

The Decentring of Docherty: the Scotsman in Contemporary Drama

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Two or three weeks after starting the pits, he saw Tadger stop in the chill morning air.

'Hell,' Tadger said. 'Ah've forgotten ma piece.'

The seven of them stood in a dark, empty street. Tadger was thinking. There was still time to go back. It was a moment or two before Conn realised the problem, that it was unlucky to turn back for anything, that if a man had to return to the house, he should stay there. 'You three'll no be leevin' as fat at piece-time the day.' The others laughed, not without relief, and they all walked on.

In step with them, Conn thought of the pit they were headed towards, souging, black, dangerous. He understood the place where Tadger had been standing. With gladness he realised that his wish had been granted. He was one of them. The implications of that wish were something he still had to learn, but for the moment his new experience was complete and absorbing in itself...¹

Conn, in William McIlvanney's 1975 novel *Docherty*, is not just any novice miner discovering the rules and superstitions of the workplace; he is Tam Docherty's son - and Docherty is a working man. The description is as simple and as all-inclusive as that. Docherty works; and the work itself defines him, not as an employee, nor even as a part of the proletarian mass, but as an individual in a community, or, in terms even more elemental, as a man among men. To work in the mine, as Docherty does, is not to accept the terms and conditions of your employment; it is to find your true self, in an environment where that self will be continually tested in front of the only audience that is qualified to judge you. To be a miner is to gain access to a mythical battleground of the soul, in which, if you are the right kind of man, your true nature will emerge. When Conn realises, proudly, that he is 'one of them',² his realisation is both that he is part of a group and also more truly himself than he has ever been.

At the centre of the community of miners, and at the centre of the world of the novel, is Conn's father, Tam Docherty. He is not a simple, archetypal representation of the dignity of labour; rather, he thinks of himself as a kind of existential Stakhanovite. His work allows him both to refine and escape the conditions of his existence:

He thought he understood why it was he had always liked Tam Docherty so much. He was more than anything in his life showed him to be, and he knew it. The effect on Andra was as if he had come across some powerful animal in a cage, kept fit on its own frustration, endlessly restless, knowing instinctively that the bars are an invention, nothing final, and feeling contempt for its keepers. Andra sensed quite simply that Tam was not defeated. And if Tam wasn't, neither was he.³

It is easy, at twenty-five years' distance, to fix the genesis both of *Docherty* and of a certain strand of Scottish drama to a particular historical moment in the country's cultural life. During the 1970s, the political and cultural debate in Scotland seemed at times to have become a quest for the nation's soul; in Andrew Marr's graphic phrase, the seventies saw 'Caledonia foetal and girning on the

therapist's chair'.⁴ The patient, it seemed, was gravely deluded; prolonged exposure to the influence of England had left it unsure of itself, and unable to arrive at a clear definition of its identity or its place in the world. This apparent disease was diagnosed most influentially by Tom Nairn, in the essays later collected in *The Break Up of Britain*.⁵ Two viral infections ran riot in the Scottish cultural corpus, infecting every part of the nation's life: Tartanry, or the conversion of the unwanted history of the Highlands into a nationally stultifying kitsch, warped the Scottish national identity; the Kailyard, or the glutinous sentimentalisation of Scottish rural life, served to trap the nation's culture in a cycle of pre-industrial infancy.

This analysis was rendered the more powerful by the circumstances around it. There seemed no other way to account for the anomalous state of the nation; Scotland, as David McCrone notes, has been something of a paradox: a civil society without the political infrastructure of the modern state. At a time of nationalist aspiration, a definition of the country as trapped in a kind of cultural prepubescence could not but be influential. For example, Lindsay Paterson, reviewing the *Scotch Myths* exhibition assembled by Murray and Barbara Grigor in 1981, was in no doubt about the reasons for Scotland's successive failures:

The material which the Grigors have assembled matters, profoundly and disturbingly. It matters obviously to anyone concerned with the development of a healthy Scottish identity - ... the whole paraphernalia of tartan mythology is, I will argue, a serious obstacle to meaningful and radical self-government... Distorting, frothily romantic, escapist and trivialising, the Myths have concealed our history and our social reality. They have created a national identity that cringes in the face of radical change... The enemy of national development is, in short, not the English, not the Americans, not the EEC, not even, simply Westminster (though that doesn't help); it is far more acutely, our own perverted self image.⁶

The question was, how to fight the monster, and one of the possible answers had, it seemed, the advantage of a link to the authentic history of the modern Scot. The Kailyard and the myriad forms of Tartanry presented an image of a Scotland that was rural, either passively and quaintly engaged in tending the land or posed against a timeless landscape of glens and tumbling skies, unfit images for a country as heavily industrialised as Scotland had become. A history - the history of the industrialised central belt - had been largely ignored. There had been the odd attempt (at least, so it seemed at the time; Scottish theatre has suffered throughout the last century from bouts of collective amnesia) to portray the urban working classes on stage; theatre historians could mention Ena Lamont Stewart's *Men Should Weep* (1947), Robert McLeish's *The Gorbals Story* (1946), George Munro's early writing, and Roddy McMillan's *All in Good Faith* (1954). These portrayals, however, had not been implanted deeply enough in the consciousness of the nation. The plays of Joe Corrie, by then, were indeed neglected. Urban Scotland was an uncomfortable mixture of razor gangs and the Broons; both exotics, both untroubled by the changing nature of the Scottish economy, and both existing in a world as confining and transparent, at least to those outside it, as a fishtank.

