

TOWARDS A THEORY OF WORKING CLASS
LITERATURE : LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON'S
A SCOTS QUAIR IN THE CONTEXT
OF EARLIER WORKING CLASS WRITING

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds
School of English
October 1992

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Ian Pople, for his constant support and occasional bullying.

I should also like to thank:

My supervisor, Dr. David Richards, for his invaluable help in gathering my scattered ideas into a coherent structure,

Kate Swann for proof-reading,

Andy Croft for advice, information and the loan of many books,

and the librarians of the Working Class Movement Library, Salford, for their endless patience with my many enquiries.

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this thesis is to develop a theoretical approach to working class literature, up to and including the 1930's, in order to place Lewis Grassie Gibbon's A Scots Quair within the context of working class writing.

In developing this approach I have drawn on the critical models of Marxist, feminist, post-colonial and post-structuralist literary theories. These have enabled me to explore issues of economic marginalisation, imperialism and the construction of gender and identity, as raised both by Gibbon's distinctive narrative and linguistic style and by earlier texts.

The main argument of my thesis is that many of the themes and issues found in earlier working class literature, such as poverty and unemployment, find expression in A Scots Quair, and that Gibbon's narrative and linguistic style constitutes an aesthetic realisation of his political vision. In addition I consider the idea of silencing and ellipsis as a defining characteristic of Gibbon's work and of working class fiction as a whole, affecting all aspects of a text, including the construction of identity, the presentation of plot and the narrative voice.

In selecting a range of material from the eighteenth century to the 1930's, I hope to establish both the continuity between Gibbon's work and earlier texts and

the ways in which his trilogy may be seen as a distinctive and innovative contribution to working class fiction.

This thesis is my own original work. I have acknowledged in full all other reference works I have used.

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INTRODUCTION

When I first began to consider Lewis Grassie Gibbon's A Scots Quair as a possible subject for a thesis, I read the available criticism, and concluded that whilst the text had already been placed in the context of Scottish literature and of the literature of the 1930's, little attempt had been made to apply more recent literary theories to the trilogy. The Quair seemed to me to be a pre-eminently suitable text for the application of feminist, post-colonial and post-structuralist theories, raising as it does complex issues of gender, language and imperialism, and narrative structure. Using 'the speak' as a medium Gibbon decentres the unified subject with a single authoritative world view or version of history; thus his characters are frequently represented as being fragmented and unstable. As I became more interested in this area of study, however, it seemed to me that I could not ignore the subject of class. Chris's powerful presence in the Quair is fascinating as a construction of feminine identity. However, the issue of how she is placed, or places herself with respect to the rest of society, her changing class position, seemed to be a fraught but crucial area within the text. And the same kind of difficulty surrounds her son, Ewan, who has a basically middle class upbringing, but who comes to identify himself (not unproblematically) with 'the keelies', and then with the organisation that will take control of the keelies come

the Revolution. On a larger scale also the Quair concerns itself with the displacement of the Scottish peasantry and the way in which, dispossessed of their lands, they can only fit into society at the lowest economic level, as factory workers or the unemployed, as rank and file soldiers or as emigrants. The last book of the trilogy in particular concerns itself with the creation and politicisation of the industrial proletariat. Given that issues of class and dispossession seemed to constitute a central theme within the Quair therefore, I began to be interested in other novels written about working class life and economic deprivation. Although at this time I had limited knowledge of such novels, I was studying one book, Greenwood's Love on the Dole at approximately the same time as A Scots Quair and was struck by certain similarities - the theme of the criminalisation of political protest, for instance, and the working class leader falling foul of the law. In addition both novels feature the strong presence of a female character who eventually surrenders both her place in the community and her identity. I thought it would be interesting to make comparisons between the texts and began to explore further into the idea of working class literature as a whole. Hawthorn's book, The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century, convinced me of two things; firstly that it would be fruitful to apply a modern critical approach to the texts, and secondly that there were certainly more texts by working class writers than I

had ever realised. P.J.Keating's The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction also made me aware that the field was much larger than I had previously supposed, and the problem of finding some original texts rather than relying on critical studies presented itself. Initially I pursued publisher's lists to see which novels if any were currently available, and also sent lists to second-hand bookshops, but the results were limited (and expensive). Finally the existence of the Working Class Movement Library in Salford was brought to my attention, and my problem seemed to be solved; except that I was totally unprepared for the wealth of lost and neglected texts I found there. The more I read the more hopeless the whole idea of a thesis seemed to become. My primary difficulty was in setting boundaries for my study. Eventually I eliminated the middle class writer who had concerned him/herself with working class life, since most had received far more critical attention than the worker writers I was discovering. I also limited my study to those writers who preceded Gibbon, or who were writing in the same era; not on the grounds that Gibbon might have been influenced by earlier working class writers, it is almost certain that he was not, since he wrote extensively on a variety of subjects and most of his interests and influences seem to have been documented in his other writings, but in order to see what had previously been written about the issues of class, poverty, unemployment, etc.,. I hoped that this would

enable me to foreground the areas in which Gibbon had been innovative.

Even given these parameters the field of study was enormous, and shapeless in the sense of being untheorised and therefore unstructured. The working class movement library has approximately thirty thousand documents on catalogue, including novels, poetry, autobiographies and political pamphlets, and a vast amount of uncatalogued material. The great difficulty however lies in ascertaining precisely which documents were actually written by working class writers rather than by writers who interested themselves in the working classes or in radical movements of various kinds, since much of the material either anonymous or has yet to be properly identified and referenced. I have ascertained the authorship of the texts I have used in this thesis, however, and from studying these texts it seemed to me, that it ought to be possible to theorise the field if for no other reason than the remarkable homogeneity of subject matter, poverty, alcoholism, unemployment etc., treated by each writer in a different way. The construction of a theory also seemed to be a necessary step before I could usefully place Gibbon's Quair into a working-class context. Finally the parameters I applied were necessarily arbitrary; I stopped reading. There was enough material in the Working Class Movement library for me to be reading still without having written anything. I had to decide at some point that I had enough substance

for a thesis, and the guidance of those critics who had already made inroads into the field, Klaus, Vicinus, Ashraf, was invaluable here. I used their books in order to compare my own observations with theirs and to extend my knowledge of the field.

It might be objected that there are many differences between Grassic Gibbon and earlier working-class writers; that his background was in the Scottish peasantry and in no way typical. However, my studies lead me to conclude that there is, in fact, no such thing as a typical working-class writer; that most have some additional factor to be taken into account, (nationality, region or trade for instance) and that it is more fruitful to consider the work from the point of view of the themes and issues it contains rather than the personal history of the writer. Having said this, a large part of my thesis concerns the issue of economic marginalisation as a primary category of experience, ultimately affecting the way in which perceptions are organised into text. In this sense Gibbon's background and experience may be considered relevant. He was born into a farming family who did not own but rented their land, and who were "caught finally in that farming depression that followed from the growing inflow of imports and the subsequent draining of wealth from the countryside." [1] His first job was as a junior reporter in Aberdeen and he later worked in Glasgow as well, where he became familiar with

1. Cameron, D.K., (1986), intro. to A Scots Quair, Penguin.

the details of urban poverty. Driven by poverty, like many others, he joined the Royal Army Corps in 1919 and then from 1923 to 1929 he was a clerk in the RAF. His experience of both urban and rural poverty and class conflict is central to the themes of the Quair just as his travelling experience with the RAF provides essential material for his other writings, factual and fictional, and for this reason it seems appropriate to use the text as an illustration of the ways in which themes of economic oppression and marginalisation may be realised artistically in literature. I have drawn mainly on Marxist theory in my analysis of the effects of class and economic oppression on such factors as the construction of identity and narrative voice in Gibbon's work and in other working-class texts. Whenever relevant I have also taken Gibbon's Scottishness and peasant background into consideration, but neither is the focus of my study.

After much deliberation, therefore, I have organised my thesis along the following lines. Chapter I is The Field of Study in which I consider why working-class literature has been inadequately theorised and provide an outline of my theoretical approach, which considers the generic content of earlier working-class novels and then draws on Marxist, feminist and post-colonial critical models in order to place issues of content and style into a critical context. This chapter closes with an explanation of the choice of Lewis Grassie Gibbon as the main focus of my thesis. In Chapter II Language and the

Nation, I consider Gibbon's narrative and linguistic style as the site of conflicting discourses, both political (Marxist, nationalistic) and generic. I explore the idea that Gibbon's linguistic appropriation of different genres makes possible the realisation of his vision of society, and also that this has implications for the construction of nationality and identity. In Chapter III A Political Epic I examine generic influences on the Quair, including epic, saga and folk tale, and the political aesthetic which results from combining unlikely literary influences. In my next chapter, Ideology and Identity I focus more directly on the way in which character in the Quair may be viewed as the site of conflicting ideologies, and that these determine the course of a character's life. I end this chapter by focussing on the relationship between ideology and alienation, particularly in the case of Chris. My fifth chapter, Chris Caledonia: Colonising the Woman, focusses on the different feminist issues and discourses involved in the Quair particularly in the construction of Chris, who, as the trilogy develops, becomes a kind of ellipsis between conflicting discourses. In my conclusion I examine the notion of silencing and ellipsis as a defining characteristic of working-class fiction, thus returning to the original context of my thesis.

Throughout my thesis I have tended to use masculine pronouns which is perhaps misleading. It is true to say, however, that the majority of the texts I have studied

seem to have been written by men. As I have noted, authorship is not always ascertainable; insofar as it has been possible to verify the authors it seems that women have tended to make a greater contribution to poetry and autobiography rather than the novel, and neither of these is directly the focus of my study, although I believe that these kinds of contrasts, between the writing of working-class women and that of men, would be a fascinating area of further study.

CHAPTER I : The Field of Study

In her article "The Literary Standard; Working-Class Lifewriting and Gender" Regenia Gagnier warns that working-class literature is being evaluated "out of the game"[1], suggesting not only that literary critics have failed to adequately assess working-class writing, but that the literary standard itself is constructed in such a way as to preclude an adequate appreciation of working-class literature. This is as true of criticism on the Left as of the Right, as Carol Snee has noted[2] so that the result has been an extreme marginalisation of this historically significant literature.

It is easy to see how working-class literature has been left out of the traditional literary canon, on the grounds that it is not "literary" enough - too overtly political, with weak or stereotypical characterisations and routine plots etc. Ultimately the values of the literary canon, which prizes 'art for art's sake', originality, uniqueness and subtle portrayals of the inner life of the individual, require not only time, leisure and a high standard of education in the writer, but an ideology which prizes the individual over the collective, the emotional or spiritual over the material,

1. Textual Practice, vol.3 no.1, (1989), p.43

2. Snee, C., "Working-Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?", in eds. Clark, J. Heinemann, M. Margolies, D. and Snee, C., (1979), Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties., Lawrence and Wishart. p.165

and indeed which creates these dichotomous categories in the first place. It is less easy, however, to see why criticism on the Left has failed to create a place for working-class writing within the broad and varied field of English literature. With the notable exception of Jeremy Hawthorn's The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century (Edward Arnold 1984) criticism on the Left has tended to fall into one of two categories. Sympathetic critics have tended to focus on the historical recovery of a great variety of working-class texts, from broadsides and ballads, to the poems and novels written by Chartists, Trade Unionists and other largely forgotten writers. Whilst emphasising the variety and vitality of the work, attempts at critical readings have tended to remain within the same paradigm as traditional criticism. Whilst the work of these critics constitutes an essential first step, and whilst some have gone beyond the first step, in attempting to appreciate rather than denigrate political commitment, for instance, as a whole working-class literature remains largely untheorised. It is still rare for the literary critic to approach a text by a working-class writer without imposing the values of the "Great Tradition", dismissing it on literary grounds whilst acknowledging that it may be of some sociological or historical value. In order for it to be of real historical value, however, it has to be treated as factual record rather than fictional literature, and it has been known for historians and political researchers to dismiss it

because of its fictionality. Ruth and Edmund Frow, for instance, criticised Love on the Dole for historical inaccuracies and omissions and for a lack of political commitment[3] whereas for a literary critic like Roy Johnson the literary value of the novel is flawed by its political emphasis[4]

Traditional Marxist criticism has tended to be unsympathetic. In Literature and Revolution (1920) Trotsky put forward the idea that working-class literature is an impossibility. The working-classes will not have a culture of their own until they are the dominant class in society i.e. no longer the working-class. In the eventual classless society culture will not bear the stamp of any class. Both George Orwell and Roy Johnson have used this view in their arguments against working-class literature, which is to argue, in effect, that there is no such thing as the culture of an oppressed people.

Later Marxist criticism has been affected by the concept of realism, as has criticism on the Right. The notion of the realist novel exists in the background of most criticisms of the working-class novel, acting in effect as a yardstick against which it is constantly being measured. There are three main lines of argument.

