Interference", "Killing Time", "The Shoes" and "From the Diary of Billy Bible", characters, who do not conform to the norms of rationality, are treated by others as an Other, following the Cartesian axiom that identifies reason with existence. Their position is contextualised in McCabe's stories by means of relating them to their social context. By this means, the family and the institution are scrutinised indirectly and others are incorporated into the problem of the self. Other characters are alienated by their daily routines as a consequence of certain conventions and practices, such as constant required role-playing, and the monotony and lack of meaningful dialogue in their lives. There seems to be an existential gap between them and the world and they cannot experience themselves "together with" others or "at home in" the world, as R. D. Laing has put it (1965: 17). The characters' happiness or healing can only take place by means of communication with others, that is, in a social context. An encounter with a stranger or with a strange event can disrupt their daily routine and eliminate their feelings of alienation and disconnection. Moreover, their opening up to the unexpected others invites them to establish an improvised bond with the strangers they come across.

In the collection *In A Dark Room with a Stranger* life is the dark room, and the stranger is oneself, as well as partners, sons, elders, neighbours or passers by. The whole collection seems to provide some kind of revision of different "peninsulas" or "threshold periods", such as childhood, adolescence, marriage, fatherhood, separation, reconciliation, etc. Some of the short stories in the collection deal with childhood perceptions, and with the process of growing up. Children's perceptions are similar to those of mad people because their view of the world is not mainstream, it is different from what could be considered "normal". For example, the child's perception in "Interference" is very similar to that of an insane character, because his imagination is so powerful that it alters the world.

Some stories show the young characters' feelings of estrangement and fascination for the world, which lead them to experience a liminal identitarian position, still under construction, a mutable and changing self. Others deal with more mature or adult preoccupations, such as routines and family relationships. These characters have already grown up and still feel that they are living the life of a stranger, or living with strangers, and they search with some nostalgia for a return to the past and to childhood. Maturity is presented as another threshold period, where the world is displayed as a complex web of events and relations. In "Peninsula" and "Where I'm From", the generational gap between adults and children is enhanced by the fact that the younger characters belong, like Brian McCabe, to the first working-class generation that had access to higher education.

The collection's general impression is that the characters' crises could be healed through their relation to others. Some characters are able to exploit the positive side of strangeness, or to break out of the paralysis of the routine that makes them feel alienated and disconnected, as happens in "A Dark Room with a Stranger". These encounters with the other(s), associated to discovery and maturation, allow characters to overcome spiritual paralysis and to enlarge their spectrum of thought and action through the incorporation of new and alien experiences. The pejorative connotations of strangeness are subverted, as it functions as the force that restores the capacity of progression in the individuation process. In this sense, McCabe's redefinition of otherness may be said to echo Emmanuel Levinas' definition of an ethics of alterity. Only through an ethical encounter with the face of the other and through the establishment of relationships between self and other(s) can the individual feel in harmony with him or herself.

The collection *A Date with My Wife* consists of eighteen short stories characterised by their sharp humour and an inventive style. The stories in this collection expose the strangeness in the everyday, and further develop the essential relation self-other(s). Normality and strangeness are further nuanced and scrutinised, as they are related to cultural and social forces at work in the making of the contemporary Scottish subject. The influence of Presbyterian upbringing on the individual is both asserted and denied in the collection, as the relationship of religion and a damaged Scottish identity is simultaneously emphasised and undermined through parodic exaggeration, as happens in "Welcome to Knoxland", or through the weight of the existential belief in the inevitability of personal freedom, as in "Petit Mal". Other stories deal with postmodern lifestyles, ideologies, and technologies, which trigger off a nostalgia for the intimacy of the old physical contact. For example, "Something New" ironises on the essentiality of Scottish identity through the deconstruction of identity. Masculinity is an aspect that is also deconstructed in this collection: the Scottish "hard man" stereotype disintegrates in favour of the common man, with his particular daily conflicts. Both national and sexual stereotypes and roles are presented as constructions, as roles that individuals can choose to perform or not. In this collection, McCabe denounces social hypocrisy in short stories such as "Waiting at the Stairs", and he explores the stigmatisation of some social identities —such as handicapped people, mental patients, prostitutes and homosexuals—, as well as the various ways in which a character's self-image depends on the gaze of the other(s).