It is no wonder, at a time of national self-questioning, that an attempt was made to accommodate, describe and pay tribute to the authentic Scottish working classes. This discourse has been termed 'Clydesideism', the term an acknowledgement of the Red Clyde of the 1910s and 20s. As John Foster noted in 1992, during the 1970s this particular part of Scottish urban history came in for re-evaluation:

[R]esearch appeared to show that there had indeed been a Red Clyde and that its emergence was closely associated with the wartime organization of workers,

especially new and non-craft workers, in large-scale industry. [...] By the late 1970s, therefore, Clydeside's revolutionary potential had become sufficiently recognized to be integrated into a larger reworking of British history.⁷

Clydesideism seemed to offer something that other versions of Scottishness lacked: an authenticity, a sense of real lives lived in the real, modern world. The experience of the worker would not be necessarily better than that of the crofter or the small-town dweller; but it would be more authentic in itself, both because it was more historically accurate and because it spoke more directly and more healthily to the Scottish psyche.

Clydesideism as a tradition had an obvious hero, and a recognised code of behaviour. It prized manual work; the worker was exploited, but he was at least good at his job. He was skilled, and he had pride in that skill; his position within his society was governed both by his skill and by his attitude to it. Work was, therefore, both an economic necessity, and therefore bad because he would be exploited, and an existential good, because it could define him. Great emphasis was also placed on the harshness both of the working world and of the social world around it. Life, for the working-class man, was conflict; it bred hardiness in him, and he was judged by his peers on his ability to use that hardiness without subsuming himself within it. It was as though the worker walked along a ledge between the conflicting abysses of wage slavery and unchecked aggression; he had to acknowledge the existence of both without succumbing to either.

Given the narrowness of the path that the ideal worker trod, it was not surprising that he should be discussed in terms that would not disgrace a saint, because that was what he was, at least in the eyes of the community that formed him. Again, the paradigmatic example comes from McIlvanney's novel. Docherty's is not an ascetic saintliness; but it is an object lesson in self-abnegation, an acknowledgement of the sheer difficulty of living a decent life:

'Ah'll tell ye the sense,' Tam said. 'We walk a nerra line. Ah ken hoo nerra it is. Ah've walked it a' ma days. Us an' folk like us hiv goat the nearest thing tae nothin' in this world. A' that filters doon tae us is shite. We leeve in the sewers o' ither bastards' comfort. The only thing we've goat is wan anither. That's why ye never sell yer mates. Because there's nothin' left tae buy wi' whit ye get. That's why ye respect yer weemenkind. Because whit we make oorselves is whit we are. Because if ye don't, ye're provin' their case. Because the bastards don't believe we're folk! They think we're somethin' ... less than that. Well, Ah ken whit Ah believe. It's only us that can show whit folk are. Whit dae they ken about it? Son, it's easy tae be guid oan a fu' belly. It's when a man's goat two bites an' wan o' them he'll share, ye ken whit he's made o'. Maist o' them were boarn blin'. Well, we aren't, son. We canny afford tae be blin'. Listen. In ony country in the world, who are the only folk that ken whit it's like tae leeve in that country? The folk at the boattom. The rest can a' kid themselves oan. They can afford to hiv fancy ideas. We canny, son. We loass the wan idea o' who we are, we're deid. We're wan anither. Tae survive, we'll respect wan anither. When the time comes, we'll a' move forward thegither, or nut at all.'⁸

In Alasdair Gray's telling phrase, Docherty is 'that horriddest of commonplaces, a Scotsman pretending to be God';⁹ the speech quoted above is a powerful statement of an almost messianic socialism. It is a call to revolution based on the primacy of real experience; only those who suffer, only those who are tested, are good enough. The problem with this, as Gray's quote would suggest, is that too much symbolic weight is placed on Docherty's shoulders. He is the centre of his world; the novel argues implicitly that no one, male or female, can possibly measure up to him. Even his

failures are monumental; the steady corrosion of his character that the novel describes is always measured against the high standards that he himself sets. When he dies, he does so defeated yet defiant (in a rather bathetic moment, McIlvanney describes his hand clutched in death into a fist); and even though his sons come to disagree with his 'liebensphilosophie', they do not challenge his position as the moral and political centre of the novel. He sets an impossible standard; for his children, for his community, and for his country.