3. Frow, E. and R., (1984), Radical Salford, Neil Richardson, (introduction)

4. Johnson, R., (1975), "The Proletarian Novel", Literature and History, vol. 2 p.90

The first is that the working-class novel is limited to or by its realism. As Tony Davies has said, working-class writing is thought to be

realistic in the most unpremeditated and unself-conscious fashion: autobiographical, documentary or commemorative, rooted in the experience of family, community, locality, it 'tells it as it is' (or more often, was) in plain words valued for their sincerity and simple truth.[5]

This approach is demonstrated by Valentine Cunningham when he writes that working-class texts are "Most tightly constrained within fact-style reportage (which is) probably easier than a more imagined, metaphoric mode"[6].(i)

The second line of argument is that working-class writing fails to achieve realism. Whilst this is not often stated explicitly it lies behind such common criticisms as stereotypical or melodramatic plots, characters who are fragmentary or unbelievably heroic, or at any rate, less than fully individualised, and of course the political propaganda in the speeches or narrative.

The third line of argument is that working-class writing fails to transcend realism, to offer something

5. Davies, T., "Unfinished Business: Realism and Working-Class Writing", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984) The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century, Edward Arnold, p.125

6. Cunningham, V., (1988), British Writers of the Thirties, Oxford University Press, p.313

new (see e.g. Johnson, Snee, articles mentioned above). Inherent in this criticism is the recognition that the traditional realist novel is steeped in the values of conventional bourgeois society, and the assumption that the working-class writer has absorbed these values uncritically, transmitting them directly in his own fiction.

These arguments may be seen to implicitly contradict one another, (how, for instance, can a work be limited by something it has failed to achieve?) but it is not uncommon to find them all in the same critical piece, and indeed on the same page (see e.g. Cunningham 1988; p313 above quotation (i) and quotations (ii) and (iii) below in illustration of all three lines of argument):

(ii) And some loss of the old individualism of characters familiar to conventional realistic novels did indeed result from what Kemp booted at as 'social accountancy' that is interpreting 'people factually', deducing 'human types from the economic processes'. These novels are anxious to generalise, to observe valuable social and political truths of wide applicability...If one smelly earth closet in yet another Coronation Street seems rather like all the others, the answer is that they are all alike...

and

(iii) Only the occasional proletarian novelist - Grassic Gibbon is the most distinguished case - was actually liberated into the zone beyond factualism, where direct social data could enjoy a confidently freer imaginative play.

Critics have generally sensed that in working-class literature there is a departure from the notion of straightforward, realistic representation, yet they have failed to theorise this departure, or (on the whole) to acknowledge the contradictions and ambiguities within the term 'realism' itself. To quote Tony Davies again, "realism is not really a literary form or genre or movement or tradition at all but a contested space, the scene of an unfinished argument" [7].

The term 'realism' has undergone many changes and is rarely used without qualification - thus we have social realism, critical realism, magical realism etc. According to Ian Watt, the early novel was realistic in comparison with previous literary forms because of its rejection of universals and emphasis on the particularities of time and place. Plots were invented rather than based on convention and individual experience rather than collective tradition became the "ultimate arbiter of reality".[8] Particular people were described in particular circumstances, named as characters in real life, and the courses of their lives were delineated in terms of time rather than values. Watt explicitly associated the rise of the novel with the rise of a social order which permitted diversity, so that the individual, non-aristocratic subject might be thought

7. Davies, T., "Unfinished Business: Realism and Working-Class Writing", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p.135

8. Watt, I., (1957), The Rise of the Novel, Chatto & Windus, p.14

important enough to feature in serious literature. More importantly he associated the rise of the novel with the rising bourgeoisie. Novels were written and read by people with "private sleeping quarters"[9] although he maintained that formal realism was "only a mode of presentation" - ethically neutral.[10]

Working-class novels, perhaps because they stem from communities with relatively less social diversity, or have not been written by people with 'private sleeping quarters', fail to measure up to this definition of realism. They tend, for instance, to avoid an absolute specificity of time and place, and frequently an allegorical mode of naming and characterisation is chosen. Also, even in non-Marxist texts, economics rather than time tends to be the defining factor of both consciousness and experience (cf. Watt I. 1957 p. 21 quoting Locke who had "defined personal identity as an identity of consciousness through duration in time; the individual was in touch with his own continuing identity through memory of his past thoughts and actions." On the same page Watt contends that the characters of the novel can only be individualised if they are set in a background of particularised time and space.)

Watt's description of realism has of course been disputed. Advocates of socialist realism have been

9. Ibid., p. 188

10. Ibid., p.117

anxious to make a distinction between socialist realism and naturalism, and Watt's definition is more descriptive of the latter than the former term.

Perhaps the most heavily contested of all the 'realisms', the term socialist realism has had a long and troubled history with which most critics will be familiar. The doctrine was put together by Stalin and Gorky and officially adopted at the Congress of Soviet Writers (1934). At this congress the Union of Soviet Writers finally took precedence over the RAPP (All Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, disbanded in 1932) an organisation which promulgated the values of Proletcult, or literature as a class weapon.

Whilst the Union of Soviet Writers asserted that literature should avoid elaborate aesthetic techniques and become an instrument of social development, it moved away from a stance of assertive proletarianism. The distinction between these two stances was never explicitly made, but whilst it was still considered to be the writer's duty to provide a "truthful, historico-concrete portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development," taking into account the "problem of ideological transformation and the education of the workers in the spirit of socialism" and, whilst literature was still to be "party-minded, optimistic and heroic, infused with a revolutionary romanticism, portraying Soviet heroes and prefiguring the future" the

policies of the Union of Soviet writers moved more towards a nationalist ideology and 'alliances with progressive elements' rather than an exclusive emphasis on the proletariat. Writers were no longer sent out to visit construction sites and to "produce novels glorifying machinery".[11] In the 1940's and '50's however, it issued a series of crippling decrees which helped to discredit the whole notion of socialist realism. Lukács was the first to attempt to reclaim the term, and the 'principle of contradiction', first put forward by Marx and Engels, the idea that a writer need not be politically orthodox in his conscious ideology. Great writing will always, in its truthfulness to life, serve history, dramatizing the significant forces of social life. In effect this principle of contradiction became a criterion of greatness, applied by Marx and Engels to Balzac, Lenin to Tolstoy and Lukács to both Tolstoy and Sir Walter Scott. The key concept was that of truthfulness to life, or at least to the significant material forces of history, since Lukács did not believe that naturalistic descriptions of social events constituted socialist realism. In the belief that it was both possible and necessary for literature to reflect the significant material forces of history however he was in agreement with Brecht, despite their famous debate about the means of representation allowable within the term socialist realism.

11. all quotations from Eagleton, T., (1976) Marxism and Literary Criticism, Routledge, pp. 37-38

Developments in Russia had international consequences. The International Bureau for Revolutionary Literature (involving Brecht) which held its first conference in 1927 on the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution was set up in order to co-ordinate exchanges between progressive writers all over the world. No one from England attended the first conference, but the second, in 1930, was attended by the Durham writer Harold Heslop, author of such mining novels as The Gate of a Strange Field (1929) Goaf (1934) and Last Cage Down (1935), and one of the few working-class writers to be translated and published extensively in Russia.

In The Literature of Labour (Harvester 1985) Klaus noted that by this time in England a great impetus had been given to working-class writing by socialist groups who organised the spare time created by unemployment - setting up summer schools, discussion groups and writing competitions. The worker was "discovered" as the object and subject of literature, and for the first time publishers were taking an interest in the 'proletarian writer'. In other words, at this time a space was temporarily created for the worker writer to enter the bourgeois world of publishing, but it turned out to be a highly prescribed space in that publishers and editors had prescriptive ideas about what the worker writer should write. As Cunningham states:

Left Review and Lehmann's New Writing as well as shorter lived organs of the Left such as Storm, painstakingly sought out working-class authors.[12]

They ran writing competitions with book prizes and a promise of publication, and the themes were carefully stipulated. "An Hour or a Shift at Work" was one featured in Left Review. The same magazine spoke in 1934 of a crisis of ideas, the 'collapse of a culture' and the problem of how to proceed. The writer was asked to recognise the necessity of "constructing a new social order" and embodying the revolution.[13] And the Writers' International was only open to members who, if working-class, desired "to express in their work more effectively than in the past the struggle of their class;... who will use their pens and their influence against Imperialist war in defence of the Soviet Union...",[14] which is in itself an interesting combination of impositions.

It is surprising that later critics have chosen to ignore this appropriation of working-class writers by the Left, and the effects of this kind of cultural hegemony on working-class writing. The similarity between descriptions of Proletcult as a combination of naturalistic portrayal and revolutionary romanticism, and critical descriptions of British working-class writing in the 1930's are striking, yet when Roy Johnson wrote:-

12. Cunningham, V., (1988), p. 305

13. Klaus, H.G., "Socialist Fiction in the 1930's", in ed. Lucas, J., (1978), The 1930's A Challenge to Orthodoxy, Harvester, p.15

14. Ibid., p. 15

naturally one sympathises with a class which has traditionally been left out of literary life, but this does not mean that an account of workshop life or My Week Down the Pit is intrinsically interesting[15]

he chooses to ignore this and pillories exactly those themes imposed by the publishing establishment. B.L.Coombes testified to the difficulties of trying to publish under different circumstances:-

I wonder can any of the Leaning Tower writers conceive of the terrific struggle a man of the working-class must put up before he can get through as a writer? It seems that every door is shut against him, that he has set himself a most hopeless task...[16]

In the 1930's, a door was briefly opened, an unprecedented number of writers went through it, and when it was shut again "most of them, encouraged by a friendly response from Left Review, or kind letters from John Lehmann, fell back eventually into a defeated silence"[17] leaving the literary establishment to complain that no true cultural revolution had occurred, and that there was, in fact, no such thing as a definitive proletarian culture. But, as Klaus points out, it is noticeable that the Writers' International did not investigate previous working-class literature in order either to accept it on its own terms (i.e. not necessarily radical) or to make available that which was

15. Johnson, R., (1975), p. 90

16. Coombes, B.L., in Cunningham, V., (1988), p. 307

17. Ibid., p. 307

radical, such as Chartist literature, so that the worker writer could see himself as part of an enduring tradition, not a momentary fashion, writing in a void hemmed around by the impositions of the publishing establishment and the dogmatic pronouncements of Proletcult.

Later developments in critical theory in Russia and elsewhere moved away from the concept of 'proletarian realism'. The historical disappearance of the proletarian revolutionary writer has meant that this kind of writing has never been assessed on its own terms, or theorised. It was eventually appended to the tradition of literary realism as a kind of worn out, inadequate branch. The theory of socialist realism, which, out of all the branches of literary criticism was the one most likely to be applied to working-class writing, was in the end used to appropriate those texts already considered to be great for Marxist debate, such as Balzac, Tolstoy etc. and, to compound the problem, it was later discredited for being too narrow and dogmatic in its approach. These days the term 'realism' is less likely than ever to be used by critics as a satisfactory way of appreciating a text, particularly since developments in structuralist and post-structuralist literary theory have questioned the whole notion of 'reality' treating it as another kind of text and suggesting that in fact there is no reality beyond language, which entirely determines our perceptions. And currently Marxist critics have moved

from a position of considering literature as a reflection of social and economic reality (Lukács, Brecht) to one which considers the relationship between art and ideology (Jameson, Althusser, Eagleton) both of which are related to 'economics in the last instance only, according to Althusser. Since it is still assumed, however, that working-class literature is a direct, straightforward attempt to reflect the reality of working-class life, in effect there seems to be even less chance than ever of it attracting the attention of Marxist critics. Yet aspects of Marxist criticism may be usefully applied to working-class literature in order to generate a new method of approach to the texts. The work of Pierre Macherey, for instance, offers a different concept of realism.

Macherey, like Benjamin, considered literature as a form of social production rather than imitation, in which older materials may be taken and transformed in the literary process.[18] Benjamin in fact believed that it was the writer's task to revolutionise the modes of production of literature, and thereby the relationship with his audience. The productive forces of art (modes of, for example, painting, publishing or theatrical representation) involve a set of social relations between the artistic producer and his audience. For Marxism the stage of development of a mode of production involves certain relations of production, and when productive

18. Eagleton, T., (1976), Marxism and Literary Criticism, Routledge, p.19

forces and productive relations enter into contradiction with each other there is a revolution in art which is also a revolution in social relations. When the existing forces of social production are developed and revolutionised, new social relations between artist and audience are created, and the contradiction which limits artistic forces potentially available to everyone to the private property of a few is overcome. The revolutionary artist's task is to develop new media, such as cinema, photography etc., as well as to transform older modes of artistic production.[19] Benjamin applied his theories particularly to the work of Bertolt Brecht, whereas Brecht himself credited the proletarian artists with whom he worked with revolutionary artistic innovations:-

What was known as 'agit-prop art' which a number of second rate noses were turned up at, was a mine of novel artistic techniques and ways of expression. Magnificent and long-forgotten elements from periods of truly popular art cropped up there, boldly adapted to the new social ends.[20]

The theory of literature as construction and production, constituted by a number of discourses, is a valuable one for working-class literature which draws on a great variety of (generally overlooked) traditions. It offers a way of considering the differences between working-class literature and traditional bourgeois literature both in terms of the materials used and the ways in which they are used in the text.