In the novel *The Other McCoy*, McCabe uses the classical motif of the double in a very innovative way, as a means to develop and explore his own preoccupations with contemporary life in Scotland, and to position himself within the Scottish literary tradition. The protagonist, Patrick McCoy, is an amusingly anti-heroic, fragmented protagonist, whose irrepressible tendency to impersonate and ventriloquise raises general questions about identity and the way in which individuals relate to others. The relationship between self and other(s) is not only crucial for an understanding of the subject, it also provides an insight into the nature of literature and representation. The novel displays an implicit parallelism between McCabe's dialogic conception of the self and of the literary text, which is overtly heteroglossic, in its use of different languages and voices. It is through the dialogue between self and other(s), and through the intertextual echoes of classical texts such as *The Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, or *Ulysses* that a space for (new) meaning emerges. Platonic dualism, the fragmented self, and the split of self and other(s) give way to plurality: the self's internal duality and the duality of self and other(s) are transformed into a hermeneutics of plurality and dialogical understanding. Further, the novel's circularity and McCoy's "rebirth" work analogically to express McCabe's conviction

that is it still possible to renew the Scottish novel, by the imaginative reworking of the old meanings into new ones.

The figure of the stranger in McCabe's fiction is related to the other(s) as well as to the self. To live is to find oneself living, to be curious about self and other(s), to be-with the world —with our circumstances—, as "intelligible reality" can only be the reality of *being-in-common* (Nancy, 2000: 55). Consequently, we are never alone, but open to circumstances, like the characters in McCabe's fiction, who are never alone but interconnected with others, who are never singular but plural, as all their singularities are inscribed in a general human nature. It could be argued that they all are in a marginal position —in a threshold or "peninsula"—, in the sense that they have an unstable critical position and no guaranteed stable identity, but this must not be interpreted as a negative characteristic, as it is precisely in the space between self and other(s) that singularity can transcend itself and make the ethical move towards the alien and unknown.

Moreover, there is something that regroups or unites the different characters —the different selves— that appear in McCabe's fictions from children, teenagers, fathers and mothers to mental hospital inmates, alienated workers, or tramps: there is a thin thread made out of common elements and circumstances —recurrent symbols, similar perceptions, repeated events, etc.— that are put in relation or activated by the readers. This fictitious thread is the web that links the universal with the particular, a web that is fostered in McCabe's writing, as the author believes that the universal must be revealed by the particular (McCabe, 1991b: viii). And it is the role not only of characters but also of readers to make the ethical move that Lévinas proposed beyond the self and towards these others, to look at the Other(s) in the face and accept their utter Otherness.

As we have seen, the Scottish backgrounds to the stories do not reduce their validity to a specific context. Rather, they become representative of the human condition at large, since the author uses what he knows best as a basis to access a more universal or philosophical reality. As Jean-Luc Nancy has pointed out, "every singularity is another access to the world" (2000: 14). This is why in the foreign stories of others there is always a familiar sameness, a "plural touching of the singular origin" (14) that all sorts of readers can recognise and acknowledge as their own.

The openness of individual identity is also applicable to communal identity. As we already know, a community is not a homogeneous and static classification but a polymorphous, singular-plural relational entity based on the negotiation of powers. As Voloshinov remarked, at the very basis of our cultural development as individuals there lies the need to unite into a collectivity, which is initially created by hybridization (in Shukman, 1983: 99). These collectivities are as dialogic and performative as the individual self. Consequently, what has been said about

the individual's self-other(s) relation could also be extrapolated to the identity of a nation. Like the subject, the nation can no longer be understood in either-or oppositional terms, but rather as an endlessly evolving and hybrid entity with different forces entering into continuous dialogue with each other.