Clydesideism in the Theatre.

The image of Scotland portrayed in *Docherty* found an echo in the work produced in Scottish theatres in the 1970s. It is too much of an exaggeration to say that the seventies in the theatre were the decade of the working man, but the theatre had its share of plays in which working class male life was anatomised. The working man appeared in Scottish drama in a number of guises; he could be a leader, calling his people to battle in the name of class warfare, as in John McGrath's *Joe's Drum*; he could be a criminal in existential revolt against an oppressive social system, as in Tom McGrath and Jimmy Boyle's *The Hard Man*; he could be a fallible repository for the hopes of his community, as in Bill Bryden's *Benny Lynch*; or he could be an artist, struggling to express himself in an environment designed to stifle his ambitions, as in John Byrne's *The Slab Boys*. However, in each one of these texts, there is the sense that the measure of experience in Scottish life is undoubtedly male; in Byrne's play, for example, the slab boys might rebel against the stifling standards of the time, but their rebellion acts as a negative definition of the underlying strength of an exclusively masculine working world that cannot accommodate the creative artist. In each one of these plays, then, maleness dominates, either overtly, or by association; and in three plays in particular - Bryden's *Willie Rough* (1972), Hector MacMillan's *The Sash My Father Wore* (1973) and Roddy MacMillan's *The Bevellers* (1973) - strong, central male characters dominate their respective plays, in much the same way as Docherty dominates his novel.

All three belong to a period of working class militancy; a general mobilisation against the policies of the Heath administration blended in Scotland with a rising tide of nationalist consciousness that had as its most visible manifestation growing support for the SNP. In Britain as a whole, the labour movement managed to resist the Tory Government; in Scotland, visible working-class victories such as the UCS sit-in seemed to reinforce the continuing power of the Clydeside tradition. It is unsurprising that a socialist company like 7:84, in *The Game's A Bogey* (1974), should adopt John MacLean as a kind of benevolent socialist patriarch; the lessons that he taught workers earlier in the century seemed to have been equally well learned by their descendants in the 1970s. Nationalism and socialism proved a rather uneasy fit,¹⁰ but both, in practice, worked to loosen ties between Scottish voting patterns and those in the rest of Britain.

John MacLean, it could be argued, provides the eponymous hero of Bill Bryden's *Willie Rough* with an idealised father figure. Willie himself is perhaps the closest the Scottish theatre has ever come to the kind of secular sainthood McIlvanney confers upon Docherty. The two characters are historical contemporaries; like Docherty, Willie is a worker and more than a worker; like Docherty, his passionate concern for his fellow man is bred from the reality of the working life that they all share. He is a family man, who never loses his ultimate faith in the importance of the family; he has a sense of his own worth, and a sense of the indignities that his employers heap upon him. Like Docherty, too, he is capable of bouts of righteous anger. In one scene, he rounds on a worker who has enlisted:

Willie. When I brought McLean down here, an' he tellt ye the truth about this war, I looked at ye, an' your mouth was wide open. Ye were spellbound, bi-Christ, listenin' tae that man. Ye believed 'im. I know ye believed 'im. An' then Willie

Gallacher cam doun frae the Albion. Ye were there that night as well. He tellt ye, an' McLean tellt ye, an' at wan meetin after another I've tellt ye mysel', an' here ye are like a whippet strainin at the leash.¹¹

Willie's anger is motivated, however, by more than the innate sense of his own place that drives Docherty. When the workers let him down, they also offend against an implicit hierarchy of saintly Scottish socialist men:

Willie. Aye, it's a rare gift tae be able tae see what's ahead o us. McLean's got it. He's a great man. I've never met anybody like him, an' you havenae, either, if ye were tae be honest about it.¹²

The play acknowledges the existence of other struggles; Willie's wife Kate is a rent striker, and Willie speaks out against the First World War, using language that, in its advocacy of the correct use of violence, could fit neatly into Docherty's mouth:

Willie. You're in the wrong fight, Geordie. Sure I want ye tae win. If ye want bands playin, we'll have bands playin, but the victory shouldnae be for the Imperialist Allies. I should be *your* victory. I'm talkin about Geordie MacLeod, the hauder-on, no Private MacLeod, G!¹³

But the play establishes a clear hierarchy of struggle to go with its clear hierarchy of socialist sainthood; the other conflicts are reflections of the central struggle, that between the workers in the shipyard and the employers. It also, in the world of the play, ensures that all other struggles reflect back to, and add to the status of, Willie himself.

Willie Rough, perhaps more than even Docherty, becomes the epitome of the self-sacrificing worker-saint. He is, if anything, too good for the world around him; the play chronicles not only his struggle against his employers, but his betrayal by those who should support him. The Clydeside activist, Charlie McGrath, reveals himself as a career politician, and tries to tempt Willie away from the workers he represents; the strike collapses, and Willie loses his job; and he is betrayed most painfully by Jake Adams, the shipyard foreman, in whom he had placed an absolute trust. The Christ parallels are almost too obvious to require explication; Willie is forsaken, time and time again, and yet he still retains his faith in the socialist pantheon. At the play's end, he may be alone, but his faith has been tested and found to be intact. The problem is, though, that the moment of his greatest influence seems to have passed; at the play's end, he is out of step with the rest of the world.