19. Ibid., p.61

20. Brecht, B., "The Popular and the Realistic", in ed. Craig, D., (1975), Marxists on Literature, Penguin, p.426

This is a primarily historical approach to working-class writing, focussing on its constituent form, genres and historical influences, which I intend to use in conjunction with a study of it as a marginalised literature since it allows the texts to emerge as a body of literature distinct from other kinds of marginalised literatures. This in effect summarises my critical approach throughout this thesis, and by the end I hope to have demonstrated that the two strategies are not separate but inter-related.

When looking at working-class literature historically it becomes apparent that certain themes recur repeatedly, most obviously unemployment and poverty, but also unwanted pregnancy, the breakdown of family and romantic relationships under economic pressure, the abuse of power and exploitation in the work situation, sexual harassment, oppression, drunkenness, criminal activity, the victimisation of a working-class leader by the police and so on. Traditionally critics have viewed these themes as being taken straight from working-class life, however the regularity of their recurrence and the omission or scarcer treatment of other aspects of working-class life (the monotony of poverty, for instance, or food adulteration or the mutilation of children in factories etc.) suggests that themes are not in fact selected directly from life. There is a strong sense of what is allowable in literature, and subject

matter is remarkably cohesive. There are three possible explanations for this:-

1. subject matter is conditioned by what has traditionally been allowed in the bourgeois novel.
2. Subject matter is conditioned by what other working-class people have written.
3. Subject matter is conditioned by the use of different genres and the range of material made available by them.

In this thesis I am arguing the case for the third factor. The similarities between different working-class texts are caused not so much by the awareness of one worker writer of another (though this has happened on occasion) as by different authors drawing on a similar pool of resources. Awareness of the traditional realist novel is another question and one to which I intend to return later.

The different types of genre commonly found in working-class novels fall into two categories; those drawn from the different kinds of literature more or less contemporary with the author, such as melodrama and political discourse, and those drawn from the history of literature, such as epic, allegory, folk tale, fable and later, picaresque.[21]

21. This is not an exhaustive list - I feel sure there is room for further study in this area.

The use of melodrama and political discourse has been dealt with elsewhere, most notably in The Industrial Muse (Vicinus M 1974 Croom Helm) which contains a study of the derivation of melodrama from street literature and the ways in which it was combined with political discourse in the Chartist novel. In Socialist Propaganda in the 20th Century Novel (Macmillan 1978) David Smith lists the different kinds of political discourse found in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists and Peter Miles article "The Painter's Bible and the British workman, Robert Tressell's Literary Activism" (ed. Hawthorn J. 1984) treats political discourse in the novel in both an historical and a literary way, considering its derivations and its effects within the text. As Miles points out "obtrusiveness need not mean poor integration" (p.6). In fact the whole issue of integration raises the question of integration into what? Presumably into some kind of overall scheme which traditional critics insist must be aesthetic rather than political - and this in turn of course raises the question of why these two terms should be seen as being contradictory. At this point I begin to feel that I am finding more questions than answers, but I hope my readers will be patient. Miles' approach is one way of avoiding the kind of dismissal of the text made by earlier critics such as George Orwell, who described The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists as a wonderful book "but clumsily written".[22] The

22. Orwell, G., "The Proletarian Writer", an interview with D.Hawkins, in eds. Orwell S. and Angus I., (1968), The

introduction of overt political discourse or polemic into the text may be considered to be one way of making ideology explicit, a kind of textually subversive polemic, deconstructing the masked values of the bourgeois novel, in which the author can rely on an assumption of shared values not available to the worker writer.

As Martha Vicinus points out, the popular novel of romantic melodrama was frequently adapted to the needs of revolutionary fiction. It was easy to place the conventions of melodrama, the seduction and subsequent demise of a young woman, unrequited love and a dissolute aristocracy into a political context. The young woman in Thomas Frost's The Secret (1839) was a serving girl seduced by the son of her employers, and romantic love was frequently doomed because of class differences or poverty (Grainger's Thorn, Thomas Wright 1872 Harry Hartley, John W. Overton 1859 Sunshine-and-Shadow Thomas Martin Wheeler 1849-50). This proved to be such a flexible device that some of the conventions survived into the twentieth century novel. In political melodrama the agency that frequently brought about the resolution of the plot was an unexpected inheritance or the benevolence of a wealthy outsider (frequently disguised) as in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists. The seduction and death of a working-class woman is a feature

of Cwmardy, Children of the Dead End and The Rat Pit. Both these conventions are given an unusual twist in Love on the Dole in which the seduced woman, Sally, chooses her own downfall in order to act as benefactor to her family who are facing a hopeless decline.

It was also possible to use the political content to subvert the romantic conventions as in Children of the Dead End (Patrick MacGill 1914). In this novel the main character, Dermod, carries a romantic image of his childhood sweetheart Norah Ryan, around with him, believing all through the years when he is sold at hiring fairs or tramping the countryside as a journeyman, that he will meet her again. When he does, Norah, after a long history of unemployment and being hired out to different employers, has been seduced, borne a child and turned to prostitution. At their meeting Norah is dying from a combination of ill-health and maltreatment. This is a powerful politicisation of the romantic convention of the dying child/woman (cf. Little Nell). In the context of the story it is made clear the blame lies with society rather than in the moral character of Norah.

In her analysis of the continuing appeal of melodrama for working-class writers, Martha Vicinus suggests two things; firstly that melodrama appeals to those who have no control over their lives and who feel a prey to larger social forces, and secondly that the details of working-class life in the urban slums -

disease, injuries, family violence, killings and the stark contrasts between overwork and unemployment, are in themselves melodramatic.[23] This is the kind of extrapolation however, that I should like to avoid, since of course it is possible to present any of these facts in a non-melodramatic way, or to focus on other, more routine aspects of working-class life. In the terms of the traditional aesthetic of course, the word 'melodrama' carries negative connotations, which denies the possibility of its use as a means of confronting the tragic in the situation of class conflict. It is interesting, however, in this context to reflect that two authors who produced more low-key, less sensational narratives, Walter Brierley and B.L. Coombes, have had their work described as dull and weighted with mundane detail.

In The Industrial Muse Vicinus writes about the origins of melodrama in street literature, which was disseminated orally, sold by hawkers, so that it relied upon the immediate appeal of sensationalism. Of course the street literature itself had links with older genres such as folk tale or fable, but in general the relationship between working-class writing and older kinds of literature has been less well documented, though the use of allegory, for instance, has frequently been noted.

23. Vicinus, M., "Chartism and the Development of a Class Based Literature", in ed. Klaus, H.G., (1982) Socialist Literature in Britain, Harvester, p.9

Despite the negative comments of Marxist critics such as Benjamin - "allegory is the mind's response to a world of objects deprived of inherent significance and value"[24] - and Jameson - "allegory lacks symbolic freedom (and is an) attempt to close meaning",[25] - the use of allegory is widespread in working-class literature.

As defined in A Glossary of Literary Terms:-

an allegory is a narrative in which the agents and action and sometimes the setting as well are contrived to make coherent sense on the 'literal' or primary level of signification, and also to signify a second correlated order of events.[26]

Although it is rare to find works of pure sustained allegory in working-class fiction (with the exception of Ernest Jones (1839) A Political Pilgrim's Progress in which the obstacles to be faced are the powers and institutions of society and the enemies of Chartism) in most novels an "allegorising tendency" is to be found. By this I mean that the primary level of signification is the story itself, the individual worker and family facing

24. Benjamin, W., in Williams, P., "James Hanley and the Problem of Commitment", in eds. Behrend H. and Neubert I., (1989), Working-class and Feminist Literature in Britain and Ireland in the twentieth century - proceedings of the 3rd conference in Berlin, printed by Dept. of English., Humboldt University, p.98

25. Jameson, F. (1971), Marxism and Form, Princeton University Press, p.72

26. Abrams, M.H., (1981), A Glossary of Literary Terms, Holt-Sanders International Editions, p.4

poverty and/or unemployment, but on the secondary level the story is made to suggest the plight of an entire class of people - the working class with its narrative of class conflict and economic oppression. The allegorising tendency, which may also be described as a synecdochic technique, may be overt as in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists in which characters are named allegorically and each incident serves to illustrate the drama of class conflict in a capitalist society, or less so, a "quasi-allegorical lack of specificity" to use Patrick Williams's phrase[27] with regard to time, place and presentation of character.

Williams also quotes Jameson's perception of allegory as an individual's story being made to tell the story of the collectivity. He contends, in response to Benjamin, that allegory is an acceptable response to a contemporary condition of alienation.[28] Critics such as Abdul Jan Mohammed however, quoted in the same article, have seen it as a deliberate refusal of commitment to history, and Williams himself considers that the lack of specificity might render the text liable to appropriation by bourgeois critics as the image of an "essentialised human condition".[29] I want to return to this issue later since I believe that a tendency to allegorise is a consequence of marginalisation and displacement in

27. Williams, P., "James Hanley and the Problem of Commitment", in eds. Behrend H. and Neubert I., (1989), p.98

28. Ibid., p.98

29. Ibid., p.98

society. A class of people which has no place in society (in the case of unemployment) or at best a precarious position, is unlikely to view itself as being defined by the same parameters of time and place as the bourgeoisie, so in this sense the refusal to commit to history may be entirely valid. There is an awareness in the literature of the eternal facts of poverty and a sense that to describe the hardships in one working-class community is to describe them in another. Thus places acquire a representative rather than a specific name (Mugsborough, Hanky Park, Grimchester etc.) and time is most frequently depicted according to an economic scale of value, repetitive and cyclical or deteriorative (Love on the Dole, A Scots Quair, Means Test Man, Kiddar's Luck) or it may be experienced as endless deferral, the endless postponement of fulfilment, and of most aspects of self-expression, until the impossible dream of economic security is realised. This naturally affects the portrayal of character, which may also deteriorate into hopelessness or criminality, or remain suspended between points of potential development. In Love on the Dole for instance, Harry seems unable to make the transition from boyhood and adolescence to manhood, primarily because economic forces keep him in a condition of dependency and helplessness. He cannot assume the responsibility implicit in the term "maturity". This in turn affects the presentation of gender. Women are often cast in a stronger, more supportive role than in the bourgeois novel, but may also be described, in contrast to male

characters such as Harry, as being prematurely aged. In general it may be said that allegory is one of the key devices the worker novelist repeatedly uses in order to subvert the categories of individualism in the bourgeois novel. Ageing is not an individual process, but dependent on economic forces, and in various ways it may be said that identity may be dissolved into the representative, as Peter Miles has noted of Tressell's work.[30]

As a resource, allegory is particularly prominent in what Klaus calls the "Utopian socialist tradition"[31] beginning with Thomas Spence's Spensonia in the late eighteenth century and continuing into this century with the work of James Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassie Gibbon) in Gay Hunter or Three Go Back. As Jameson has said, an allegorical structure is "built into the forward movement of the Utopian impulse" which can never reveal itself directly, but must always "speak in figures".[32] It is also found, however, in many autobiographies, such as that of Joseph Skipsey (1832-1903) who used an allegorical and spiritual mode to describe his life, the state of society and the human soul. Later autobiographies underwent a shift from the spiritual to the political, as Klaus notes[33] but they were always

30. Miles, P., "The Painter's Bible and the British Workman: Robert Tressell's Literary Activism", in ed. Hawthorn J., (1984), p.9

31. Klaus, H.G., (1985), The Literature of Labour, Harvester, p.43

32. Jameson, F., (1971), p.14

33. Klaus, H.G., (1985), p.160

written with a view to selecting the representative aspects of the authors' lives. As Regenia Gagnier has written, autobiographies often begin not with a birthdate but with a statement of ordinariness, often incorporated into the title e.g. One of the Multitude by George Acorn (1911).[34] Monike Ruthke has also noted the depiction of typical features of working-class life and economic struggle over aspects of private life and relationships.[35] In key ways, therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between working-class fiction, autobiography and other kinds of prose, not because they are commonly based on 'real life' but because modes of representation are similar. It is important to realise that the traditional categories applied by literary criticism are frequently unhelpful when dealing with working-class writing.