Under this light, Scotland can no longer be considered as a traumatised community, a "damaged land" or an "artistic wasteland". Once the stability and unity of language have been questioned by dialogism, it is easy to see the beauty and creative energy of the polyphony created by a plurality of languages coexisting with each other in the Scottish nation. What appeared as a mirage now becomes a complex and dynamic relational social entity constructed "through mutuality of personal relationships" (MacMurray, 1957: 38). In other words, from a dialogical perspective, MacMurray's proposal of the "I say to you; and I await your response" (74) becomes Nancy's "we are", "we are-with-each-other" (1957: 74, and 2000: 33, respectively).

The dialogic formulation of individual and national identity in McCabe's work would also have consequences for (Scottish) literature and criticism. If nation and language are not homogenous but plural and dynamic constructions, the cultural expression of the Scottish people will be that of a "dialectic of traditions" and not that of a "split self" as defended by Edwin Muir. As the lack of unity in Scotland's languages and literary production start to be envisioned not as a short-coming —as Eliot's concept of tradition suggested— but as an asset, the possibilities created by the plurality inherent to a tradition can be consciously explored. As a consequence, Scottish art has started to revitalise itself in the last decades of the twentieth and the first of the twenty-first century, and social pessimism and traumatic interpretations of the Scottish artistic and cultural achievements are being replaced by a more complex vision of the state of affairs. Criticism has recognised the Scottish tradition as something valid and rich in itself and this has brought about the self-confidence required for cultural dialogue.

 Echoing this change in world-view, the alienated and damned emblem of Scottishness embodied by the Jekyll-and-Hyde figure has become the Patrick-McCoy, the impersonator and ventriloquist with the immense potential for renewal and regeneration of Scottish literature and culture associated to his comic character.

APPENDIX

CONVERSATION AREA TWO:
A CONVERSATION WITH THE SCOTTISH WRITER
BRIAN MCCABE[1]

Edinburgh, 23rd July 2008

McCabe appears, casually dressed and with a gentle smile. He tells me he is in a very good mood since he has just heard that the poems he has been long working on are going to be published.[2] It's difficult to get poetry published nowadays, as the publishers themselves comment to him. We walk towards a café in Edinburgh, near University —where he has been teaching some Creative Writing courses—, and he tells me he now may get into fiction again, some short stories, maybe another novel…

I tell him that besides the article entitled "Identity(ies) in Brian McCabe's *The Other McCoy*", I expect another article to be published, on the short story "Say Something".

Brian McCabe: "Say Something" was done on radio first. It was lot of fun to do. Obviously it was just one actress, because the man never speaks, and she really got in her part, and when we finished recording I was sitting behind the glass with the producer and we went through to see the actress and, she had just been sobbing her heart out at the end of "Say Something", at the end of the story, you know; and when we went into she was laughing hysterically. [*Laughter*].

You know, actors are such strange creatures…; I don't understand that, to me it's like a kind of magic, the way somebody can just become like someone else. My oldest daughter is an actress, and she can do it, she can; certainly, she's like another person. I don't know how to do it.

Interviewer: Well, you, as a writer, do that also, in a sense.

B. M.: Oh, yes, I can imagine being another character, yes. I suppose that's one of the most basic things in writing fiction that you have to do; but, actually to act like them and to speak like them, that's something else… something I can't do. Although the character McCoy in *The Other McCoy* does that in a way, you know, eh, he's a mimic.

I.: I remember reading in that novel that McCoy had that "overcoat feeling"… maybe that's what a writer could feel.

B. M.: Yes sort of. I suppose it could apply to.

"The overcoat feeling", yes.

I.: For me, being a non-Scottish reader, it's difficult sometimes to know certain things about some specifically Scottish issues, so let me first ask you a few questions about Scotland or rather about Scottishness.