Willie. I like the grime. [...] I've got tae stay, Pat. I've got tae show folk what it's like tae live by somethin' ye believe in. Mebbie I can change them by showin them that. Mebbie I cannae. But I've got tae haud my heid up, so that they can stick up for themselves an' no be feart tae demand what's theirs by rights. They can call me any name they like. They can brand me wi any slogan, any party, an' I'll answer tae them aa. They can jyle me again if they want tae, an' if they throw anither brick at my heid, it had better kill me! 'Cause I'm here, an' I'm gonna haunt Jake Adams an' every worker in this river an' Cosgrave an' aa. I'll haunt them till they see sense or tae my time's spent. I'll turn everything upside down an' backside foremost or die tryin. There's worse tae come.

Pat. But ye havenae got a start yet, Willie.

Willie. But I will, Pat. I've got tae.¹⁴

Bill MacWilliam in *The Sash My Father Wore* is Willie's negative image. It is clear that MacMillan intends him to be a monstrous model of working-class false consciousness. He is rabidly bigoted, chauvinistic, unable to rein in his sexuality. Rather than gaining the admiration of his peers, he delights in antagonising those whose faith is different. Docherty has a mixed marriage; Willie sees class as the major dividing factor in his society; Bill sees King Billy as the ultimate symbol of Protestant manhood, holding firm against the Catholic horde:

Bill. Who knows, maybe even King William there (*of picture*) had his wee bit lapses, God bless'm; but it's the important things we mind him for! An whit could be mair important than the Prodisant cause?
(*Georgina is confused by this process that is slowly removing the domination she had. She sits on settee.*)
Oor forefathers fought for the Prodisant ascendancy. We're still up against that. We cannae let,... let stupit things divide us (*quickly.*) That's aw they're waitin on, y'know. Divide and conquer... They'll be ower us like that! Back tae Papish tyranny! The Scarlet Harlot! The Mark o the Beast! The end o everything oor ancestors fought and died for.¹⁵

Granted, Bill is here attempting to smooth over an overt pass at a much younger woman; what is interesting is that his explanation explicitly links him to generations of good Orangemen, who might have had the odd problem in restraining themselves, but who can be excused because their hearts are staunch and true. Orangeism in the play is, it seems, a male pursuit; the female marchers, Georgina in particular, only play a supporting role in what is a classically masculine culture, symbolised by the eternally poised, potent image of King William on a rearing horse. Given this, it is unsurprising that the play's Catholics should be women, and that the dissenting Protestant should be Bill's son.

It is abundantly clear where MacMillan intends our political sympathy to lie; the play's final chorus calls for a red working-class to replace one divided into orange and green. However, the play's political argument is complicated, and to an extent confused, by the curious transformation in Bill's character. At the play's beginning, he is wrong, but he is energetic; even though the audience would be expected radically to disagree with him, MacMillan accords him the most dynamic role in the play. He dominates his world, as decisively as Willie or Docherty dominate theirs. Unfortunately, this energy is self-defeating; an excess of enthusiasm propels Bill out of a window at the end of the first act. Bill's fall is obviously symbolic: militant Protestantism is ultimately self-defeating, because it harms only the working-classes; but, oddly, the now injured man is allowed more dignity in the play's second half than he is in the first. However flawed his worldview, it has at least provided an organising principle for his life, and its removal would leave him with nothing:

Georgina. (*gently*) Mister MacWilliam?

Bill. (*slowly losing the struggle*) He's tryin t'take ma faith away f'me.

Georgina. (*very concerned*) C'mon back on the sofa.

Bill. Take that away an ma life's been wastit!¹⁶

Bill has been forsaken just as surely as Willie Rough: at the end of the play he is in the same position, abandoned, weakened, but with his ideals intact. Granted, those ideals might be the wrong ones; but MacMillan allows Bill a paradoxical dignity at the end, as he leaves for hospital in full Orange dress. Even his bitterest opponent demands that his son shows him a particularly male form of respect:

Bridget. (*highly critical of Cameron*) I've no time for the way that man behaved. I've less time for the things he stands for. But b'Gawd an I've a lot less even than that for the son that wouldn't support his own father!¹⁷

This pattern, of male dignity in the face of betrayal and defeat, is a strong underlying current in Roddy McMillan's *The Bevellers*. The play is a realistic portrayal of a day in a bevelling shop in Glasgow; it is the first and only day at work for a young apprentice, Norrie Beaton, who finds himself in a world where the rules are both more harsh and more intricate than he could expect. Norrie finds himself in an environment that is aggressively male; women, the play subliminally suggests, would want no part of the work these men do. In such an environment, a young man such as Norrie will undergo a specifically male rite of passage: an education in the necessary harshness of the working world. He is tested and found wanting; at the play's end he has become a whimpering child, comforted by his new employer in the tone and style of a teacher after a playground fight:

Leslie. What's the matter with you, sonny, have they been giving you a rough time? It sometimes happens with new boys. They haven't really hurt you, have they? That's all right, then. I think you better get up the stair. Where's your jacket? I'll get it for you. This bag belong to you, too? All right, come on then, up you go. Your stomach sore, eh? Ah, you'll be all right. Away home to your mother, and you'll be all right.¹⁸

The equation of work with maleness is made even clearer by the work foreman, Bob Darnley:

Bob. A'right, Norrie, ah don't know whit he said tae ye, but it's no the worst ye'll hear. In this game or any other. Feed up, noo. Come on, come on, move. Feed up.

Norrie. Ah'm chuckin it.

Bob. Ah tellt ye. You're no in the school noo. You're wi the big men ootside. Yur faither cannae come divin up tae see the heid-maister an' tell him somebody's been unkind tae his wee boy. That's in the past. Make up yur mind tae it, you'll get a lot o knocks afore you're done, specially fae the likes o the Rouger therr, and if you want tae chuck it on the first day, that's up tae you, but ye havenae made much o a stab at it, hiv ye?¹⁹

The lesson is harsher than that of John Byrne's *The Slab Boys*; in that play, an artistic young lad might be defeated by a similarly all-male working world, but the defeat leaves him defiant, still staking out his artistic territory at the play's end. At the conclusion of *The Bevellers*, Norrie no longer has even the most residual claim to manhood.

Work creates men; it does not necessarily create good men. The workers in *The Bevellers* are skilled craftsmen, but they have been toughened by the work that they do; and McMillan provides Norrie, and the audience, with an illustration of the destructive potential of the work, in the figure of Alex, a broken, alcoholic ex-beveller, who has been destroyed by the work and yet cannot bring himself to abandon the workplace. The other workers are also trapped in this process, both physically and mentally; each one has been warped in some way by the hard and unrelenting work they have to do, and by the roughness of the culture surrounding it.

However, work also ennobles. Bob the foreman is the play's Docherty figure; hard on himself and on the men, but fair, not inclined to accept the word of management, and genuinely interested in the

welfare of his workmates. He attempts to school Norrie not only in his craft but also in the history of the work:

Bob. Naw. Cowcaddens wis wherr ah wis brought up. Used tae be a bevellin shop doon your wey. Ye know Elliot Street? Aye, well, doon therr. Quite unusual that. The trade wis maistly centred up roon about Cowcaddens. Lot o Irishmen in it, tae. Hard men - hard drinkers, a lot o them. Piece-workers, and no often steady work. Used tae wait in the pub tae a few jobs came in and go intae the shop when the gaffer sent fur them.²⁰

In Bob's eyes, the harshness of the culture is explained and excused by the hardness of the work; and the first prerequisite of manhood is to accept and understand that harshness. For Norrie to decide, as he does, that bevelling is not for him is not only a denial of his own manhood, but it is a betrayal both of the work and of the men:

Norrie. An' ah'm sorry about the job. Ah mean leavin.

Bob. Don't apologise tae me. You're no comin tae the trade, so forget it. This time the morra ah'll have forgotten you. It's nae insult tae me if ye don't want tae work at this job. Ah didnae think ye wid stick it long anyway. That's the wey it goes. New folk don't want tae come intae the game, an' some o them that are at it don't give a toss fur it. So save yur apologies. Makes nae odds tae me.²¹

These plays, then, present a curiously elegiac image of the working-class man. The world that formed him, and from which he drew his idea of himself, is changing, as the workers go back to work in *Willie Rough*, as the son does not follow his father in *The Sash*, and as another youngster turns his back on the trade in *The Bevellers*. The sources from which the dominant men draw their worldviews are also proving disturbingly unstable; Willie, Bill and Bob all feel themselves at some point betrayed, and betrayed by their fellow men. For example, Willie is betrayed by his proletarian brothers; Bill and Bob by their actual or symbolic sons. These men were the strong centres of their worlds; but they feel their position shifting, their place in what is a largely male hierarchy less secure than they had imagined. Even though their commitment to a particular worldview remains intact, there is the sense that these characters are being abandoned by history, monumental figures dwindling as history sweeps past them.

Abandoning the Centre: the 1980s and 90s.

