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The Union and Jack: British masculinities, pomophobia, and the post-nation

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Starting with a general theoretical investigation into nationalist imageries of masculine and feminine embodiment, this essay offers a tentative outline of some of the most problematic shifts in the conceptualisation and literary representation of man, self and nation in Britain throughout the twentieth century. The second part of the essay comprises a close reading of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1993 [1956]), which is to illustrate the syndromic inextricability of masculinist and nationalist discourses within a patriarchal context and, moreover, to disclose the representational symptoms of these discourses' critical decline as interpellative models of successful self-identification in post-imperial Britain. Finally, shifting its focus to a discussion of masculine modes of self-representation in contemporary Scottish men's writing, the essay highlights the utopian potentialities of subnational emancipation; at the same time, it questions the ultimate political viability of any devolutionary attempt to move beyond masculinist notions of man, self and nation. Although I develop no direct correspondence here, given the role that the ideology of 'Englishness' has historically played throughout these islands, I suggest that this critique of gender and national identity could be usefully adapted all across the Atlantic archipelago.

The Union and Jack

In striking contrast to Virginia Woolf's cosmopolitan assertion in *Three Guineas* that 'as a woman I have no country ... As a woman my country is the whole world' (1993 [1938]: 234), Antony Easthope writes in *What a Man's Gotta Do* that 'if I am masculine I am at one with the nation' (1986: 57). Both propositions clearly identify nationalism as a profoundly

gendered discourse that interpellates men as ‘insiders’ while at the same time excluding and quite literally ‘alienating’ women. However, unlike Woolf, who appears to blame men’s congenital bellicosity – ‘a sex instinct’ (1993 [1938]: 234) – for their deleterious susceptibility to patriotism, and patriotically motivated warfare in particular, Easthope’s enquiry works to expose the insidious dynamics of patriarchal conditioning that not only ensure, but in fact insist, that there be for men, as Woolf puts it, ‘some glory, some necessity, some satisfaction in fighting which [women] have never felt or enjoyed’ (1993 [1938]: 121).

As a conjunctive reading of Easthope’s and Woolf’s essays demonstrates, both men and women find themselves caught up in processes of normative self-formation that, in strategic fulfillment of a patriarchally propagated complementarity of the sexes, render women innocent bystanders while casting men in the role of their dutifully heroic protectors. Thus, even Woolf’s most resolutely feminist endeavour to identify for women a possible position of resistance within patriarchal society seems ultimately at risk of reinscribing the passive, virtuous role traditionally allocated to the female: men’s seemingly incorrigible ‘badness’ comes to be contrasted with women’s (equally incorrigible) angelic ‘goodness’. What Woolf seems unable to recognise is the compelling functionality of femininity and masculinity within patriarchal and nationalist discourse. Traditional gender formations facilitate the orchestration of an allegedly harmonious, systemic interplay of complementary polarities, whose ultimate objective is the construction and continuous reconsolidation of communal cohesion. Metaphorically speaking, the soldierly masculinity of all men is summoned to form an impenetrable armour shielding the domestic body of all women’s soft and vulnerable femininity within. Such a patriarchal rhetoric of nationalist containment evidently bears its own contradictions and ideological inconsistencies. What the writings of a dissenting woman intellectual like Woolf reveal, for example, is that what ostensibly stands at the very core of the nation’s interests – that is, ‘woman’, in the broadest possible sense of the term – also always constitutes, at least potentially, an inimical site of emergent discontent, threatening to undermine the nation state’s traditionalist pose of indivisible oneness.

As George Mosse writes in *The Image of Man*, ‘women who left their prescribed roles ... joined the counter-types as the enemies against whom manliness sharpened its image’ (1996: 12). By successfully evading the grasp of traditional gender imperatives, women become ‘unwomanly’ and thus enemies of the patriarchally organised nation state, which

champions conservative masculinist values: homeostasis, integrity and homogeneity, indivisibility and heroic self-effacement, clear-cut, definitive boundaries as well as a committed and irrevocable subjection to what Craig Calhoun has designated as ‘the rhetoric of nation’ (1997: 4; see also Easthope 1986: 57). As I intend to demonstrate, nations traditionally represent deeply paranoid formations of the people that paradoxically thrive on both at once a strict oppositional segregation of the sexes and an adamant disavowal of their intrinsic heterogeneity, or self-and-otherness. In the modernist era of the early twentieth century this fundamental deconstructive disunity at the heart of nationalist discourse – albeit ‘repressed and disguised by the veneer of national unity’ (Plain 1996: 20) and thus prone to strengthen the alleged bond of complementarity between the nation’s men and women – gives rise to the gender-specifically disparate experience of nationhood which Woolf addresses so passionately in *Three Guineas*:

If you [i.e. men] insist upon fighting to protect me, or ‘our’ country, let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to produce benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share; but not to gratify my instincts, or to protect either myself or my country. (1993 [1938]: 234)

But if women’s relationship to the nation is so clearly fraught with irresolvable contradictions, a sense of negativity and exclusion, would it be fair to assume that men’s experience of national belonging is entirely unproblematic, that is, privileged and beneficial rather than oppressive or exploitative? As Mosse points out, men have traditionally been called upon not only to defend (if necessary with their lives), but moreover to epitomise the territorial and historical solidity and self-containment of the nation, its supposedly inalienable claim to political sovereignty as well as its homeostatic resilience to historical change. However, what Mosse fails to address are the tragic implications that such a conscriptive masculine embodiment of the nation must inevitably entail for the well-being of the individual male. Summoned to project and uphold an appearance of invincible strength in order to deter other nations from attempting to attack or invade their territory, men must subscribe, not only with their bodies but with their whole being, to the formation of a hard national shell, that is, a stiff, parametric boundary between the enemy without and, as we shall see, the potentially even unrulier enemy within. This collective masculine fortification of the nation’s boundaries requires a total disembodiment of the individual male, a self-effacing,

evacuating surrender of his individual interiority to the tumescent inscription of supra-individual, communal causes. Symptomatically, so Kaja Silverman argues,

when the male subject is brought into a traumatic encounter with lack, as in the situation of war, he often experiences it as the impairment of his anatomical masculinity. What is really at issue, though, is a psychic disintegration – the disintegration, that is, of a bound and armored ego, predicated upon the illusion of coherence and control. (1992: 62)

As an indispensable part of the rhetoric of the patriarchally organised nation state, the individual male's private persona is required to perform a vanishing act by allowing itself to be assimilated without trace into a collective masculinist show of communal uniformity, designed to camouflage the nation's otherwise helplessly exposed feminine body within. Thus, the rhetoric of nation clearly ties in with what in *Male Matters* Calvin Thomas refers to as 'the long-standing patriarchal ideology in which embodiment and femininity are equated, in which male bodies do not matter [and remain ultimately invisible], in which only women are supposed to have bodies, in which only women's bodies are seen' (1996: 15). Men are led to mistake the corporeality of others – wives, mothers and children – for a manifestation of their own bodiliness which, in turn, freezes into an effectively disembodied, territorialist utterance of internal homogeneity and cohesion. This ideologically motivated split of the nation into a feminine body protectively contained and held together by a fixed set of masculine demarcations exerts an impossible pressure on the individual male, a pressure that must ultimately prove quite literally 'insufferable' since it prohibits men from legitimately experiencing trauma and pain as a result of bodily violation. Because the body is traditionally designated as female, and men are expected to obfuscate their bodily vulnerability through an exterior display of bravery and courage, openly to admit to an experience of violation would, for a 'real' man, be equivalent to committing a grossly unmanly act of confessional self-emasculatation.

The body – and, with it, everything traditionally construed as or associated with the feminine – poses a continuous subversive threat of emasculatation to the heroic athletics of patriarchal masculinity. Within nationalist discourse this means that what is ideally to be cherished, loved and – if necessary – to be defended with one's life simultaneously represents an incorporation of the unmanly to be loathed and categorically abjected. Hence, rather than facilitating harmonious relations

between the sexes, nationalism reveals itself as a deeply homophobic and misogynous discourse informed by irreconcilable conflictual tensions between the masculine and the feminine, that is, between the systemically controlled and the ultimately uncontrollable. It seems important in this context that not only is it the soldierly duty of all men to protect the nation from external menace, they must also keep a vigilant eye on the tremulous, intrinsically recalcitrant body of the nation itself, its (or should we say 'her?') inveterate susceptibility to sudden socio-political shifts and fluxes, as well as its treacherous tendency to spawn rebellious or revolutionary counterdiscourses of the nation that threaten to undermine or spill across the homeostatic fixtures of the given status quo. As Homi K. Bhabha explains in *The Location of Culture*, such 'counter-narratives of the nation ... continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – [and] disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which "imagined communities" are given essentialist identities' (1994: 149).