B. M.: Ok.

I.: You sure will remember Edwin Muir's phrase "Scotsmen feel in one language and think in another".[3]

B. M.: Yes.

I.: … And how Scottish culture and identity are usually represented or portrayed as "schizophrenic". Is this so, or is this a kind of cliché?

B. M.: The schizophrenic Scot; I suppose it is. I mean Jekyll and Hyde and Deacon Brodie; and then there is the idea of the very polite and civilised Edinburgh of old ladies in fur coats who look through their net curtains what is going on on the street, and there is that kind of image of Edinburgh, and then there is a sort of underbelly of Edinburgh, that sort of Irving Welsh side of Edinburgh, if you like; so I mean it is a cliché, of course, but it's true.

I.: Yes, it's even something physical, you know in the Royal Mile, and its underground closes, like "Mary King's close".[4]

B. M.: Yes.

I.: But do you think language is really so important in the shaping of the Scottish character?

B. M.: I think it probably is, um, I mean we speak in English with some Scots words through them; but the Scots language has kind of faded of it. I think I know what Edwin Morgan means when he says that. An old poet who is dead now, called

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3. As Edwin Muir explains in his long essay entitled *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer*, Scotsmen's emotions turn to the Scottish tongue, with all its associations of local sentiment, and their minds to a standard English which for them is almost bare of associations other than those of the classroom. (1936: 21).

4. Actually, in 2003 a commercial tourist attraction was opened, where visitors can make a guided dramatic-historic tour to see that uncanny part of the undergrounds of Edinburgh's Old Town, in which, around 1750s, entire ruinous closes where literally covered by new buildings.
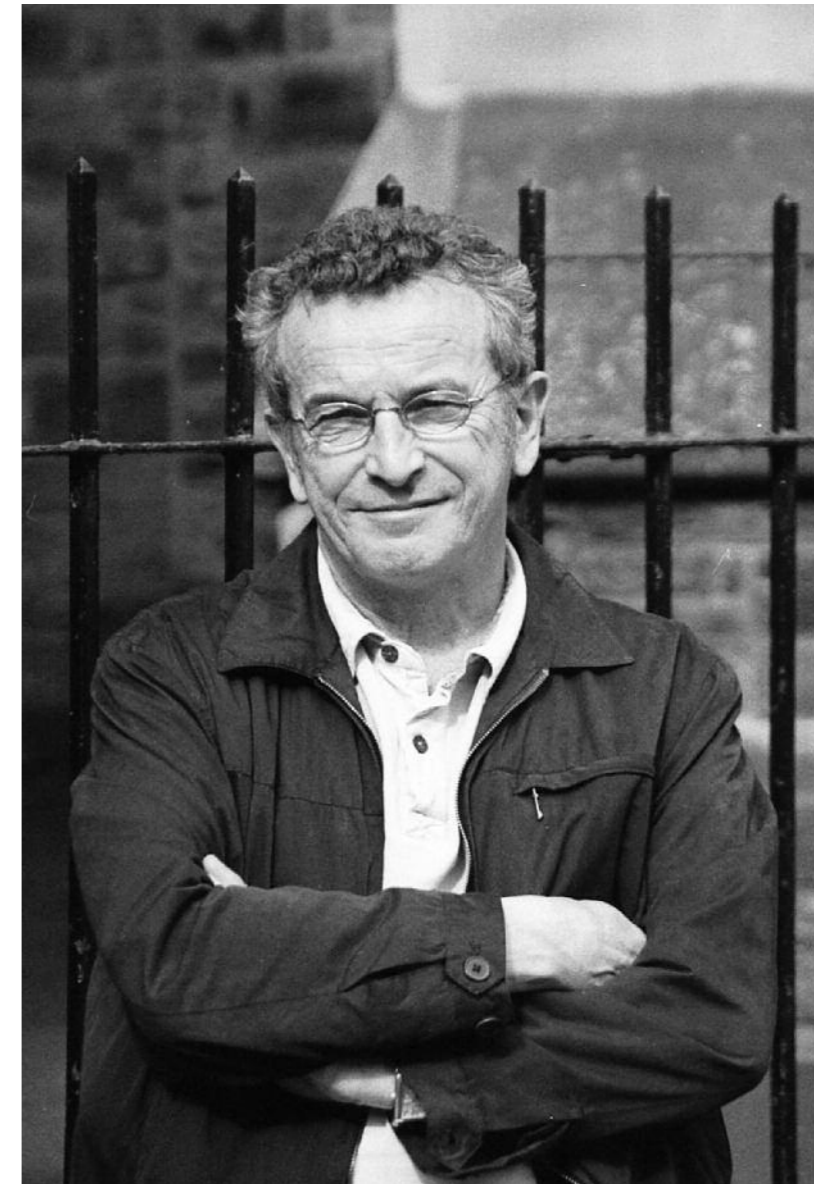
Brian McCabe
Edinburgh, July 2008