The 1970s male worker, as presented in Scottish drama, seemed to be standing on ground that was shifting under him; however, no one could predict just how quickly that ground was to move over the next decade. In the period between 1960s and 1980s, the core of the male working-class, the skilled manual labouring sector, had been in decline (27.6% in 1961; 19,2% in 1981). In the 1980s, Thatcherism, even though mitigated slightly by the Scottish Office, further devastated much of the industrial heartland of the country. Unemployment and chronic social deprivation were the inevitable by-products of an economic policy that tacitly approved the Friedmanite concept of a natural rate of joblessness; assaults on trades unions and on the labour movement as a whole seemed to undermine fatally the implicit hierarchy on which the Scottish working-class male depended. Increasingly, the gender of the Scottish worker changed; full-time workers, usually male, were replaced by businesses and industries requiring a cheaper, more flexible workforce, usually female. McIlvanney, the novelist who created the archetypal worker saint in *Docherty*, sounded the death knell for the archetype in two novels, published in the middle and at the end of the decade. In *The Big Man* (1985) the unemployed Dan Scoular regains his sense of himself by redirecting his implicit capacity for violence against those who exploit his class, but he does so in the certain

knowledge that he is simultaneously sacrificing himself. In *Strange Loyalties* (1991), Dan's death is recorded in appropriately muted tones:

'Dan Scoular's dead,' Frankie said. He paused as if he was still not fully used to the idea. 'The big man's dead.'²²

The Dan Scoular of Scottish fiction were replaced by newer, far less certain versions of the Scottish male. James Kelman's protagonists find themselves discarded by a society that no longer supports them or their class; Jock McLeish in Alisdair Gray's *1982 Janine* constructs increasingly baroque sado-masochistic fantasies in a desperate attempt to exert some control over his life; Frank Cauldham in Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory* plays the kind of destructive, murderous games he associates with manhood, only to find at the novel's end that he is mistaken about his gender; and for *Trainspotting's* young men heroin has come to fill the space previously occupied by work and politics.

Unsurprisingly, these changes were mirrored in the drama of the time; plays such as *Dead Dad Dog* (John McKay, 1988) and *A Wholly Healthy Glasgow* (Iain Heggie, 1987) were set in an urban Scotland where lifestyle choice had replaced life-defining work. Eck, in *Dead Dad Dog*, finds that his dead father has inconveniently arrived back on Earth; and his father is an embarrassing anachronism, spoiling Eck's chances of a media job by vehemently denying his son's working-class roots:

Willie. [...] What do you mean working-class? Eh? A sold hoovers. A had trainin. A voted Tory. That's no working-class. Now yer Auntie Bella, her and that sailor man, livin in their single end, that's working-class. But no you.²³

In *A Wholly Healthy Glasgow*, rather than the clear hierarchy of *The Bevellers*, in which the apprentice is schooled by the work's father figure, the newest employee in a Glasgow gym finds that his fellow workers are defiantly out for themselves. By the play's end, Murdo has become the management's favourite worker, a dangerous innocent who is able blithely to dismiss his fellow workers as irrelevant.

If work and working-class culture no longer structures male experience in drama in the nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties, then, it might be asked, what does? The answer would seem to be nothing; there are no certainties in male experience, in the all-embracing sense that socialism was for Willie, Orangeism was for Bill, or the work itself was for Bob Darnley. The world that male characters in Scottish drama find themselves uneasily occupying is a shifting, uncertain one, in which there are no fixed hierarchies against which they can either judge themselves or be judged. They do not feel themselves to be part of a group, in the sudden, self-defining way experienced by Conn Docherty; they do not have a recoverable history, of the kind celebrated by Willie, by Bill and by Bob. When they do work, their work does not ally them to an existential community. The terrain has changed; in Mike Cullen's *The Cut* (1993), Thatcherite individualism has penetrated the bastions of dignified labour:

Hessel. [...] see, what I'm saying, what I'm trying to say, your pits, right, your pits are basically fucked, ken what I mean, they're F.U.C. kayed, boy... cos your gaffers... your gaffers are fucking away wi' it, boy, cos there's nae stopping... there's nae friggin *union*... well, no what you'd cry a union, I mean, a union needs power, a union needs *clout*... fucking *drive*, boy... nane of this broon-tongue brigade wi' their secret ballots, and their friggin democracy, see your secret ballot, it's just so the cowards can hide away, so's naibdy sees them put the bit in... (...) So, I

packs in the union, and frigging... one mair step, and I'm under-frigging-manager... and then, right, then... I dae things MY way and I can put the men first. D'you see what I'm getting at here? You dinnae actually *need* a union, just the right men in chairge, men wi' convictions... I mean, no they kind of convictions, like, I didnae mean... what I meant... men wi' the right sympathies.²⁴

It is no longer an exclusively male preserve. In Duncan McLean's *Julie Allardyce* (1993), the eponymous character has a job on an oil-rig that demands far more skill and application than the rather menial position occupied by her fiancée. In David Greig's *Europe* (1994), those men who hark back to the old uncertainties also know that their position in the world is no longer tenable:

Sava. If people want to know the truth about this town they only need to come here. They'll soon see it's not the way Berlin wants it. People only need to turn up.