The forms that allegory takes in working-class literature vary enormously. The key figure, however, or hero, is usually presented in enough 'realistic' detail for the reader to be able to identify with him, yet at the same time he is a representative figure. As Tony Davies has said, the "truly typical protagonists of late-nineteenth-century realism" are allegorical "the class-conscious worker and woman struggling to liberate herself

34. Gagnier, R., (1989), p.44

35. Ruthke, M., "Twentieth-Century Working-Class Autobiography, Changing Features and Functions", in eds. Behrend H. and Neubert I., (1989), p.44

from patriarchal oppression".[36] Jack Mitchell credited Thomas Martin Wheeler with the creation of the prototype of the proletarian hero in the figure of Arthur Morton in Sunshine and Shadow[37]

In The Working-classes in Victorian Fiction P.J.

Keating writes:-

There is no difficulty in defining the worker in these novels - he is part of a composite picture called Labour and is shown to be in bitter conflict with a further composite portrait called Capital.[38]

In fact, however, character portrayals were often mixed, or became more so in the 20th century, between straightforward personifications from the tradition of music hall or burlesque, frequently used in portrayals of the 'enemy' of the working-class, and the more complex portrayals of the hero(es). In other words, character as well as time is presented according to an economic scale of values which takes precedence over any attention to realism. The economic framework serves as a point of reference in many working-class novels in much the same way as Christian theology serves as a point of reference for Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. In other novels, the allegory works less through types than through themes, as

36. Davies, T., "Unfinished Business: Realism and Working-class Writing", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p.128

37. Mitchell, J., "Aesthetic Problems of the Development of the Proletarian Revolutionary Novel in Nineteenth century Britain", in ed. Craig, D., (1975), Marxists on Literature, Penguin, p.256

38. Keating, P.J., (1971), The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction, Routledge and Kegan Paul, p.7

in Children of the Dead End in which the story of two journeymen suggests the story of the displacement of the Irish working-class and the subsequent changes in values, as Ruth Sherry has noted[39] or as in James C. Welsh's The Underworld in which the theme is the linking of sexual and economic exploitation. And in other novels the allegory is mainly to be detected in the "ambivalent stance on questions of commitment" as Patrick Williams has said of James Hanley's work.[40]

Later I want to consider the function of allegory in the creation of a sense of 'de-territorialisation' and 'collectivity', categories used in the assessment of minority discourse, but for now I want to make the point that allegory is not necessarily a simplistic device; it may be used flexibly and subtly in order to bring a wide panoply of characters and themes into economic relation.

The use of the genre of fable, which may be considered to be a shorter, or less sustained, version of allegory, has already been noted with reference to Chartist short stories such as Ernest Jones' The London Door Step by Martha Vicinus. As defined by Abrams, fable is based on a single moral thesis or principle of human behaviour.[41] In the Chartist short story the moral

39. Sherry, R., "The Irish Working Class in Fiction", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p.113

40. Williams, P., "James Hanley and the Problem of Commitment", in eds. Behrend H. and Neubert I., (1989), p.98

41. Abrams, M.H., (1981), p.6

thesis becomes a political one, social wealth as social murder in the case of The London Door Step for instance.

The allegorical or fabular mode of presentation of character, situation, time and place, makes possible a certain largeness of theme, which is one of the factors connecting working-class writing to one of the oldest forms of literature, epic.

Marxist critics have devoted some attention to epic, seeing it as the art form of a society organised along more collective lines than is possible under capitalism. In his article "Individuality and Characterisation in the Modernist Novel" Jeremy Hawthorn describes epic as the "art form of men and women embedded in the values and activities of a group." [42]

According to Lukács, epic narration represents a reconciliation of matter and spirit, life and essence, and is only possible when daily life is still felt to be meaningful and immediately comprehensible. [43] Lukács felt that a truly epic narration was no longer possible because of current life conditions. In The Historical Novel he wrote that the "epic tendency" in the novel can only be fulfilled under socialism; in a capitalist society contradictions must prevail. [44] Ralph Fox also

42. in eds. Jefferson, D. and Martin, G., (1982), The Uses of Fiction, The Open University Press, p.46

43. Lukács, G., quoted in Jameson, F., (1971), p.170

44. Lukács, G., (1962), The Historical Novel, Merlin Press, p.342

believes that epic is only possible in a society in which there is no "fundamental tension" between people, or between humanity and the land:

The Iliad is a picture of a society rather than any one of its characters - a society in which the individual does not feel himself in opposition to the collective any more than he feels himself in conflict with nature.[45]

This may seem to be a strange statement, or a political idealisation of the text, in view of the fact that the Iliad is all about conflict, but it is possibly meant to suggest the idea that conflicts in the Iliad are generally presented as being external to the individual rather than internalised, and it is true to say that the collectivity, of whom the hero is representative, is depicted as having close ties to the land.

In The Dialogic Imagination Bakhtin also stressed the links between epic and a community with close ties to the land. In a pre-class, pre-industrial society, time is collective and measured by the collective life of labour. Under capitalism however individual life sequences become separated out; food and drink lose their ancient link with the labouring community and the life of the social whole. Individual lives and sub-groups become opposed to the social whole and links with the life of nature are severed. In literature this is reflected in the sublimation of aspects of the fertility cycle - the sexual aspects into romantic love, for instance. Death

45. Fox, R., quoted in Hawthorn, J., "Individuality and Characterisation in the Modernist Novel", in eds. Jefferson, D. and Martin, G., (1982), p.42

loses its links to the cycle and is presented as an ultimate end. The novel for Bakhtin was marked by the destruction of this ancient "folkloric complex" and by the presentation of 'sealed-off' individual life sequences which require different values in art.[46]

In epic for instance, Bakhtin suggested that the hero's view of himself coincides with the view others have of him. Society, position and fate are all externalised since life is lived publicly. Even the sense of 'I' is distanced and conventionalised, and outside his destiny the hero is nothing. In epic there is a single world view, and the epic disintegrated as a form with the search for a new perception of self, so that the ancient wholeness and exteriority became reduced to the individual's consciousness of self.[47] In contrast to the epic the novel is founded upon a crucial tension between the internal and external man, and its basic theme is the hero's inadequacy to meet his situation. A solitary man, having lost all connections to his group or clan, is depicted in an alien world.[48] As Hawthorn says, society is no longer simply public, but a "collection of privacies". Modern man is abstracted and disembedded and artistically this presupposes the need

46. Bakhtin, M.M., (1981), The Dialogic Imagination, ed. Holquist, M., University of Texas Press, p.215

47. Ibid., pp. 31-35

48. Ibid., p.106

for the representation of a complex, not a unitary self.[49]

For Jameson also the change in literary form came with the loss of immediate comprehensibility which disappeared along with the "unquestioned ritualistic time of village life".[50] The primary consequence of the development of society has been the separation of public and private spheres, of work and leisure. Jameson notes that the plots of novels tend to occur in the leisure periods of private life - holidays, weekends.[51] Whereas the epic hero belongs to a collectivity, the hero of the novel is solitary, and the issue at hand is frequently that of his integration into society. As Lukács wrote in The Historical Novel for the hero of the epic, life itself was not individual, and in fact the individual was frequently subject to an event which overshadowed the human by its magnitude.[52] Lukács felt that working-class writers were potentially able to restore the lost sense of epic wholeness to literature. Because of their relationship to the mode of production, they do not see the world as separate and unrelated, but interdependent.[53]

49. Hawthorn, J., "Individuality and Characterisation in the Modernist Novel", in eds. Jefferson, D., and Martin, G., (1982), p.43

50. Jameson F., (1971), p.116

51. Ibid., p. 172

52. Lukács, G., (1962), p. 34

53. Lukács, G., quoted in Jameson, F., (1971), p.184

From my observations, the relevance of epic for working-class literature hinges around two factors. The first is the relationship between public and private, different in most working-class communities from the middle class experience. As Hawthorn has noted, even the modes of learning to read may be different, a shared rather than a private experience, organised by religious or political groups.[54] The potential repercussions in literature are numerous. One is an oral quality in the narrative, reflecting not simply working-class speech but ease and immediacy of communication. This is found also at times in the bourgeois novel of course, but it is a particular feature of many working-class texts. In fact the development of an appropriate narrative voice not entirely divorced from oral tradition is one of the key issues facing the worker writer. Another consequence of this different balance between public and private is a less internalised portrayal of the individual, who is seen primarily from the point of view of his role in society.

In many texts, (see e.g. Kiddar's Luck by Jack Common) the individual's role in society is commensurate with his fate. For key characters the process of 'growing up' is presented in terms of a decline, into a pre-written narrative of poverty, unemployment or hard, low-paid labour at an unwanted trade, factors which lie ahead for the working-class child as certainly as death

54. in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p. viii

and taxes. In addition, conventions attach to the portrayal of character and plot, most of which relate to the economic situation and class conflict, or the portrayal of the collective life of labour. Tensions arise in the plot because of the appropriation of that labour and the severing of links with nature (the long working day or night shift, the effects of industrial pollution, etc.). These issues are explored particularly in mining novels such as James C. Welsh's The Underworld (1920), Harold Heslop's Goaf (1934), and Lewis Jones' Cwmardy (1937) and We Live (1939). Another related effect is repetitiveness of theme or character portrayal. Valentine Cunningham has suggested that this is because of the repetitiveness of the actual daily existence of the poor[55] but I suggest that it is more likely to stem from a relative lack of concern with uniqueness or the unconventional, attributes which were never valued for themselves in older, oral kinds of literature. Emphasis tends to be on common or shared experience, and on what is known.

The second factor connecting working-class fiction to epic is one I have mentioned before - that of largeness of theme made possible by the allegorising or synecdochic tendency in which the story of one person or family is made to reflect the story of a class or nation. The story of Chris in A Scots Quair for example may be symbolically read as the story of Scotland itself, or the

55. Cunningham, V., (1988), p.313

story of a class of people, the peasants, and their decline. All incidents in the fiction tend to illustrate a single theme of economic deprivation in its many aspects, and there is a tendency in many novels to see the world in terms of an absolute conflict between rich and poor. This again influences character portrayals which result from a sense of the collectivity over the individual. In this way the fiction might be said to approach what Bakhtin has called the 'single world view' of epic, and, as in epic, there is always a factor of overwhelming importance which overshadows individual lives and character traits - poverty. In her Introduction to Working-class Literature Mary Ashraf notes that protagonists face issues quite disproportionate to their individual capacities, and outside their control. In spite of failure they momentarily share in the significance of something greater than themselves, and in this respect may be considered to be tragic heroes in the same mould as those tragic heroes of ancient drama.[56] She also points out that in working-class fiction the social system with its network of institutions and conventions encompassing the individual from birth, replaces the "fatality of the ancients" and destiny works through the relations of production in society.[57]

56. Ashraf, M., (1978), An Introduction to Working-class Literature VEB Kongreß und Werberdruck Oberlingwitz, p.145

57. Ibid., p.146

A sense of epic most obviously applies to Gibbon's trilogy with its story of national decline and the passing of a whole class of people. Klaus has also applied the term to the work of those eighteenth-century poets who were farm labourers, such as Stephen Duck or Mary Collier. Their themes were closely bound up with the agricultural cycle and stylistically they "respected the eminence of the epic and dramatic over the lyrical"[58] producing long narratives with biblical or classical overtones. Many novels, however, contain an epic sense of conflict (Cwmardy, We Live, Against the Red Sky H.H.Barber) or decline (The Handloom Weaver's Daughter Thomas Wright, which is about the passing of a skilled trade into obsolescence and the people who practised it into the poorhouse or death by poverty).

In most novels the allegorising tendency, whilst an essential factor in realising an epic largeness of theme, tends more to the universal than the national, and since epic is a genre which is most frequently associated with the construction of a sense of national identity, in this sense it may be said to exist in a kind of tension with allegory within working-class writing. Both genres are concerned with representations of the collective, but allegory focusses more on synecdochic representations of an abstract condition whereas epic concentrates on means of representing the nation.

58. Klaus, H.G., (1985), p.19

Epic shares at least two qualities with the folk tale, the oral quality of the narrative, and the construction of a world which may be defined by supernatural as well as mundane parameters.

In The Dialogical Imagination Bakhtin writes that the roots of the novel lie in the folklore of the lower classes[59] and in The Prison House of Language Jameson raises the question of the relationship of "individual creation and style to those collective and anonymous works which are folk tales"[60]. He also quotes Ernst Bloch as saying that "where myths reflect the warriors and priesthood, folk tales are the narrative expressions of the poorer classes."[61] Bakhtin's 'folkloric complex', the cycles and rituals of the agricultural community, apply to folk tales as well as epic; the crucial characteristics of both are their anonymity and collectivity.