Norman MacCraig, he used to say we wrote in English with a Scottish accent. And I think a Scots writer's use of English is usually different from an English writer's use of English. It has no so much to do with using particular Scots words, although there is a bit of that, but it has so much to do with the syntax, the order, and the rhythm of speech, I think. There is quite a lot of variation here in Scotland. Glasgow can be quite laconic, like the Glaswegian poet Tom Leonards who writes these very laconic little poems. And then generally I think the Scots are perhaps traditionally more emotionally repressed or inhibited and this affects the speech.

I'm not sure how much of it comes from the language and how much from the Scot's character reflected in the language, but certainly I think the language is important and the way we use English is important. Sometimes when I'm writing a poem a Scots word will come up that I used to use more when I was a boy, so there is a choice whether to use "the door *squeaked* on its hinges" or "the door *grind* on its hinges"; "grind" is a Scots word, and I often choose the Scots word because it's a bit more expressive or something in terms of sound.

I think it is important to most Scots writers.

I have written one or two things in dialect but in a way, even the things I've written in English I think they are quite Scots in a way, and certainly my identity is very much Scottish, it is part of my identity, a strong part of it. I think it's the same with most Scottish writers, even younger Scottish writers... Something about Scottish history and the Scottish character, and the landscapes, and the environment, helped to shape the way they write.

I.: You think there's any difference with the younger writers, or are there none, do youngsters nowadays prefer rock bands rather than writing?

B. M.: No, there are quite a lot, more than there used to be 20 or 30 years ago. It's a growing, a growing thing. Well, people throw the word "Renaissance" around, you know, that's a bit an exaggeration, but there's certainly a big flourishing of new writing in Scotland and young Scottish writers. A lot of them who are very successful, not just in Scotland but in England or abroad; people like Janice Galloway and... There are so many... many.

I.: Let me then ask you about the translation of those Scottish works. What about your work being read in another language?

B. M.: I haven't been translated that much, but there is a book of short-stories published in France, in French (McCabe, 2004).

I.: I also have read some poems translated into French, in a French Magazine.[5]

B. M.: Yes; that was very interesting.

I.: How can be certain things be translated, such as the Scots dialect?

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5. *La traductière. Revue franco-anglaise de poésie*. No. 19.

B. M.: The woman who was translating them was quite good at that, she used a kind of Southern French dialect for the stories which, in which dialect was important, either in the dialog or the way they were narrated; and she did too one piece —"The Hunter of Dryburne" (McCabe, 1985: 131-135 and McCabe, 2003: 101-107)— which was really pure dialect, in a very Scottish voice and she seemed to do this quite nice as well.

I had some other translations done, again, in French, which were not so good; some things are quite difficult to translate, like for example in Scotland you we've got something that is called "the drying green", and this is a patch of grass where you dry your clothes, and there is no real equivalent in French, so this came out in one translation as a patch of dry grass; and the funniest one was, and appears in a book actually, in one story, I don't know if you've read the story, it's … the story takes he form of a computer site.