Fret. They won't be able to find it. They'll just see a blur from the train. Express trains going so fast they can't even make out the station name when they pass. That's all that'll be left of us. The home you thought you had, the place you thought you came from, the person you thought you were... whoosh! Whoosh! Gone past. Dust on the breeze. By the time they think to turn up it'll already be gone.²⁵

One can, therefore, argue that men in contemporary Scottish drama can be seen as unfixed in an equally unfixed world. In Simon Donald's *The Life of Stuff* (1992), a criminal organisation overextends itself, and falls foul of its rivals, but the criminal world is neither a degraded, sub-human slum, in the tradition of *No Mean City*, nor the domain of the unreflectingly rebellious, as it is in Tom McGrath's and Jimmy Boyle's *The Hard Man*. It is a world both darkly comic and uncertain; to bolster their preferred self-images, the play's hard men are driven to over-declare their status and power, in a transparently desperate attempt to assert themselves:

Dobie. [...] Me! Look at me here - I mean I am *drowning* in responsibilities. And... it's the same, you know... the hard fact is. The fundamental fact of the matter is if you don't have the strength to face your responsibilities then you drown. And nothing can change that simple, since time immemorial fact, as very many poor, sad, deluded people have learned to their ultimate cost. Guys with no sense... of themselves... their Destiny...²⁶

For all his talk of destiny, Dobie is an ineffectual, uncertain man, unable to order even his immediate subordinates; the play chronicles the descent of his plans into chaos, a chaos graphically prefigured in the shambolic collection of druggies and dolies²⁷ with which he surrounds himself. At the play's end Dobie's world goes up in smoke; the fire is set by his rival Sneddon, who has unexpectedly survived an attempted burning by Dobie's employees. He returns, singed by the fire, and with an idiosyncratically cosmic perspective on his plight:

Sneddon. [...] See Raymond told me that current thinking is that this universe was created in one huge big explosion that produced loads and loads of... stuff. I think it was hydrogen he said. And that's all there was. And it swirled about for... Oh... hundreds of years until it made stars. And then inside of these stars, Willie, the hydrogen got turned into other stuff. You know by the heat or something. The pressure. And I can appreciate that. I'm not a hundred percent sure but anyway. It made gold and lead and iron and uranium and all the expensive precious stuff.

And that's what makes us. All these chemicals inside us that make us work came from the inside of a star. Is that not an exceptional piece of knowledge.²⁸

There are no codes, no structures, no fixed reference points; all there is, is stuff. We are not here to further our own interests or the interests of others; there is nothing in the world that provides an accessible code of male behaviour. We are matter: the stuff that forms us may be precious, but it is undifferentiated, it does not specifically make men.

It is, perhaps, in the work of Chris Hannan that the urban working class Scottish man is at his most displaced. Sammy Doak in *The Evil Doers* (1990) and Charlie in *Shining Souls* (1996) live lives outside the old routines of work and the old certainties of male culture. However, this has not left them free; rather, they are profoundly lost, both uneasily aware that their lives are disturbingly contingent:

Sammy. Look at her, Tracky. And look at me. Who pays the bills? Who's stupid? And every time she goes out or she's late back my stomach's going that something's happened to her, a road-accident. Or she's met some bloke. And while I'm busy worrying about *her*: this! - And Glasgow: and my taxi: OK so I kid myself on. So it's a lovely summer's evening, why not? *Why not kid myself on it's a lovely summer's evening?*²⁹

Charlie. [...] This is all wrong Margaret, I know that. My life's all wrong. At least I can say that now. At least I can see it. Whether I can retrieve the situation, that's another thing I don't know. Something like this happens you think about your cliché life. Y'know? What have I ever gave. Y'know? What have I ever gave.³⁰

Both characters have the uneasy sense that the world is opening up beneath their feet, and that there is nothing to prevent them from slipping through. The families that might have proved a final refuge are themselves in tatters; Sammy's alcoholic wife and his unhappy teenage daughter drift, as he does, from one part of Glasgow to another. Charlie's mother is dying, and his wife is divorced; the relationships he forms during the course of the play come to nothing. Both Charlie and Sammy begin and end their plays isolated and sidelined, no longer essential, defining presences in their respective worlds.

Their rootlessness is perhaps most aptly demonstrated in the locations through which they pass. Men's lives in 1970s drama have only a few potential settings; the pub, the place of work, the neighbourhood streets, or the home. When the action moves outside of this fixed round, as for example when Willie Rough goes to prison, it is a sign that things have gone badly wrong. In contrast, both Sammy and Charlie live scattered lives. Sammy's taxi service takes potential clients on a bizarre, jumbled tour through both old and new Glasgow; the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, the Parkhead Forge shopping centre, the Burrell Collection. Charlie does not have a home; according to the playtext, he was rescued two months before the opening of the play by Max, who found him crying in a pub. During the play we follow him around the Barras and into the tenement flat of a woman that he has just met.