In 'Narratives of nationalism: being "British"', Iain Chambers distinguishes between two different concepts of nationhood which, within the framework of the present argument, could easily be described as grounded in mutually incompatible 'masculine' and 'feminine' principles of communal assemblage, the masculine principle stressing traditionalist unity, whereas the feminine principle comprehends nationality as a propagation of diversity thriving on never-ending processes of communal configuration and reconfiguration. Chambers writes:

Here we face the possibility of two perspectives and two versions of 'Britishness'. One is Anglo-centric, frequently conservative, backward-looking, and increasingly located in a frozen and largely stereotyped idea of national culture. The other is ex-centric, open-ended, and multi-ethnic. The first is based on a homogeneous 'unity' in which history, tradition, and individual biographies and roles, including ethnic and sexual ones, are fundamentally fixed and embalmed in the national epic, in the mere fact of being 'British'. The other perspective suggests an overlapping network of histories and traditions, a heterogeneous complexity in which positions and identities, including that of the 'national', cannot be taken for granted, are not interminably fixed but are in flux. (1993: 153–4)

According to Gillian Beer, the gradually increasing dismantling of traditionalist narratives of the nation throughout the twentieth century is not only to do with counterdiscursive agitation but also, perhaps more pertinently, with technological progress. In 'The island and the aeroplane:

the case of Virginia Woolf, first published in Bhabha's influential collection *Nation and Narration*, Beer demonstrates how, with the arrival of the aeroplane, it became ever more difficult to perpetuate the myth of Britain, and of England in particular, as an invincible, safely detached and autonomous fortress-island. Boundaries, especially those that used to safely encapsulate the national bodies of island states, began to blur out of focus. The new bird's-eye perspective gradually replaced Britain's vision of itself as a self-contained, insular unit with one that accentuated its global – or at least its neighbourly – interconnectedness, its panoramic diversity as well as its embeddedness within contexts larger than that of the nation. Paraphrasing Gertrude Stein, Beer speaks of 'the formal reordering of the earth when seen from the aeroplane – a reordering which does away with centrality and very largely with borders'; as she continues to explain, '[it] is an ordering at the opposite extreme from that of the island, in which centrality is emphasized and the enclosure of land within surrounding shores is the controlling meaning' (1990: 265).

Postmodern technologies have considerably accelerated this process of decentralisation in all areas of both public and private life. However, what frequently tends to go under in the general salutation of growing globalisation is a close analysis of the manifold anxieties that motivate reactionary responses to such a seemingly unstoppable destabilisation of the old 'insular' order, as well as the patent gender-specificity of these anxieties, both in terms of individual subjectivity and communal or national self-formation. The cultural conditions of both modernity and postmodernity have effected – as well as in their own turn been affected by – an existential shattering or dispersal of the self as we used to know it. As Thomas Byers notes in 'Terminating the postmodern: masculinity and pomophobia', the multifarious epistemological quandaries incurred by postmodernity in particular 'pose threats to the continued existence of the reified subject of bourgeois humanism' (1995: 6), causing 'the traditional subject, *particularly the masculine subject*, [to find itself] in the throes of an identity crisis' (7, my emphasis). A violent masculinist backlash seems pre-programmed, triggered by what Byers describes as 'pomophobia', that is, traditional masculinity's existential fear and rejection of all kinds of postmodern destabilisation and, most importantly perhaps, the liquid(is)ation of hitherto fixed epistemic boundaries through postmodernity's radical demolition of all totalising systems of cultural identification. Ever more vociferously cornered by the manifold processes of minoritarian 'coming out' that characterise our postmodern era of pluralist diversification, white, western, middle- and upper-class,

heterosexual masculinity of the patriarchal mould is about to become obsolete and reduced to a hopelessly outmoded anachronism. It seems that only if men – as a minority as yet oblivious of its own minoritarian status – could be made to ‘come out’ as well and embrace a counter-discursive, decidedly post-patriarchal identity, would they be able to begin to partake in the newly reassembling communal forum of a turbulently, often tumultuously, reconfiguring symbolic sphere that bears the promise of reconstituting contemporary society.