I.: Knoxland.[6]

B. M.: Aha.

Yes, a kind of nightmare site where everything is all mixed up with religion. In that story there is a sentence which has to do with Rangers and Europe and Rangers is a football team, the Glasgow Rangers and this girl didn't understand that, and she thought "rangers" meant like "girl guides", you know, so she tried to translate into French as girl guides in Europe. I thought it was very very funny.

So some things go wrong but she did a very good job, actually. One story works particularly well because it was about a Scottish French school exchange[7] and, so … in that story you get these boys not getting very good French and she had the problem of translating that, whether to leave that or not, and she did leave it, but that was an interesting one, because of the bits of French that were already in the story, and just because of the whole subject of France and Scotland.

I.: Yes.

B. M.: I think it's great to have something translated.

You know, I took part in a translation festival franco-anglaise in Paris,[8] and

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6. (McCabe, 2001: 1-14).

7. "A New Aliance" (McCabe, 2001: 171-209).

8. In 2002, in an effort to popularise French poetry, the Scottish Poetry Library and the Institut Français d'Ecosse invited the director of the annual Festivale franco-anglaise de poésie and editor of *La Traductière*, Jacques Rancourt, to choose about twenty poems from the last twenty years and give them to four Scottish poets, who would then translate twelve of these poems.

The four Scottish poets were Magi Gibson, David Kinloch, Brian McCabe and Donny O'Rourke. On 14 December 2002, Rancourt presented his own and his contemporaries' poetry at an open session at the Institut français, chaired by Graham Dunstan Martin, a distinguished translator of French poetry.

McCabe translated Françoise Han's "Les Dieux" ("The Gods"), Leslie Kaplan's "La Banlieu" ("The Housing Estate"), Josée Lapeyrère's "Si je vous dis" ("If I Say to You"), Anne Talvaz's "Le quartier des fleuves" ("The River District").

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there were six writers: four French speaking writers and three English people writers around, from Australia, Canada, Scotland, and we translated each others' poems. Of each poem that you could get translated, you got four versions, and then you had to choose the one you thought was best to go into the magazine or whatever. And it's sometimes quite difficult to judge, because of course it's in a different language, so you have to try and judge it in French, but it's a really interesting process.

I've got some poems translated into Italian; nothing in Spanish I think.

I.: That will come in the future, I hope.

Some days ago I was reading some short stories by a Spanish poet and short story writer, Leopoldo María Panero (2007), who lives in a mental institution. His work is very much intertextual, and he seems to use other writers' words, even sentences, stories, etc. as if he could not help relating all those texts, integrating them and creating some kind of personal hypertext. How do you get on with the texts you have read?

B. M.: Yeah, I mean, this sort of influence stuff… it's a difficult thing to talk about, because, you know, you are not always conscious of what is influencing you, really.

I.: Sure. It happens to me even as a reader.

This morning, when I was in the bus to Bonnyrigg,[9] there happened something very funny: There were some old women on the bus, a man and me, and, somewhere on the road, the bus conductor, who was a woman with extremely long eyelashes, stopped, and she started yelling through the window: "Good Morning! Goood Mooorniiing!", almost falling down, and then she turned back smiling and she told us: "It's my husband". Someone added: "That's a marriage of busses passing by", and everybody had to laugh, including me. And I thought this could be a part of a story by you.

B. M.: Yes, it could.

I.: So, I mean influence is there all the time, it influences what I see.