Both Sammy and Charlie exist in a world where the old male hierarchy is no longer even remotely present. The only relationships they can form are with those as rootless as themselves, and those relationships cut across the expected gender boundaries. Sammy's life is defined negatively, by the lack of love in his marriage; as Hannan notes in the introduction to the play, Glasgow itself, suitably feminised, has become the replacement love of his life. He goes so far as to adopt the name of the city as his working pseudonym; his second name, Danny Glasgow, not only weds him to his beloved city, but also places him in the conventional female position: he adopts the feminised city's name. Charlie, at the end of *Shining Souls*, finds himself alone, imagining the voice of his dead mother.

What was a shameful sign of immaturity in *The Bevellers* has turned into a melancholy and moving admission of inadequacy in *Shining Souls*. Perhaps it has also become an acknowledgment that a social position occupied by a Docherty, a Willie Rough, or a Bob Darnley - and the measure and centre of their respective worlds - are no longer available to the Scottish male.

Charlie. 'What is it, Charlie son? Are you OK? You're awfy quiet, son. You were out awfy late. Were you playing football? Ah you stick in, Charlie son, you'll be playing for the Celtic one of these days. You're awfy quiet, son. Was it the nice lady? Did the nice lady scare you? It's OK. She's gone. She'll no come back again, son. I've seen to that. I'm your mammy, son, always have been, always will be [...].'³¹

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Endnotes.

¹ William McIlvanney, *Docherty* (London: Sceptre Books, 1987), p. 201.

² William McIlvanney, *Docherty* (London: Sceptre Books, 1987), p. 201.

³ William McIlvanney, *Docherty* (London: Sceptre Books, 1987), p. 101.

⁴ Andrew Marr, *The Battle for Scotland* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 120.

⁵ Tom Nairn, *The Break Up of Britain* (London: NLB, 1981).

⁶ Quoted in Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 106.

⁷ John Foster, 'Red Clyde, Red Scotland', in Ian Donnachie and Christopher Whatley (eds.) *The Manufacture of Scottish History* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), pp. 120-1.

⁸ William McIlvanney, *Docherty* (London: Sceptre Books, 1987), p. 277.

⁹ Alasdair Gray, *1982 Janine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 299.

¹⁰ See, for example, the work of 7:84 during the decade; in particular the *Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil* and *Little Red Hen*.

¹¹ Bill Bryden, *Willie Rough* (Edinburgh: Southside, 1972), p. 39.

¹² Bill Bryden, *Willie Rough* (Edinburgh: Southside, 1972), p. 66.

¹³ Bill Bryden, *Willie Rough* (Edinburgh: Southside, 1972), p. 40.

- ¹⁴ Bill Bryden, *Willie Rough* (Edinburgh: Southside, 1972), pp. 89-90.
- ¹⁵ Hector MacMillan, *The Sash My Father Wore* (Glasgow: The Molendinar Press, 1974), p. 27.
- ¹⁶ Hector MacMillan, *The Sash My Father Wore* (Glasgow: The Molendinar Press, 1974), p. 68.
- ¹⁷ Hector MacMillan, *The Sash My Father Wore* (Glasgow: The Molendinar Press, 1974), p. 71.
- ¹⁸ Roddy McMillan, *The Bevellers* (Edinburgh: Southside, 1974), p. 70.
- ¹⁹ Roddy McMillan, *The Bevellers* (Edinburgh: Southside, 1974), p. 27.
- ²⁰ Roddy McMillan, *The Bevellers* (Edinburgh: Southside, 1974), p. 22.
- ²¹ Roddy McMillan, *The Bevellers* (Edinburgh: Southside, 1974), p. 69.
- ²² William McIlvanney, *Strange Loyalties* (London: Spectre, 1992), p. 149.
- ²³ John McKay, *Dead Dad Dog* in Alasdair Cameron (ed.) *Scot-Free* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), p. 159.
- ²⁴ Mike Cullen, *The Cut* in Ian Brown and Mark Fisher (eds.) *Made in Scotland* (London: Methuen, 1995), p. 8.
- ²⁵ David Greig, *Europe in Europe and The Architect* (London: Methuen Drama, 1996), p. 72.
- ²⁶ Simon Donald, *The Life of Stuff* in Ian Brown and Mark Fisher (eds.) *Made in Scotland* (London: Methuen, 1995), p. 95.
- ²⁷ 'Dolies' used to be Glasgow slang for those drawing the dole. (op. a.)
- ²⁸ Simon Donald, *The Life of Stuff* in Ian Brown and Mark Fisher (eds.) *Made in Scotland* (London: Methuen, 1995), p. 119.
- ²⁹ Chris Hannan, *The Evil Doers* in *The Evil Doers and The Baby: Two Plays* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1991), p. 61.
- ³⁰ Chris Hannan, *Shining Souls* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996), p. 8.
- ³¹ Chris Hannan, *Shining Souls* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996), p. 83.