The presence of the folk tale in working-class writing has been noted before. Grassie Gibbon has been praised for his deft handling of folkloric material, and, in his interview with Michael Pickering and Kevin Robins, Sid Chaplin (born 1916 into a Durham mining family, and author of such mining novels as My Fate Cries Out (1949)) states that for him the greatest art is oral story-

59. Bakhtin, M.M., (1981), p.38

60. Jameson, F., (1972), The Prison House of Language Princeton University Press, p. 27

61. Ibid., p.69

telling; he always wanted to be a raconteur and draws consciously upon this tradition in his writing.[62] In their article on Jack Common in the same volume, Pickering and Robins note his debt to 'oral recitation' and 'popular repartee'. They describe him as a folk-tale teller, and note that this might be considered to be a different kind of self-conscious literariness.[63] Jack Common's autobiography, Kiddar's Luck, begins with the mythical cursing of his destiny by bad fairies, and Patrick MacGill's semi-autobiographical novel Children of the Dead End opens with the folk tale of the red haired man. Throughout the early part of his narrative, MacGill interweaves folk elements with descriptions of daily life and the primary effect of this is to create a sense of 'otherness', of a world apart, which is both the child's world and the world of rural Ireland. Later, as reality becomes harsher, the narrative changes, becoming more pithy and proverbial, less whimsical :- "the belly hasn't ears" as Moleskin Joe says in response to a lecture Dermot has been given for begging food.[64]

In Stephen Slemon's analysis, magic realism encodes a form of resistance to the "massive imperial centre" and its totalising systems, and is closely linked to a perception of living on the margins. Magic realism

62. in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p. 140

63. Pickering, M., and Robins, K., "A Revolutionary Materialist with a Leg Free: The Autobiographical Novels of Jack Common", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p.79

64. MacGill, P., (1914), Children of the Dead End, Caliban, p.100

consists of the construction of "two different fictional worlds" the ground rules of each of which are incompatible, so that neither can fully come into being. In effect each remains suspended, locked into a continuous dialectic with the other.[65] The use of folk tale in working-class writing may function in the same way as magic realism, generating a sense of otherness and existing in a dialectical relationship to other kinds of narrative between which the lives of characters may remain permanently suspended.

The last of the genres I wish to consider is picaresque, which also has its roots in folk tale, and was originally a lower class satire on the aristocratic romance.

In Dockers and Detectives Ken Worpole quotes Benjamin's division of the art of story-telling into two traditions; that of the peasant and the voyager.[66] Worpole applies this distinction to working-class literature which is divided between the regional (based around communities with a strong local identity and perhaps a single industry) and those books in which economic deprivation is experienced as homelessness, rootlessness, dislocation. These books, including MacGill's Children of the Dead End or John Law's Out of Work are often concerned with the corresponding shift in

65. Slemon, S., "Magic and Other Realisms", in Canadian Literature, no.116, Spring (1988), p.11

66. Worpole, K., (1983), Dockers and Detectives, Verso, p.77

moral values, presented either as decline (Law) or as genuine ideological insight (MacGill).

Traditionally, as Bakhtin has noted, the hero of the picaresque novel is faithful to nothing but himself.[67] In MacGill's fiction this is given political point as the two journeymen lose everything else they could possibly be faithful to, including religion. Initially also, the picaresque hero was insouciant, and immune to most forms of suffering, whereas in the working-class novel the emphasis is on vulnerability and humiliation. In The Rise of the Novel Ian Watt links the picaresque form to the breakdown of the feudal order. In working-class fiction it tends to be linked to the break-up of the community by economic forces. Even within the community, however, there is frequently a strong sense of displacement and radical discontinuity from one generation to another, as economic conditions change and decline, which may be considered to be one aspect of the 'motif of journey' characteristic of working-class fiction.

Earlier in the history of the working-class novel, the picaresque was a feature of Utopian novels such as A Voyage to Utopia (1840) by John Francis Bray, himself an unemployed typesetter and journeyman. This type of Utopian fiction was episodic in structure, and its heroes lived by their wits in the manner of picaresque heroes. A

67. Bakhtin, M.M., (1981), p.408

Voyage to Utopia remained unpublished until 1957 because of the author's economic difficulties (he had to pay for his earlier work to be published). Meanwhile the Utopian tradition had undergone a shift from travel in space to travel in time (e.g. Platonopolis by John Goodwyn Drumby, set in the year 2000 AD and Gay Hunter by James Leslie Mitchell), a fact which Klaus evaluates as progress since it implied an attainable development rather than a journey to fictional worlds, though still of course the motif of journey was retained.[68]

Broadly speaking then, the use of earlier genres in fiction has the effect of universalising and collectivising themes and experience, whilst still grounding them within an oral and colloquial tradition. The more contemporary genres tend to serve the purpose of popularising and persuasion, though of course the distinction is not clear-cut.

It is worthwhile considering the mix of genres in working-class fiction in the light of Brecht's alienation effect, as an attempt to "make strange" experience as much as to naturalise it, or, as David Craig puts it, an "effort to make an art which did not invite the identification of the reader." [69] As Vicinus has said, the tendency to graft a political analysis onto a romantic plot, for example, frequently alienated the

68. Klaus, H.G., (1985), p.43

69. Craig, D., (1973), The Real Foundations: Literature and Social Change, Chatto & Windus, (1973) p 76

reader [70] but it is possible that the effect was deliberate - an attempt to make the reader think rather than identify in any simplistic way with the text, or to "present the facts of social injustice as shockingly unnatural and surprising" rather than as acceptable if unfortunate blows of fate.[71] The same is true of the caricatured portrayals of character from the tradition of melodrama, music hall or allegory.

There is also the term used by both Adorno and Jameson - "dialectical shock" for that quality in the text which both distances the reader and makes demands upon the concentration, awakening deadened perceptions. Adorno believed that this notion could mainly be applied to literature that is obviously avant-garde, or complex and abstruse. He felt that "popular art forms collude with the economic system which shapes them".[72] It is a widespread assumption that literature produced in a culture with less formal or conventional education and which is aimed overtly at popularity and persuasion cannot be complex, yet obviously the more a literature is critically explored and theorised the more complexities appear. As Bakhtin has said, heteroglossia in the novel is derived in part from the mix of genres which make an important contribution to the richness of a text.[73] And

70. Vicinus, M., "Chartism and the Development of a Class-Based Literature", in ed. Klaus, H.G., (1982), The Socialist Novel in Britain, Harvester, p.12

71. Selden, R., (1985), A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.32

72. Ibid., p.33-4

73. Bakhtin, M.M., (1981), p.316

Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn have noted the importance of seeking out "the organization of the discourses which constitute"[74] the text as part of the process which enables the literary critic to refuse "the received areas of greatness" and investigate "the political interests they serve" whilst raising questions which "alter standards of literary excellence, redefine literary periods and reshape the canon."[75]

In the case of working-class literature, however, I believe that the single most important effect of the mix of genres is the sense of internal discord, conflict and fragmentation generated within the text. The question is raised by Jeremy Hawthorn:-

What if the social reality upon and within which an inner self has to be constructed is too contradictory for some people to coherently internalise it?[76]

The result is conflict and fragmentation, aesthetically realised in working-class fiction by combining unlikely or apparently incompatible literary forms and influences together in a single text. In this sense then, that of reflecting the conflicts of society, its fragmentary and

74. Belsey, C., quoted in Greene, G. and Kahn, C., "Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Women", in eds. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., (1985), Making a Difference, Routledge, p.22

75. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., "Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Women", in eds. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., (1985), Making a Difference, Routledge, pp.22-3

76. Hawthorn, J., "Individuality and Characterisation in the Modernist Novel", in eds. Jefferson, D. and Martin, G., (1982), p.46

unstable nature, normally concealed by an ideology which suggests that the way things are is inevitable and therefore incapable of change, the literature may be said to be related to social reality, yet in most other respects the term 'realism' is inadequate and misleading. It might even be said that if working-class literature is not rescued from the label of realism, it will remain forever neglected in a small ghetto of its own, somewhere between the fields of literature, sociology, history and politics. This has never been more likely than at the present moment with the collapse of communism in the former USSR and Eastern Europe, and the radical changes in the University of East Berlin, for example, which had a whole department set aside for the study of British working-class literature. Yet it is also true to say that there has never been a better time for the recuperation of this literature, since precedents have been set for the recovery of lost traditions in women's writing and post-colonial writing, and in both these areas of study (as well as post-modernism, deconstruction etc) the notion that literature can reflect reality in any direct, unpremeditated way has been thoroughly questioned. Feminist and post-colonial critics are particularly concerned to develop ways of appreciating a marginalised literature without imposing conventional standards of greatness. The key terms such as 'marginalisation' 'displacement' construction of gender and identity etc. offer a new means of approach to working-class literature which could open up a whole new

area of study. There has already been an innovative opening in Hawthorn's book The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century, the first theoretical text to incorporate a collection of modern critical approaches to working-class writing though as yet few critics have taken up the challenge of the theoretical insights in this text, so that for the most part working-class writing remains invisible because untheorised, though containing much of interest to modern areas of critical study. I want now to move into a consideration of working-class writing as a marginalised literature which contains overlapping areas of critical interest with both women's and post-colonial writing.

As Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn have said:-

[History's] androcentric framework - the criteria of significance and selection which have determined the questions it asks as well as its methodology and notion of evidence - has excluded from its consideration not only women but the poor, the anonymous and the illiterate.[77]

In the same article they point out that women share the experience of being denied access to the "authoritative self" with other cultural and racial groups.

The main value of these modes of criticism is that they do not seek merely to append forgotten texts to the

77. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., "Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Women", in eds. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., (1985), p.13

"Great Tradition" but to change the existing paradigm which makes this construction possible. It is important to remember, however, that whatever the value of these modes of criticism for working-class writing, there are important differences as well as overlapping areas. Working-class texts constitute a distinctive body of literature with repeated themes, images and modes of characterisation, and the primary determinant is economics rather than race or gender, though of course it is not possible to entirely separate these areas. This is why it is important to retain Marxist approaches in conjunction with other modes of literary criticism. Even though Marxist critics have neglected working-class literature, they have contributed invaluable insights into the relationships between art, ideology and economics within the literary text which are of immediate relevance for the study of working-class writing. However the critical terms of feminist and post-colonial literary theory provide a useful framework for the exploration of the ways in which working-class literature has developed modes of representation which are deeply expressive of marginalisation.

The most important of the issues raised by both feminist and post-colonial critics that I should like to consider is that of silencing. In the introduction to The British Working-class Novel in the 20th Century Jeremy Hawthorn quotes Tillie Olsen as saying that people

are silenced by colour, gender and class.[78] Both feminist and post-colonial theorists have adopted critical strategies which allow them to be aware of the process of silencing and self-censorship, and of the resultant gaps, contradictions and omissions in the text. It has been contested by post-structuralist feminists that women have "no position from which to speak in the symbolic order"[79] My contention is that the working classes occupy a similar position in the symbolic order as women; the same negative pole in the system of binary oppositions around which language is constructed. As Cora Kaplan has said:-

The unfavourable symbiosis of reason and passion ascribed to women is also used to characterise both men and women in the labouring classes and in other races and cultures.[80]

It is in this context that such critical terms as 'displacement' 'deterritorialisation', 'collectivity' and 'politicisation', first developed as a means of conceptualising minority discourse, need to be considered when applying them to working-class literature. Patrick Williams has already supplied a linguistic context to these terms in his study of James Hanley's work. In his article "James Hanley and the Problem of Commitment" he argues that the terms 'deterritorialisation' and

78. Olsen, T., in ed. Hawthorn J., (1984), p.viii

79. Weedon, C., (1989), Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory, Basil Blackwell, p.148

80. Kaplan, C., "Pandora's Box - Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism", in eds. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., (1985), p.167

'displacement' may be applied in either a geographic or a linguistic sense, and he characterises Hanley as a "linguistic terrorist"; noting the oppositional use of language that a minority constructs within the dominant language[81] as a necessary stage in subverting the prevailing symbolic discourse. He also notes the co-existence of narratives of place and voyage in working-class writing and suggests that concepts of place and displacement are not mutually exclusive, but operate in complex ways within the text.[82] This is particularly relevant for the study of what has traditionally been categorised as regional literature. Even within the community the people do not own the houses they live in or the land they work, so that there is a constant sense of dispossession, and this creates oppositional tensions between them and the people who do own the property and the land. The sense of their own economic marginalisation within the area they live affects the construction of place in literature in various ways. As Roger Webster has said of Love on the Dole, the novel opens with a transpersonal rather than an individual survey, and impersonal pronouns are used to suggest the invisible forces of power manipulating people in the area in which they live and work so that "individual love and language" are constantly shown to be subsumed by "anonymous and indifferent powers".[83] Alternatively the

81. in eds. Behrend, H. and Neubert, I., (1989), p.94,

82. Ibid., p.95

83. Webster, R., "Love on the Dole and the Aesthetic of Contradiction", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), pp.52-55

writer may opt to show the developing process of alienation from the land, as in A Scots Quair, or the process of homelessness, in which the land may become a hostile force, and the idea of place meaningless since nowhere is home. These constructions of place naturally also affect constructions of identity - the portrayal of character as fugitive, alien and dispossessed. As Williams notes, a form of "psychological deterritorialisation" occurs as the seemingly inevitable condition of the working class[84] and this is expressed in both economic and linguistic terms. A major aim of this thesis is to link silencing with economic marginalisation, and to explore the effects of both within the working-class text.