However, as Byers demonstrates, instead of catalysing a radical overhaul and reconceptualisation of traditional modes of both individual and communal identification, the postmodern demise of ‘man’ is just as likely to instigate a pomophobic reaction, manifesting itself in paranoid reassertions of the ancient binarist categories of the self and its other(s). As Byers continues to explain, the acute omnipresence of paranoia in postmodern culture must primarily be understood as ‘an extreme concern with the defense of the (illusory) unity, integrity, and significance of the subject’ (1995: 12). Perhaps, paranoia, as the expression of a fundamental epistemic rupture brought about by a wide range of different postmodern destabilisations, can also help to explain the apparently schizophrenic disposition of twentieth-century western culture as a whole. Whereas modernist and postmodernist writers, artists and intellectuals appear to cultivate an aesthetics of self-abolition and self-dispersal, twentieth-century politics has been marked, often latently but sometimes cataclysmically, by reactionary, hyperbolic reassertions of the self. Responding to the threat of a total dissipation of traditionalist boundaries that used to clearly demarcate the presence of both the masculine self and the patriarchal nation state, both man and nation seem inclined to reassert themselves hyperbolically, that is, by means of a deliberate pomophobic reinforcement of their allegedly original (yet in fact nostalgic and entirely imaginary) definitive contours and monumental stature. Fascism and ethnic cleansing are the inevitable result, propagating a relentless reinscription of terrifyingly atavistic, masculinist formations of subjectivity and nationhood, formations whose powerful artifice has, according to Byers’s poignant description, always been desperately ‘pumped up by ideological steroids’ (1995: 27). Both post-modernist fascism (as in Germany of the 1930s and 1940s) and post-postmodernist fascism (as in Yugoslavia of the 1990s) are thus perhaps best understood as violent paranoid reactions to the increasing epistemic dissolution of traditional notions of identity as facilitated by both traditional masculine subjectivity and patriarchal nationalism. The impending demise of the

hegemonic self is held at bay by attempts to re-establish an imagined old order of perfect self-sameness, purity and communal homogeneity. In short, the abolition of the self is deferred, however precariously, by abolishing – uprooting, raping and killing – the other.

In *Male Matters* Calvin Thomas probes this apparently inextricable correlation between two mutually incompatible manifestations of modernity with an urgent list of provocative questions. ‘Is modernity as self-hyperbole a repression of modernity as self-abolition?’, he asks.

That is, are those philosophical, political, and aesthetic responses to and projects of modernity that gather themselves into self-hyperbole a repression of the experience of modernity as self-shattering? Is this hyperbolic gathering of modernity into a totalizing project staked not only on the repression of self-abolition but on the active abolition of the other? And is the acceptance or even celebration of the self-shattering experience of modernity the necessarily unorganizing rallying cry for the impossible communities of the postmodern? (1996: 24–5)

But pomophobia does not always of necessity manifest itself in crass, catastrophically violent, fascistic reassertions of the ancient self/other binary. Its presence may be latent in a culture as, I find, it is in Britain, particularly in English culture but perhaps also, so I would like to argue, in Scottish culture. Since the collapse of the Empire, the British nation has been suffering from a severe cultural identity crisis, considerably exacerbated by the fact that it now sees its socio-economic status, cultural prestige and national identity challenged by immigrant populations from the ex-colonies, who have begun to ascend the social ladder to ever greater equality and sameness. To compound matters further, so John Osmond argues in *The Divided Kingdom*, unlike the separate Ulster, Scots and Welsh identities, British identity is not ‘based on territory, traditional culture and a republican sense of “the people”’, but on ‘hopelessly old-fashioned and *ad hoc* structures’, such as the monarchy, the military, bourgeois class values and ‘the tired procedures of Lords and Commons at Westminster’ (1988: 192, 221). Britain’s loss of Empire, its relative economic decline and reluctant entry into the European Community, as well as the ever more vociferous emergence of separatist Scottish, Welsh and Ulster identities, have fractured British identity by exposing it as grounded in the thin air of a now outdated imperial rhetoric. From as early as 1956 – significantly the year of the Suez Crisis, commonly regarded as the political event that ended Britain’s imperial career as a world power – one can find reflections of this national identity crisis in English literature, most spectacularly perhaps in John Osborne’s

play *Look Back in Anger*, which shows a young Englishman, Jimmy Porter, fight his pomophobic fear of imminent self-dispersal by aiming to shatter and assimilate the self of his closest other, that of his wife Alison.