B.M.: Yes. I've been influenced by a lot of writers. In fiction, there is one I know I was definitely influenced by and that was someone from a very different background and culture: to me it was Bernard Malamud, a Jewish American fiction writer. I used to read his stories and though he was so good, and then I read them again to see how he had done something. And I remember picking up lots of, I mean this is a critical example but there is a story, it's called "My Son the Murderer" (Malamud, 1973), it had two narrators: the father narrated some of the story and then the son narrated some of it, and then the father and the son, so there are

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9. Brian McCabe and the main character in *The Other McCoy* (1990), Patrick McCoy, spent some childhood years in Bonnyrigg.

two different narrators; and I thought I've never seen this done before and I thought, well, I could use that, you know, and something else. But there were also other things that I couldn't, that I would find difficult to explain, to do with the syntax, the sentences, … He was very good at working in a kind of Jewish-American speech pattern into his narrative. Not just the dialog but the narrative. So you had a lot of things as in brackets, in parenthesis, like asides, and this reflected a kind of speech pattern. I think I learned a lot about doing that from him and I have used that a lot in my own writing. It's an extensively third person narrator but we are getting subjective impressions, characters' points of view, and to some extent, character speech pattern through the narration, not just in the dialog, but in the narration. I do that quite deliberately and it's something I learned a lot about from him, from books. So reading does have an effect, definitively, and… I suppose there are bad influences as well, that's the trouble, you know.

When I was a young writer I would write stories that were some kind of pastiches of Ernest Hemingway, something I remember reading Chekhov's short stories when I was quite young, and in a way I was trying to copy them; but there was nothing, there was nothing to copy, there was nothing to imitate, there was no style that I could see. Hemingway was easy to mimic, but I realised that what makes Chekhov so good is his insight into human psychology and motivation, which you can't imitate, so that was a kind of lesson.[10] I suppose though, that it was a kind of influence, because it showed me the great thing that a story could be, that a short story could be just as much a great work of art as a novel; and that made me want to write my own stories as well. So there you are then, mentioning Chekov as an influence.

I suppose in Scotland, closer to home, there have been other influences on me: friends who write, for example. I saw one of them walking by, while we were sitting here, Ron Butlin, who is a friend, and we went to University together, he and one or two others, we used to read each others' work a lot, and sometimes still do work in progress. And we know each others' work so well that sometimes Ron can read something by me and just write at a certain point write "no" in the margin, and I know exactly what he means. So that's a kind of influence as well, from contemporary writers —other writers that you know and work with, works you read. I mean reading is part of the same process as writing, really.

I.: I wanted to ask you now about your writing processes, but I know it's difficult to answer to this.

B.M.: Right.

I.: I remember a narrator of your talking about the act of writing

B.M.: in a story.

I.: yes, in a story. The focaliser is a writer and he …

B.M.: Right, I think I know the story you mean.[11]

I.: So I wanted to ask you if there are stories "which virtually write themselves" or rather you get an idea or some impression that you have to work on and rework, until you "cup it in your hand"…

B.M.: Usually, I have to work quite hard on them, but occasionally you do get one that "virtually writes itself" but that's a quiet rare thing. There was one in particular I remember, I think it was one of the first stories I published… It was originally called "Feathered Choristers", and I changed the title to "Interference" (1985: 31-40). There was that little boy in the school, and that's, I think that's possibly the first story I published.

I.: It is one of my favourites.[12]

B.M.: and that seem just to come, all at once, in one go.

And then there was another one…

I.: nevertheless, that story seems quite complex, with those symbols, and plays…

B.M.: Yeah, of course what I wrote first was shorter and much loafer, and you know, I developed it and brought more things in.

Another story that sort of came all at once if you like, that wrote itself, was called "The Face" (McCabe, 2003: 135- 141), about a boy being taken down the mine by his father. That was based on memories, some of it, and there were parts that were fictional and made up as well. I wrote that one at one sitting, one evening; of course I worked on that afterwards, you know, they don't come out perfect at first time. But I'd say that's kind of the exception, usually I have to work a bit harder.