Of course the worker who writes may feel himself to be marginalised within the community which is itself marginalised within the dominant culture, so that there are layers of displacement within the text. The process of growing up is marked by an increasing sense of limitation, which is intensified when the worker as writer is set apart from the community - a process explored in the autobiographical novels of Jack Common, for example, as Pickering and Robins have noted. The narrator, simply by reading, is drawn into a private existence. The creative, imaginative life, instead of enhancing his existence and prestige within the

84. Williams, P., "James Hanley and the Problem of Commitment", in eds. Behrend, H. and Neubert, I., (1989), p.96

community, pose a continual series of problems, from mild forms of persecution and a sense of dislocation (as in Walter Brierley's Sandwichman) to actual self-destruction. "Healthy creativity" as Pickering and Robins put it, becomes without outlet a disabling form of fantasising, a process exemplified by Keith Waterhouse's Billy Liar. [85]

Perhaps the most complex problem posed by economic marginalisation is reflected in the mode of narration and the position adopted by the narrator relative to the story he is telling, to his characters and his readers. The author rarely allows his narrator to assume a single, authoritative stance and this has generated the most complex experimentation of all. Tressell and Greenwood opted to tell their stories using not a single narrator but a series of individual points of view, so that the text, particularly in the case of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists becomes decentred and fragmented, and the same might be said of the images of the narrator(s). Gibbon's famous innovation lay in the attempt to give the collectivity a voice, and in James Barke's Major Operation (1936) the narrative moves from the intimate personal mode of stream of consciousness to its extreme opposite - the impersonal mode influenced by the movement known as Mass Observation, which describes in sociological and political terms the activities of the

85. Pickering, K. and Robins, M., "A Revolutionary Materialist with a Leg Free: The Autobiographical Novels of Jack Common", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), pp.81-84

collective. Even in texts with a single mode of narration or a single narrator, such as Hunger and Love by Lionel Britton, (1931) experimentation is evident. Britton politicised the stream of consciousness mode in his lengthy novel by making it the only available mode of narrative for a character who has lost everything but his mind.

Ultimately this kind of experimentation, dispersal and fragmentation, within the narrative has the effect of destabilising meaning. The author cannot project himself as authoritative narrator, or even as single, unified narrator, because ultimately the effect of economic marginalisation is to render questions of identity and individuality uncertain. The narrative he chooses is also, therefore, an attempt to portray the complex and changing relationship between the individual and the collectivity. He cannot position himself as neutral observer, or leave out the collectivity or portray it simply as a threatening mass - options frequently chosen by the bourgeois writer. In the working-class novel, as Patrick Williams has noted, both family and community are organised around the rhythms of work, the primary collective experience. The process of individualisation in a capitalist society is bought to a great extent, or achieved through economic specialisation. Williams has suggested that the process of collectivisation and politicisation is the other side of alienation; the desire for some form of belonging. "Everything in minor

literature," he writes, "becomes politicised and takes on a collective enunciation" so that the text is made to speak for and to the collectivity.[86]

I am very much aware that in this thesis I can only touch on areas which need to be explored much more thoroughly. I do not have, for instance, a fully developed materialist theory of language, nor a full understanding of the interactions of race, class and gender in literature. I merely hope to open up some areas which other critics can explore so that eventually a mature theory of working-class literature may be developed and a virtually lost literary tradition granted a place within literary criticism. In my next section I want to apply the theories outlined here to a specific text, Lewis Grassie Gibbon's A Scots Quair. This is one of the few working-class novels to have already received critical attention and recognition, particularly in Scotland, although it is still a marginal text within the tradition of English literature. The critical attention it has received, however, has largely been of a traditional kind (with the notable exception of Deirdre Burton's article "A Feminist Reading of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's A Scots Quair" (in ed. Hawthorn J. 1984) and none of it has placed the novel in the context of working-class literature. I hope to show that my approach enables me to by-pass traditional categories, including

86. Williams, P., "James Hanley and the Problem of Commitment", in eds. Behrend, H. and Neubert, I., (1989), p.96

the category of 'greatness' and that it may be applied to any text whether or not it is normally considered to be of literary merit. Also, and more controversially, I believe that my approach makes the issue of the writer's background, his exact location within the working class, irrelevant. The categories Graham Holderness has suggested in his article "Miners and the Novel; from Bourgeois to Proletarian Fiction" (ed. Hawthorn J. 1984) i.e. whether the work may be considered to be working-class or proletarian, peasant or industrial, or whether it is written from a position within the working class or by someone who has travelled beyond it etc., do not apply when the fiction is considered mainly from the point of view of economic marginalisation.

Gibbon's work contains many of the themes and motifs found recurrently in the working-class novel, from poverty and unemployment to the victimisation of a working-class leader by the police. It deals in a comprehensive way with the inter-relationships between the political and private spheres of life, undermining any notion of dichotomy between the two. I hope to demonstrate that Gibbon draws upon a wide range of genres and source material in order to generate effects of dialectical shock, alienation, conflict and fragmentation. More importantly, these effects are placed within the context of economic marginalisation, which is why I believe that the trilogy should be

considered in terms of the aims and achievements of working-class writing as a whole.

In the Quair Gibbon confronts many of the issues of economic marginalisation, relating them to class, race and gender; silencing and the use of political discourse, the unstable ego and the use of representative types in character portrayal for instance. Placing his work in the context of the working-class novel also allows the innovations to be fully appreciated; the development of a narrative style which posits a new kind of relationship between the individual and the collectivity, as well as between 'dialect' and 'Standard English', and a method of character portrayal which allows him to explore the connections between subjectivity, language, ideology and economics.

Issues of marginalisation in the text form part of its varying discourses drawn from the different (in some cases conflicting) ideologies which influenced Gibbon, from Marxism and Nationalism to feminism, anarchism, and diffusionism. The creative impetus of the text is generated in part by the tension between conflicting ideologies which are held together in complex relationships. The novel is not merely about these issues; its narrative and linguistic style are adapted in such a way as to constitute an aesthetic realisation of a complex ideological vision. Gibbon's prose style may be

seen as an ongoing political negotiation, and is as much the subject of the trilogy as the story itself.

In the next section I want to analyse the effects of specific discourses which seem to me to be major constituents of the text and which generate the need for Gibbon's "mixed and multivalent prose" as Ramón López Ortega has described it.[87] Firstly, however, I want to make a few observations about the prose style of the Quair and its flexibility as a vehicle or medium for these discourses.

87. Ortega, R.L., "The Language of the British Working-class Novel of the Thirties", in Klaus, H.G., The Socialist Novel in the Thirties, Harvester, (1982), p.127

CHAPTER II : Language and the Nation

'I am a revolutionary writer...I hate capitalism. All my books are explicit or implicit propaganda.' - Lewis Grassic Gibbon, letter to Left Review 1 1935 pp 179-80

Although Lewis Grassic Gibbon made this statement towards the end of his life, shortly after the completion of the trilogy, in many of his writings he also makes it plain that his allegiance to Marxism was neither direct nor uncomplicated. In a letter to Christopher Grieve dated 12/1/35 he says "You and I, alas, are the only true communists." [1] He also stated that the communists refused to let him into the party, and that he was criticised for his anarchistic ideology, the principles of which he adhered to throughout his life, and which profoundly influenced his writing - "My art is implicit anarchy," he said. [2]

It is not easy to establish, therefore, what kind of revolutionary Gibbon felt himself to be. William R. Malcolm believes that Gibbon's allegiance to Marxist ideology grew towards the end of his career, eventually taking precedence over both anarchism and diffusionism, the other two main influences on his political thinking and finding fictional expression in A Scots Quair. [3] This is in direct contrast to Douglas F. Young, however,

1. Malcolm, W.R., (1984), Blasphemer and Reformer, Aberdeen: University Press, p.11

2. Ibid., p.25

3. Ibid., p.22

whose main theory, outlined in Beyond the Sunset, (1973, Aberdeen: Impulse Publications) was that the trilogy basically expressed diffusionist ideology. The issue is further complicated by the Scottishness of Gibbon's prose; his desire to invest the Quair with some kind of nationalist sensibility. The creative impetus of the text may be seen to be derived from Gibbon's resolution of these conflicting discourses, which I should now like to consider.

In Scottish Scene Gibbon states that the Scottish writer who writes in English does so under all the constraints of translation; he is actually 'drained' by the language itself and cannot give of his best. Gibbon knew this from experience since he had previously written books with an English narrative and, perhaps significantly, these are now all forgotten. It is possible that the selection of a representative style of Scots was perhaps the most difficult problem Gibbon had to face, a problem he shared with other Scottish writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Spence. In fact there had never been an attempt to fully resuscitate Scots in prose. The classic novel The House With Green Shutters (George Douglas Brown) referred to in A Scots Quair is described by Alan Bold as being archetypally Scottish, its story a "microcosm of the story of Scotland"[4] yet its narrative is entirely in English. The work of Sir

4. Bold, A., (1983), Modern Scottish Literature, Longman, p.108

Walter Scott, as Bold describes it "hovers between literary and oral modes, a refined English narration and a rough and ready Scots dialogue." [5] Gibbon's revival of a form of Scots in prose is therefore a unique achievement and one which meant that his prose carried within itself a kind of mythical imprint as I shall try to explain in a brief version of the history of the Scottish language (taken mainly from Modern Scottish Literature, Alan Bold, Longman 1983).

At the time when the Romans attempted to conquer Scotland, there were four strains of language extant in the country; three varieties of Celtic, spoken by the Picts, Scots and Britons, and a variety of Anglo-Saxon called Sasunnaich, spoken by the Angles of Lothian. The Romans withdrew in AD407, and by 843AD Scotia, as Scotland was then known, was using qCeltic, or Gaelic, as the main language of a kingdom united under Kenneth McAlpin. This period of linguistic unity continued until the marriage of Malcolm III to Margaret, sister of the Anglo-Saxon heir to the English throne in 1069AD. Margaret's aim was to 'transform Scotland to the glory of God'. In retrospect it seems that her main achievement was to undermine the whole Celtic tradition in Scotland. Malcolm substituted Saxon for Gaelic as the court language and replaced the clan system with a form of feudalism, thus polarising Scotland into the Highlands, where people sought to retain their Celtic speech and

5. Ibid., p.101

customs, and the Lowlands in which society was based around Anglo-Saxon culture and speech. This division has continued to this day.

By 1194 AD Scotsmen referred to Lowland speech as Scottis. Then, in 1561 came the revolution brought about by Protestant reformers under John Knox. They required a translation of the bible, and eventually gained possession of one translated by English refugees in Geneva. The English language of the Geneva bible became literary law in Scotland, taught to children and used in courts. Its language became the language of power, philosophy and debate, whilst Scots became the language of domestic life and agriculture used also, in literature for the sentimental and comic. This division is deeply embedded in Scottish literature. MacDiarmid has complained of its occurrence in the poetry of Burns, and it was his own claim that he had transcended this split. In Lucky Poet he writes that Burns betrayed the Scottish movement by expressing thought in English and sentiment in Scots, whereas he (MacDiarmid) operates differently: "when I want to clinch the matter, I pass from dialect Scots, little different from English, into the real Mackay." [6]

The original division, however, seems to have caused irretrievable damage, compounded by James VI of Scotland, and I of England, who moved his court to London, from

where Scotland has been governed ever since, and whose efforts towards anglicising writing culminated in the King James bible.

By 1707 English was the official language of the United Kingdom, and the speech of the London Parliament. Scots survived only as an oral influence and in dialect verse; in order to have any kind of status the Scottish person spoke English, and in fact, in 1872, the teaching of Gaelic in Scottish schools was suppressed.