The Union and Jimmy

In more than just one respect, Osborne's Jimmy Porter epitomises a crisis in self-authentication that seems endemic to post-war British culture in its entirety. The play is an index of the postmodern decentring of the traditional masculine subject, accelerated by the collapse of the Empire and the incipience of a diversity of minoritarian liberation movements. *Look Back in Anger* presents us with a young anti-hero about to realise that man's centre-stage role in society has become precarious and questionable, destabilised by a general loss of certainty, faith and commitment, corrupted by a history of unjust, exploitative rule both at home and in the colonies, compromised by political apathy and opportunism, and contested by various subordinate identities beginning to voice and pursue their hitherto unacknowledged desires. Since, so Jimmy declares, 'there aren't any good, brave causes left' (1993 [1956]: 83), all the grand conflictual tensions between himself and the world at large release themselves in hurtful, often excruciatingly petty rhetorical tirades against Alison, his wife. However, *Look Back in Anger* is only secondarily concerned with the asphyxiation of young manly zest within the claustrophobic confines of an allegedly female-governed domesticity. The primary issue at stake is the hegemony of imperial English masculinity.

Deploring a political climate in which 'nobody thinks, nobody cares', Jimmy expresses his desire for 'something strong, something simple, something English', adding that he 'can understand how [Alison's] Daddy must have felt when he came back from India, after all those years away' (13). The grand imperial design is 'unsettled' and, irrespective of their class or generation, Englishmen are united in their nostalgic mourning of 'the England [Colonel Redfern, Alison's father] left in 1914' (66). As Jimmy confesses, 'if you've got no world of your own, it's rather pleasant to regret the passing of someone else's' (13). Jimmy's rhetoric is transfused with references to the Empire, alluding to Alison's domestic chores as 'the White Woman's Burden' while calling Cliff, the Porters' lodger and friend – notably a Welshman – 'a savage' in constant need of Jimmy's magnanimous supervision: 'What do you think you're going to do when I'm not around to look after you? Well, what are you going to do? Tell me?' (12). Clearly not satisfied with sprawling in the central

limelight, Jimmy expands his presence until he is in a position to occupy the whole stage at all times, imposing his psychological territorialism upon Alison and Cliff by means of endless oration, obnoxious pipe smoke and, whilst offstage, bouts of noisy trumpeting. Jimmy's hegemonic sense of self depends for its affirmation entirely on the responses he is able to elicit from others. Should his audience suddenly disperse instead of clustering attentively around him, and for once begin to concentrate on an exploration of their own interiority rather than eternally answering to the urgency of his allegedly superior needs, Jimmy's leadership would crumble and his claim to heroic status evaporate. As Osborne's stage directions indicate, Jimmy's frantic last-minute attempts at consolidating his position cannot pre-empt his imminent dematerialisation: 'He has lost [Alison and Cliff], and he knows it, but he won't leave it' (10).

It seems tempting to read Jimmy's angry young male struggle for an anachronistic kind of masculine dominance, already lost to devolutionary processes of ever greater societal diversification, as symptomatic of the break-up of the British Empire in the 1950s. Both patriarchal masculinity and European imperialism rely for their superiority on the unconditional subservience of a clearly defined margin of others. As colonies all over the globe took the end of World War II as an opportunity to opt for national independence, in *Look Back in Anger* we witness the first stirrings of organised self-assertion amongst women, gay men and – in Cliff's case – the minoritarian Anglo-Celtic subnations of Great Britain. Cliff eventually decides to move out and get married. Alison leaves her husband, if only temporarily. Her friend Helena is introduced as a woman with a 'sense of matriarchal authority [that] makes most men who meet her anxious, not only to please but to impress' (36). Not enough, earlier in the play we hear Jimmy express jealous admiration for Alison's gay friend Webster and his 'Michelangelo Brigade' for having, unlike him, a cause worth fighting for. Naturally, all these subversive destabilisations of the old order must provoke some kind of pomophobic backlash from Jimmy who, despite his self-professed role as a working-class rebel, appears to identify first and foremost as a heterosexual English male and hence as a standard representative of the patriarchal norm.

Deprived of its manifold imperial opportunities for exotic self-expansion and self-aggrandisement, the British nation of the 1950s found itself at a loss for viable means and strategies to accommodate the young male energies its own glamorous idealisation of a certain kind of heroic masculinity had fostered. Conscriptive army service turned out to be but

a poor and hopelessly inadequate substitute for the loss of real-life challenges like the war-effort or the adventures opened up by the imperial enterprise. At the same time, attempts at domesticating the British male by redefining the masculine role as that of a breadwinner, considerate partner in marriage, responsible father and DIY expert only resulted in the Angry Young Male backlash (Segal 1990: 1–25), of which Jimmy Porter stands as a paradigmatic example. For the first time ever, British patriarchy found itself uncomfortably confined within its own insular parameters, parameters that could no longer hold the imperial Englishman's traditional self-image of hegemonic superiority. The ever more assertive emancipation of a wide range of minoritarian differences from within postmodern Britain's multicultural make-up has effectively brought about a gradual minoritisation of the hitherto uncontested normative standard of imperial masculinity whose cultural self-representations – traditionally taken for granted and deemed entirely unproblematic – are now in great need of radical re-envisioning.