I think, once you get upon where you have some notion of what the story is about, you might not be able to explain it, what it is about to yourself, but you have a feeling for what it seems to be driving at and your kind of thematic territory is here. So, once you get that, just a notion of that, then you can usually get it finished, and then you're in a position where you can, you can take things out that are irrelevant to that, the thrust of the story, and bring in other things that are more relevant. I remember going through that process quite a lot writing stories and, but if you don't get that notion it can be very hard to actually finish

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10. In fact, one of the characters in "The Hunter of Dryburn" reads a short story by Hemingway and confronts a problem when trying to understand a "story boot shootna a lion", since all this Scotsman has hunted are rats in Bonnybridge's canal (McCabe 2003: 103).

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11. Both "The Start of Something" (2001b: 125-141), and "The End of Something" (2001:143-153), are centred on the act of writing.

12. The story has been published in Spanish (Aliaga, 2008b: 219-225).

it, to know how to finish that story. I mean, I think, sometimes half a story is not better than no story at all.

And I do have half-stories in my drawer that are not finished, sometimes later you can see what you were trying to do, but weren't able to do at the time, and you are able to go back to it.

I.: Do you think rather of moods, or a maybe a character, or a fact, or everything, when a story comes to you mind?

B.M.: It's usually something quite concrete, rather than an idea. You don't sit down and say it's really time I wrote a story about the growing social problem of homelessness; that's not the way stories happen. That story happens when somebody knocks on your door and, a homeless or something. It's usually something concrete, sometimes it's an idea for a character; I mean, in *The Other McCoy* there is an example of that: I just, I began with just that character, the idea of this guy who is a compulsive mimic,[13] —that's not like me, I'm not like that; I'm no good at accents or imitating the way people speak— so that's where I started from, with, with that, that was the character.

Sometimes it's more of a mood, or just sometimes it's a narrative voice; I mean I don't want to sound like "I hear voices", but sometimes it is like a voice speaking in my head. In poetry, as well as in stories. I know very seldom what something is about, I just explore it to see if it might go somewhere; but sometimes it doesn't, and sometimes it's something less mysterious than that; sometimes it's simply that you overhear something on a bus or you read something in a newspaper, and that plumps an idea for a story; or you start to explore it and that becomes a story. So it's not always sort of mysterious things coming from your subconscious; sometimes it's something quite straightforward: somebody will tell you something that happened to them, and you use it in a story or... I mean I've written several stories which were prompted by things I had read in the newspaper, one is called "The Hunter of Dryburne", which is sort of a dialect story. I read in the newspaper of Edinburgh, about two men who discovered a dead body floating in this canal in a place called Bonnybridge, —Bonnybridge is not Bonnyrigg, it's somewhere else—, I lived in Bonnybridge as well, and I knew exactly the place where this was and, I could imagine it: a very bleak stretch of canal, with the backs of the ware houses and the closed down factories. The thing that got me about these stories was that those guys were shooting at rats at the canal, with those compressed air guns. Everything was so horrible in that.

So I started to write about it, but then things from my own started to come into. For example, my father came in, that's the character, that's one of the

characters the guy talks about in that story. I don't know if you remember this story, it's about a young couple who come into a bar and this man talks to them. This business of this young couple coming into a bar in a strange place and somebody talking to them, this has happened to me with wife in one of those small places outside Edinburgh, where the rules change a bit, you know, like Bonnyrigg or somewhere else. So I was drawing on that as well, but it started off from just something I read in the paper.

I always recommended if my students, my writing students, are stuck for something to write about, just go through the newspaper until you find something.

[*Laughter*]

I.: I think you answered everything I wanted to ask you.

B.M.: yeah? Oh, good.

I.: Just one to finish: If you knew there was a hell and a heaven, and you were dead, and you met God and he could answer a question... what would you like him to tell you?

B.M.: My God! What would I ask God? Jesus! [*laughing*] That's a difficult one, I don't know, I don't know.

[*Laughter*]

I.: What would you like him to tell you?

You don't have to answer if you don't want to...

B.M.: How everything,...; Why he made everything. And, why he did that that way. Why he made evil as well as good; I don't know, something like that.

I.: Thank you very much

B.M.: I have to write more to give you more work.

I.: Yes, please.

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13. Patrick McCoy.

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