The fact that Gaelic was once the national language of a united Scotland, however, has had a profound effect on Scottish writing. As Alan Bold puts it, "writers have been irresistibly drawn to the mythogenic possibilities of the fall of the Gael from his Eden." [7] The Gaelic civilisation is still seen as the "innocent childhood that was denied the Scottish nation." In Modern Scottish Literature Bold lists the writers who have drawn upon the idea of a Fall from a Golden Age, and the different ways in which this central idea manifests itself, as the Never-Never land of J.M. Barrie, for instance, based upon Celtic myths of Tir Nan Og. Until this century, however, there has been no real attempt to reclaim Scots, and so the issue of exactly how to regenerate the Scots language, which has disintegrated into a wide range of dialects, has been fraught with difficulties and controversy. The poet Lewis Spence, for instance, who

7. Bold, A., (1983), Modern Scottish Literature, Longman, p.6

was also the first Scottish Nationalist to stand for Parliament in 1929, founded his poetic language on a serious study of Mediaeval Scots, and mediaeval Scots poets such as Henryson and Dunbar. Hugh MacDiarmid, however, whilst also drawing upon the poetry of the Middle Scots period, used an etymological dictionary and his wide knowledge of Scottish dialects to create his Synthetic Scots, a linguistic medium which he saw as an antidote to the inherent conservatism of dialect. Spence criticised Synthetic Scots for being overly scientific in its orientation. In "Literary Lights" Gibbon discusses the issue of whether Spence and MacDiarmid are to be seen in isolation or whether they are true precursors of a definite school of Scots literature, and goes on to say:

An experiment of quite a different order from MacDiarmid's writing in Synthetic Scots, or Spence's deliberate excavation of the antique Scots vocabularies, may be noted here. As already stated, there is no novelist, (or, indeed prose writer,) worthy of the name who is writing in Braid Scots. The technique of Lewis Grassie Gibbon in his trilogy A Scots Quair ... is to mould the English language into the rhythms and cadences of Scots spoken speech, and to inject into the English vocabulary such minimum number of words from Braid Scots as that remodelling requires.[8]

One way of understanding and approaching this technique is through a consideration of the work of Julia Kristeva who has suggested that the rhythms of language are rooted in the "drives and stases" of the body. She calls this phenomenon the chora, "discrete quantities of

8. Gibbon, L.G., and MacDiarmid, H., (1934), Scottish Scene, Jarrolds, p.205

energy moving through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such." [9] This process of rupture and flow has its source in the mother's body which "mediates the symbolic law organising social relations and is the ordering principle of the chora." [10] Kristeva allocates great importance to this phenomenon, calling it the "space underlying the written, prior to judgement but restrained by syntax," and also the source of the "mystery" in literature. [11] It is possible that this is what Benjamin means when he talks of the "central untranslatableability" of languages in his essay "The Task of the Translator". [12] At any rate, Kristeva says that literature is "rhythm made intelligible by syntax" and that:

among the capitalist's mode of production's numerous signifying practices only certain literary texts of the avant-garde, Mallarmé, Joyce, manage to convey the infinity of the process, that is, reach the semiotic chora which modifies linguistic structures. [13]

It is possible that Gibbon, in choosing to modify the English language to Scottish rhythms, is taking a step towards the use of the chora in order to place the English language in a Scottish context, rather than placing the Scottish language in an English context in the manner of previous writers including Walter Scott.

9. Moi, T., ed., (1989), The Kristeva Reader, Basil Blackwell Ltd., p.93

10. Ibid., p.95

11. Ibid., p.97

12. Benjamin, W., (1968), Illuminations, Schocken Books, pp. 69-83

13. Moi, T., ed., (1989), The Kristeva Reader, Basil Blackwell Ltd., p.122

The rhythms and stases are predominantly Scottish, so that the written English is greatly modified by the power of the Scottish 'space underlying the written' or chora. It might be said, then that Gibbon's prose is more a translation of English into Scottish terms than a compromised Scots; an attempt to supply a primordial "Scottishness" to his work whilst still making it intelligible to the English reader. Gibbon's Marxism made him essentially internationalist in outlook; his relationship with the Scottish Nationalists was at best uneasy, and at one point he declared that he was a nationalist "only temporarily, opportunistically," that, whilst not being really anti-nationalist, he "loathed Fascism in all its forms".[14] He was also interested in the development of an international language, Esperanto, and, in "Glasgow" expresses the hope that man will one day "sing his epics in a language moulded from the best on earth,..."[15] I doubt that he would ever have chosen to fully resuscitate the Scottish language, but his translation of English into a Scottish context is a powerful destabilising and subversive technique, and the effect is heightened by the careful choice of Scottish words.

Like MacDiarmid, Gibbon chose his words from a variety of Scottish dialects, rather than from the

14. Malcolm, W., (1984), Blasphemer and Reformer, Aberdeen: University Press p.6

15. Gibbon, L.G. and MacDiarmid, H., (1933), Scottish Scene. Jarrolds p.146

literary language of mediaeval Scots. Inevitably the result is a colloquialisation of his prose, since there is no longer a Scottish literary medium in which to write. Rather than resisting this colloquialisation, or investing the language he uses with a scientific authority like MacDiarmid, he emphasises it, using the anonymous folk narration and devices such as interruptions and exclamations "och" "feuch!" etc to suggest the speaking voice.

Gibbon once wrote of MacDiarmid's poetry that it is:

stuff unexpected and beautiful, mellow and keen. [...] He has shown the Scottish language capable of dealing, tremendously and vividly, with the utmost extremes of passion and pity." [16]

There is no doubt that Gibbon achieved the same flexibility in his prose; it deals not only with passion and pity, but with philosophical and spiritual thought, and he applied it to the complexities of contemporary society which was, as he himself felt, his greatest challenge. This was a problem familiar to other Scots writers. Lewis Spence thought that by excavating mediaeval Scots he could provide a basis from which a modern Scottish language might evolve, as contemporary English has evolved from Chaucer. MacDiarmid felt that his most difficult task was to adapt the ancient resources of the language to the complex requirements of modern Scottish life: "a modern consciousness" he wrote,

16. Grieve, C.M., (1972), Lucky Poet, Jonathan Cape, p.72

"cannot fully express itself in the Doric as it stands." [17] The prose of Gibbon's last book, Grey Granite is more English than the rest. Ewan asserts his independence linguistically as well as in his lifestyle, and importantly, the 'newspaper speak', the language of mass communication, is English. This is, however, in keeping with the anti-national, Marxist theme of Grey Granite, which, as the last book of the trilogy, moves away from the national concerns of Scotland's peasantry towards international issues of urbanisation and industrialisation, and with Gibbon's portrayal of a culture which is becoming increasingly alienated from its own language. For this reason the final novel contains a greater variety of linguistic codes than the previous two books.

Characters in the Quair are frequently judged according to the way in which they position themselves with respect to the Scottish language. This is most apparent in the case of Chris and Ewan, but the choice of Scottish or English is always an issue even with the minor characters. Gibbon reverses the tradition which characterises users of Scots as low, rough or ludicrous; in his narrative it is the ones who attempt to anglicise their speech who are made to look foolish:

[Mistress Gordon] was a meikle sow of a woman, but aye well-dressed, and with eyes like the eyes of a fish, fair cod-like they were, and she tried to speak English and to make her two bit daughters, Nellie and Maggie Jean, them

17. Bold, A., (1988), MacDiarmid, John Murray, p.128

that went to Stonehaven Academy, speak English as well. And God! they made a right muck of it, and if you met the bit things on the road and said Well Nellie, and how are your mother's hens laying? the quean would more than likely answer you Not very meikle the day and look so proud it was all you could do to stop yourself catching the futret across your knee and giving her a bit skelp. (SS pp.28-29)

Mowat, of course, speaks English and this appears to symbolise his political corruption and treachery, since he is also a Nationalist and a Fascist. His upper-class education and right-wing politics have led him to defect from his own language, and this in itself, Gibbon seems to suggest, generates a certain duplicity. There is a great awareness in his work of the wide-ranging consequences, foolish, pitiful, tragic or corrupt, when a national language goes into decline, so that, each time they speak, people must situate themselves with respect to the essentially political divisions in their language and society. Alan Bold has written of the 'divided self' as an essentially Scottish feature of literature:

fiction haunted by history and constantly aware of linguistic division becomes distinctively Scottish when it admits the element of unsettled psychology.[18]

The extreme form of this is exemplified by Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but each of Gibbon's major characters demonstrates an unstable or divided element in his or her psychology, as I hope to demonstrate later, and this can be immediately related

18. Bold A., 1983, Modern Scottish Literature, Longman, p.101

back to the splits and divisions of ideology contained within the language they use.

MacDiarmid has written of his attempts to express himself in English and then Scots and notes that the transition from English to Scots involved a profound personal change. He also writes that by choosing to narrate his autobiography in English rather than Scots he restricted himself to an external sketch of his career; "for such an essential and inner history of myself I would have had to use Scots." [19] The Scottish writer seems always to have known, from force of experience, that language determines consciousness; that linguistic divisions generate crises of identity and the kind of double vision described by other post-colonial writers.

Gibbon's awareness of the power and complexity of language and its constituent discourses is dramatised in the stories of his characters. In Chris's case, for instance, the choice of the Scottish over the English language is neither simple nor superficial since each language seems to carry embedded within it its own narrative. The English language is the language of the gentry and of education; at a deeper level it is also a narrative which rejects the physicality of the body and the land:

And Chris stared at him with horrified imaginings in her mind, she hadn't known

19. Grieve, C.M., (1972), Lucky Poet, Jonathan Cape, p.33

better then, the English bit of her went sick, she whispered What has father to do with it? And Will stared back, shamefaced, Don't you know? What's a bull to do with a calf, you fool?(SS p.38)

The same kind of dichotomy is occurring here as the one outlined in The Politics and Poetics of Transgression when Peter Stallybrass and Allon White describe class division in terms of sexual boundaries and the need to exert control over the body: "to become socially high it is necessary for the child to be at a controlling distance from food and dirt alike." [20] Since historically the Scottish language has been increasingly associated with the physical or non-abstract, the realm of nature and the body, whilst the discourses of law and philosophy have been appropriated by English, Scottish has become socially low, and increasingly excluded from other forms of discourse. The division is similar to that occurring between Germanic and Latinate forms of English.

The kind of choice facing Chris, therefore, is the choice between one complex of associations over another so that eventually the knowledge that she cannot leave the land means that Chris must reject her education and her middle class aspirations and accept the whole narrative of the Scottish language, historically bound up with the peasant farming tradition. This narrative then determines the whole course of her life.

20. Stallybrass, P. and White, A., (1986), The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, Methuen, p.165

It is important also that in the trilogy characters are never shown to be in control of their choice of narrative. Its selection coincides with a deep personal change, transition or crisis and there is no element of conscious control. The subject is shown to be spoken rather than speaking, as Lacan has said and "at the heart of the subject there is no autonomy but only this submission to language." [21] If, as Lacan has suggested, when you explore the unconscious you find, not instincts, but the structures of language, and that the unconscious of the subject is the discourse of the Other (Écrits p.55) then the components of the unconscious mind might be said to be predominantly social, so that it is indeed true, as Marx has said, that "the social being of man determines his consciousness" [22] and in Chris's case her narrative is chosen for her by her social and economic heritage. On page 97 of the Penguin edition, for instance, Chris becomes aware that she can "never leave it, this life of toiling days and the needs of beasts, and the smoke of wood fires and the air that stung your throat so acrid, Autumn and Spring, she was bound and held as though they had prisoned her here," so this is certainly not presented as a choice. The knowledge of it comes to her even though she:-

hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk, and learning was brave and fine one day and the next you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the smell of the earth

21. Lacan, J., (1977), Écrits, Routledge, p.144

22. Marx, K. and Engels, F., (1958), Selected Works Vol I, Moscow p.363

in your face, almost you'd cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies. You saw their faces in the firelight, father's and mother's and the neighbours', before the lamps lit up, tired and kind, faces dear and close to you, you wanted the words they'd known and used, forgotten in the far-off youngness of their lives, Scots words to tell to your heart, how they wrung it and held it, the toil of their days and unendingly their fight. And the next minute that passed from you, you were English, back to the English words so sharp and clean and true - for a while, for a while, till they slid so smooth from your throat you knew they could never say anything that was worth the saying at all. (SS p.37)

This level of conflict makes most sense if we consider the subject to be dialectically inserted into language. If the language itself is riddled with additional divisions it must be profoundly difficult for the subject to synthesise an ideal, or even adequate self-image from it, and this seems to be one of the recurring issues of the trilogy. Chris's recurrent use of the mirror seems to symbolise her inability to find an adequate reflection of her ideal, complete self in language or society. Ultimately, of course, the mirror can be no substitute, so that at last she acknowledges her failure to see herself. On the morning of her final wedding she is "the fugitive Chris imprisoned at last" "behind this newness and those cool eyes in the mirror." (GG p.434) as the social space she must occupy finally becomes too great a contradiction of her own internal experience of self for her consciousness of self to sustain; and this prefigures her slow lapse into paralysis and silence.