What I would like to explore in the concluding part of this chapter is the notion that such a devolutionary overhaul and counterdiscursive remoulding of traditional conceptions of British manhood can only derive from what used to constitute the margins of imperial Britishness, not only the categorically ostracised position of the feminine but also, more importantly perhaps, the negative exteriority of a wide range of nationally, ethnically or sexually deviant 'countertypes' of British masculinity. My main focus will be on the 'countertype' of Scottish masculinity which, due to its recent re-emergence from a historical location of subnational marginality, appears to offer itself as a particularly pertinent and rewarding case study.

The Union and Jock

No doubt the most conspicuous difference between English and Scottish masculinities resides in the fact that, with reference to R. W. Connell's definition of four different realisations of patriarchal masculinity, Scottish masculinity would not normally be described as a 'hegemonic', but rather as a 'marginalised' or 'subordinate', if perhaps all too frequently 'complicitous', kind of masculinity (1995: 76–81). Within this context it seems worthwhile to have a closer look at the prominent motif of the double, or *doppelgänger*, which, since James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1999 [1886]), has enjoyed such great popularity in both creative

and critical Scottish writing, and Scottish men's writing especially. Would it be legitimate to read the *doppelgänger* motif as a gender-specific obsession with difference, not so much with what Adrienne Scullion has described as 'society's fear of the *unheimlich* aspects of the feminine' (1995: 201) as, more specifically, the Scottish male's fear of his own intrinsic self-and-otherness, or 'effeminacy'? Notably, within the imperial framework of English-Scottish relations, the Scottish male is always already feminised as a disempowered native (br)other. His condition is one of subordinate marginalisation which, whilst sensitising him to the plights of the systemically oppressed (women, for example), makes it all the more important for him to rigorously detach himself from the feminine, both within and outside of himself, in order not to compromise his already badly shaken sense of masculine self-containment even further. The result is a psychic split expressing itself in precarious and highly conflictual assertions of the integrity of a self that finds itself continuously embattled and destabilised by its own irrepressible alterity.

Scottish masculinity represents a case of highly ambivalent cross-interpellation. It occupies no fixed position of indisputable social hegemony but is caught up in continuous oscillation between the diametrically opposed sites of (post)colonial marginality on the one hand and patriarchal dominance on the other. This simultaneous inferiority and superiority make an uneasy blend, highlighting Scottish men's complicity with a system of oppression (that of patriarchy) while, at the same time, necessitating their commitment to counterdiscursive resistance (against English domination and remote control). Due to the Scottish male's position of subordinate marginality, it seems tempting to speculate that, unlike his English counterpart, he would not be prone to lash out against his others in a fit of pomophobic angst but instead enter into a coalition with them, a coalition that would greatly benefit from post-modernity's manifold devolutionary processes of destabilisation. In fact, in many respects the Scottish male's counterdiscursive marginality would seem to render him a perfect representative of Julia Kristeva's idea of 'woman' as a *sujet en procès*, or subject-in-the-making, which would effectively place him 'on the side of the explosion of social codes: with revolutionary moments' (1981: 166).

Indeed, as I have illustrated in *Writing Men*, there are a number of contemporary British men writers who, in recent years, have become highly self-conscious of the gender-specificity of their writing, and among them are many Scottish writers, for example Iain Banks, Alasdair Gray and even, if perhaps less successfully, Irvine Welsh. Inspired by

feminist strategies of emancipation, these writers have begun to re-assess their given status as representatives of a standard norm whose systemic hegemony is safeguarded by a pomophobic oppression of alterity in all its signifiatory manifestations. Significantly, to resist and unlearn the sexist practices of masculine self-fashioning, these men writers often deliberately assume a position of societal marginality – traditionally occupied by women and other subordinate identities – from which they are able to ‘come out’ of patriarchy’s interpellative frame and rehabilitate their gender in new, less one-dimensionally specific configurations. It is in this respect that heterosexual men might perhaps benefit from allowing themselves to be inspired not only by feminist but also gay male strategies of emancipation. Intriguingly, as a comparison of writings by gay and pro-feminist straight male authors reveals, the utopian position of marginality, circuitously arrived at by straight male protagonists, is fundamentally little different from the gay male heroes’ original point of departure.

In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* Kaja Silverman has dedicated a whole book to an analysis of these ‘marginal male subjectivities ... which absent themselves from the line of paternal succession, and ... in one way or another occupy the domain of femininity’ (1992: 389). Propounding ‘the theoretical articulation of some non-phallic masculinities [as] an urgent feminist issue’, Silverman’s study foregrounds subordinate masculinities

which not only acknowledge but embrace castration, alterity, and specularly. Although these attributes represent the unavoidable tropes of all subjectivity, they generally feature prominently only within the conscious existence of the female subject. Conventional masculinity is largely predicated upon their denial. Saying ‘no’ to power necessarily implies achieving some kind of reconciliation with these structuring terms, and hence with femininity. It means, in other words, the collapse of that system of fortification whereby sexual difference is secured, a system dependent upon projection, disavowal and fetishism. (3)

The question to be asked now is whether contemporary Scottish masculinity could possibly be described as a devolutionary kind of masculinity that has embraced its feminine marginality and is saying ‘no’ to power. In ‘Not(e) from the margin’, an essay written in 1995 in response to an English woman colleague’s suggestion that ‘nationalism is always bad news for women’, Christopher Whyte suggests that indeed, due to its status as a minoritarian counterdiscourse, Scottishness ‘could, conceivably if not actually, be more receptive and more nurturing to women, gay men and other “marginal” groups than larger, more dominant

cultures.’ The generally highly conflictual and problematical tensions between nationalism and minoritarian counternarratives of national belonging are likely to dissolve, so Whyte argues, in a country whose rhetoric of nation constitutes in itself such a minoritarian counternarrative. Thus, Whyte continues, ‘a Scottish woman might, under certain circumstances, feel closer to a Scottish man than to an English woman’ (1995b: 34). However, in an essay written only three years later, Whyte adopts an entirely different and far less optimistic stance, concluding that, ‘in a context such as Scotland’s, where national self-determination continues to be a burning issue, gender antagonisms may be aggravated rather than resolved’ (1998: 284). Analysing various representations of masculinity in contemporary Scottish fiction and looking at the works of Alasdair Gray, Alan Warner and Irvine Welsh in particular, Whyte identifies the Scottish *hard man*’s alleged marginality as a pathetic pose motivated by pretentious pseudo-feminist affectations rather than any genuine desire to facilitate a radical overhaul of traditional power structures within Scottish society, let alone enter into a counterdiscursive coalition with women and/or gay men. In fact, rather than exploring and negotiating their own feminine quandary of subnational castration, alterity and specularity, Scottish men writers seem prone to merely appropriate and thus upstage the marginality of women.

Symptomatically, ‘the figure of the reclining male, a hero who is incapacitated in some way and may even be hospitalised’ (Whyte 1998: 279), makes a recurrent appearance in contemporary Scottish men’s writing, for instance in Iain Banks’s *The Bridge* (1986), Alasdair Gray’s *1982 Janine* (1984) and Irvine Welsh’s *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1996). Whereas Whyte recognises these heroes’ supineness as a (stereo)typically feminine position, deployed to signal the men’s apparent ‘incapab[ility] of adopting an upright, “erect” pose’, he also feels obliged to comment on what he regards as the deeply fraudulent artifice of such a metaphorical device. ‘The damage that reduced [the male protagonists] to this state is’, so Whyte points out, ‘as often as not self-inflicted’ (1998: 280), meaning that their putative marginality is more often than not the result of a petulant temper tantrum in response to being denied access to a position of authority, autonomy and power to which they deem themselves rightfully entitled. In no way is it comparable to the burden of actual real-life discrimination and societal ostracism borne by ‘unwomanly’ women and gay men. In light of Scotland’s recently accomplished devolution, Whyte’s concern that Scottishness may now begin to undergo a hyperbolic reassertion of itself as a monologic master discourse at risk of

recklessly shattering its erstwhile alliance with other, alternative counter-narratives of the nation is surely to be taken very seriously.

In conclusion, I would like to return to Kaja Silverman's suggestion that men's embrace of marginality, their collective resolution to say 'no' to power and reject what Calvin Thomas so pertinently designates as 'the phallicized ego' (1996: 21), could put an end to 'the murderous logic of traditional male subjectivity' (Silverman 1992: 389), its unwholesome obsession with the erection of definitive boundaries, be they individual or communal, and its uncritical promotion of the self 'to the status of an ethical ideal' that, due to its hyperbolic elevation, becomes, as Leo Bersani has asserted, 'a sanction for violence' (1987: 222). Finding itself at the beginning of a new era, Scotland has been given the chance to resist a re-erection of the hyperbolic self and its patriarchally organised nation state. By taking on board Iain Chambers' position that 'the "nation" as a cultural and linguistic unit is not a closed history, something that has already been achieved, but is an open, malleable framework in the making' (1993: 160), Scotland could develop into what Catherine Hall calls a 'post-nation', that is, 'a society that has discarded the notion of a homogeneous nation state with singular forms of belonging' (1996: 67). Such a post-nation would take its inspiration from what Silverman envisages as a 'libidinal politics' of desire and radical self-and-otherness. The aim would be to once and for all demolish the nation as a disembodied system of paranoid fortification and to put in its place the living body of the nation's wide diversity of different people(s) who continue to express and (re-)identify themselves in ceaseless processes of dialogic and fundamentally counterdiscursive intercommunication.

There are at least two – admittedly utopianist – epistemic preliminaries whose fulfillment would be absolutely crucial for the successful facilitation of a post-national state with which both men and women could wholeheartedly identify – intellectually as well as, more importantly perhaps, libidinally – and which would incorporate rather than merely accommodate the nation's vast repertoire of different narratives of national belonging. First, the people would have to communally unlearn the concept of 'otherness', especially in terms of the hoary mind/body dualism that burdens women with the symbolic embodiment of the nation whilst requiring men to disembody themselves and disappear into a representational façade of the nation's inflexibly demarcated boundaries. Secondly, the people would have to say a collective 'no' to power, which would necessitate a radical reconceptualisation of the very concept of identity, not in terms of a superiority/inferiority or sameness/difference

binary, but in terms of what, with reference to the work of Leo Bersani, Calvin Thomas discusses as 'the value of powerlessness, and of meaninglessness, of nonidentity or dis-identification, in both women and men' (1996: 35). To my knowledge there is so far only one male-authored Scottish novel that comes close to illustrating both these utopianist preliminaries, and that is Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory* (1990 [1984]), which features a boy protagonist (Frank) who turns out to be 'really' a girl and who in the novel's concluding vision comes to embrace her 'effeminate' brother Eric, whose performative artifice of an insufferable masculine heroism has cracked and disintegrated under patriarchal pressure.

Albeit only in vaguely allegorical terms, Banks's *The Wasp Factory* addresses the issue of Scottish postmodernity, that is, contemporary Scotland's communal struggle for national (re)identification. Significantly, Frank (as an exemplary representative of Scottish masculinity) must eventually abandon his pomophobic project of phallic self-fashioning. The hitherto unchallenged lord of the island becomes a Kristevan *sujet en procès*, eager to resume his quest for self-authentication but now required to do so from a position of feminine marginality rather than phallogocentric independence. Stripped of its spurious self-consistency and fraudulent traditionalism, the new Scotland is left to re-inscribe itself in a dialogic exploration of its own – as well as its (br)other's – alterity. Importantly, Banks's vision of subversive change is not apocalyptic but epiphanic, deconstructive rather than purely annihilative. 'Poor Eric came home to see his brother', the novel concludes, 'only to find (Zap! Pow! Dams burst! Bombs go off! Wasps fry: tsssss!) he's got a sister' (1990 [1984]: 184). The apparent cataclysm is parenthetically contained within the notion of a revelational homecoming. Although the old order has undergone an explosive decentralisation, it is not radically destroyed but transformed into a welcoming refuge for the uprooted and temporarily insane.

Initially, in their confusion, both Frank and Eric set fire to the picture-book icons of the Scottish pastoral (rabbits, dogs, sheep). Miraculously, however, despite the fact that it sits on a basement full of cordite, hoarded by the boys' grandfather, the family estate of the Cauldhames emerges unscathed from this panoramic conflagration. The old Scotland is not totally erased by the angry insurrection of 'an evil demon we have lurking, a symbol for all our family misdeeds' (1990 [1984]: 53). Rather, like the traditional gender formations that have sustained it so far, it appears to find itself at the beginning of a regenerative period of post-national change.