In The Empire Writes Back the problem of creating a sense of indigeneity is raised as an issue of primary importance for the post-colonial writer. There can be no simple "return to innocence", a sense of indigeneity, of original relations to culture, must be constructed in each case through language.[23] This is precisely Gibbon's problem, he deals with it distinctively and creatively by using the rhythmical structures of the Scottish language and by choosing old words; archaisms rooted in a time when Scotland was not oppressed by the English, and ones which are therefore expressive of different relations and perceptions. In Lucky Poet, MacDiarmid has written of the way in which Gaelic words are pregnant with multiple meanings. The word fonn for instance, can be translated as land, earth, delight or a time in music. Gibbon brings something of these lost perceptions and relationships to his text by repeatedly selecting words for which there is no precise equivalent in English. Words such as "smoring"(p.40) or "shoggly"(p.432) release multiplicity into the text; the reader may be able to think of several words in English which approximate to their meaning, but none which precisely fit, especially since many of the words, such as "unco" or "billy" seem to change in meaning at different times and places in the text. This destabilising of meaning means that the reader must rely increasingly upon the context rather than the actual

23. Ibid., p. 135

words, and must take on a more actively interpretive role.

I feel that this is as true of the Scottish reader as of the English, since Gibbon has formulated a prose which is neither, but which sets up a dialectical relationship to both. Jameson's description of art as defamiliarisation and dialectical shock[24] breaking through the mechanical and deadening processes of our everyday perceptions is relevant here. Brecht believed that this characteristic of art has great political value, since it challenges the idea that our lives and perceptions are 'natural', eternal or pre-ordained, restoring to consciousness the idea that they are, in fact, historically conditioned and subject to change.

Gibbon's language and prose style may therefore be said to contain a complex of ideas about language and culture, which are both Marxist and Nationalist in orientation. It is not easy to reconcile these two divergent ideologies, except in that Marxism for Gibbon, as for MacDiarmid, rested on a belief in the freedom and equality of different cultures, something similar to the concept of the Soviet. In Gibbon's case also, of course, he believed that older, more primitive cultures were superior to our own, and that culture in general was in a state of decline, and this aspect of his ideology also

24. Dowling, W.C., (1984), Jameson, Althusser, Marx, An Introduction to the Political Unconscious, Methuen, p.11

manifests itself in his prose style, chiefly through his use of the Scots language.

In Modern Scottish Literature Alan Bold quotes William Sharp as saying that "the last tragedy and the saddest is when the treasured language slowly dies out and with it the legendary remembrance of a people." [25] Bold goes on to say that much of Scottish literature is informed with an intense nostalgia for the language, the "racial awareness of a lost Celtic paradise". The story of the Scottish language has been one of slow decline, a falling away from its original richness and precision, so that it seems that a narrative of decline has become embedded within the language itself. And it is interesting to note, with reference to Gibbon's use of Scottish rhythms, what Kristeva has written of the "dominant destructive wave of the chora", and its connection to our most basic instinct, the death drive. [26] Those characters who, like Chris, are caught up in the Scottish rhythms seem also to be caught up in this 'dominant destructive wave' and the narrative of decline.

It has often been noted that Gibbon's trilogy works on many levels, from the personal to the socio-historical and the mythical. Most of these levels and discourses

25. Bold, A., (1983), Modern Scottish Literature, Longman, p.41

26. Moi, T., ed., (1989), The Kristeva Reader, Basil Blackwell Ltd., p.95

are embedded within the narrative style. Gibbon's language, like the language of other Scottish writers, is not so much a vehicle for expressing political themes, as an ongoing political negotiation, at the foreground of political struggle in Scotland. It is as much the subject of his trilogy as the story itself, and into it he has woven the complex of conflicting discourses which constitute his creative dilemma. As I have said, the language he has chosen is destabilising and subversive in many ways, yet it is also bound up in the "dominant destructive wave", and the events and characters constituted by its discourse are inescapably drawn into its narrative of decline. This is most noticeable in the way in which characters deteriorate, but also in the fact that similar characters recur in consecutive parts of the trilogy in a less attractive context or playing a more destructive role, as I hope to explain later. And of course the community as a whole is caught up in the deteriorative process. I consider this to be the dominant theme of the trilogy; the idea of the community and nation being embedded in a social and linguistic web of conflicting discourses, of which certain elements are doomed to decline or to be rendered 'quaint' by an artificial process of selective preservation.

At this point I think I should briefly explore the other two influences on Gibbon's political thinking, anarchism and diffusionism. The theme of decline so prevalent in the Quair is drawn from the ideology of

diffusionism which is basically the idea that civilisation evolved from the accidental genesis of agriculture in the Nile Delta and from that point "diffused" outwards. Before this time man existed in tribal groups of hunter-gatherers, "naked, cultureless, without religion or social organisation" in an original state of harmony with nature.[27] With the advent of agriculture, however, there also arose the religious and political restraints pertaining fundamentally to private property which are the pre-requisites for the growth of civilisation, which in the terms of diffusionism is synonymous with decline. This ideology exists as a kind of sub-text within the text, and is bound up in its narrative and linguistic expression. The term 'primitive man' as Gibbon uses it has wholly positive connotations and is distinct in meaning from the term 'savage' which he uses to describe the condition of men who have already absorbed "religious and social details from alien cultures and transformed their economic organisation in harmony with that absorption." [28] "Barbarisation" is the last stage in the process when full colonisation and hybridisation has been achieved, greatly to the detriment of the subsumed culture. In "The Antique Scene" Gibbon says that in Scottish history the word 'barbarisation' is a synonym for Anglicisation (p.19). The story of history in the

27. see "The Antique Scene", in Gibbon, L. G., & MacDiarmid, H., (1934), Scottish Scene, Jarrolds p.20

28. Gibbon, L.G., "Religion" in Gibbon, L.G. & MacDiarmid, H., (1934), op. cit., p.314

diffusionist scheme is therefore one of decline from an original Golden Age, whereas the Marxist version is one of dialectical development towards a Golden Age of true communism.

Yet to put it this way is to create a simple opposition between the two philosophies which is not entirely valid. It is true that Marx defined the word 'primitive' rather differently. He wrote that primitive man's powers reached only a low level of development and fulfilment because of his inefficient appropriation of nature.[29] Developments in the means of production were to lead to improved possibilities for man's appropriation of nature and consequently to the development of his powers. Marx also looked back to the ancient history of man with pleasure and admiration, though he considered it to be a kind of childhood of the race, the truth of which would be manifested at a higher stage. Yet although history is seen as a dialectical development, this cannot be equated with a steady, linear development. Indeed for the worker the capitalist phase is one of unprecedented decline in which "estranged labour tears from him his species life, his real species objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his organic body, nature, is taken from him." [30]

29. Ollman, B., (1971), Alienation, Cambridge University Press, p.93.

30. Ibid., p.151

The story of the trilogy might be defined as the story of man being deprived of his organic body, nature, and his consequent deterioration. For both Gibbon and Marx therefore, man's relationship with nature is an essential component in the fulfilment of the ideal, and this of course is expressed in Gibbon's use of the Scottish language which, especially in the first book, evokes a nostalgia for an ideal stage of harmony between man and nature:-

And she heard Ewan call Ay, man, Rob, and Rob call Ay, man, Ewan, and they called the truth, they seemed fine men both against the horizon of Spring, their feet deep laired in the wet clay ground, brown and great, with their feet on the earth and the sky that waited behind.
(SS p.153)

Gibbon's ideal, influenced by the ideology of anarchism, finds expression in two earlier books, Three Go Back and Gay Hunter. As Malcolm points out "the Utopian society of the future in Gay Hunter is synonymous with the past Arcadia in Three Go Back.[31] It seems then that Gibbon did believe in the possibility of a future Golden Age. His diffusionism was not merely retrospective; the ideal society might be located at any time in the history of the future race. It is separated from contemporary reality more by values than time, the distance is that between an oppressed and oppressive culture and a culture in which oppression does not exist. Gibbon's conception of time is more relativistic than linear; the essential difference between Gibbon and

31. in Malcolm, W.R., (1984), op.cit., p.20

Marx is that Gibbon apparently leaves out the issue of the development of man's powers into full humanism through developments in the means of production, which seems to imply an economic progression from a lower to a higher state.

Malcolm believes that the chief tenets of diffusionism conform with the political directives of anarchism and communism. He suggests that Gibbon believed that fascism would give way to communism which was an essential stage on the way to the ideal society which Gibbon envisaged in terms of anarchy. In his ideal, co-operation in a primitive society is the same as that in an anarchist society, effected "without the merging of individuality in any group consciousness".[32] Malcolm states that, like Kropotkin, Gibbon "ultimately demands the abolition of property rather than the Marxist redistribution of wealth (leading to) the abolition of all constitutional and legislative ruling in what is effectively an apolitical state." [33] Malcolm's concept of Marxism seems to contradict what Marx himself wrote in his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, in which he explicitly states that "communism is not the levelling down or universalisation of private property as the crude communists believe...true communism aims rather at the 'positive transcendence' of private property by a fully developed humanism." [34] There is no fundamental

32. Ibid., p.21

33. Ibid., p.21

34. Marx, K., (1975), Early Writings, Penguin, p.279

contradiction here between Gibbon and Marx in their conception of the ideal state. And although Malcolm also states that anarchism pays more attention to the rights of the individual, it is clear from his early writings that the aim of all Marx's philosophy was this fully developed humanism, only possible in a classless free society.

Marxism is a comprehensive system of thought and it is difficult, therefore, to separate out areas of Marxist discourse in the text. It would be nonsensical to say, for example, that whilst Gibbon's conception of history is Marxist his approach to characterisation is essentially right-wing because in Marxist philosophy all factors are inter-related, so that it is not possible to have a Marxist conception of history without a Marxist conception of humanity, and vice versa. Marxist discourse is likely to affect all the components of a text, the notion of history, characterisation, narrative strategies, plot structure and linguistic choice. It is through 'the speak' however, that Gibbon creates a medium in which all these related factors can be integrated.

Much has been written about the innovative linguistic style of the 'speak'. I don't want to repeat what has already been said, so I will restrict myself to discussing a few issues which do not seem to have been raised so far and which place Gibbon's style within a Marxist/post-structuralist context.

In The Dialogical Imagination Bakhtin expounds his concept of the opposition and struggle at the heart of language; the competition of centripetal and centrifugal forces. In Écrits Lacan writes of the dialectical development of the subject in language, so that, instead of the Marxist view of the subject being dialectically inserted into the world of object reality, the post-Saussurean view is that of the subject being dialectically inserted into the objective structure of language. I want to apply these two theories to an exploration of the language of A Scots Quair in order to give some idea of its richness and diversity.

The text of A Scots Quair, with its multiple voices and shifting subject positions, provides a unique opportunity for this kind of theoretical examination. And by using the device of the speak, for instance, Gibbon constantly foregrounds the ways in which language shapes our consciousness of reality, of the plot and its characters, in fact there are times when he explicitly draws attention to this:

(you laughed: but you sometimes wished that Ma wouldn't say those things about folks so often: the picture stuck, true or untrue, and you never saw them in real likeness again) (GG p.365)

Through the speak we see the subject translated into linguistic terms over which he or she has no control. When Chris, for example, takes up her position as wife to

the minister at the Manse, her failure to find an appropriate language is described in this way:

Others of the choir that had missed a service would say to her with a shy-like smile, I'm so sorry, Mrs. Colquhoun, I was late; and Chris would say that they needn't fash, if she said it in Scots the woman would think, Isn't that a common-like bitch at the Manse? If she said it in English the speak would spread round the minister's wife was putting on airs. (CH p.209)

Chris seems to fall through the gaps which lie between different social spheres and their languages; without the enabling function of an appropriate language she is disabled, eventually lapsing completely into silence.

Another aspect of the speak is that it is entirely resistant to the attempts of the centripetal forces of orthodox ideologies to marshal its multiple and contradictory voices into monoglossia. This is true whether the ideology is Christianity or Communism:

...everybody laughed, you knew well enough what Reds were like, daft about Russia and its Bolshevists - tink brutes, it made you boil to think the way they mis-used the ministers there, the Daily Runner had pages about it and the Pope had been in a hell of a rage... (GG p. 390)

Particularly in Grey Granite the function of the newspapers is shown to be to increase the tendency of the speak towards polyphony, polarising the participants into conflict and debate so that, in effect, they cannot be united. In fact in this last section of the trilogy they may be said to take over in part the earlier function of

the village speak, fanning rumours and distorting events, so that the tendency of large economic institutions such as the media to take gradual control over the means of interchange and communication in a big city is portrayed and the political implications examined.

The alien discourse of Marxist ideology has little impact compared to the sensationalised gossip and inflammatory rumours spread by the newspapers. The problem of finding a discourse which will appeal to the masses becomes part of Ewan's task, as it was Robert's in the earlier book. In the end, however, Ewan chooses to play the speak at its own game, releasing unfounded rumours of his own:-

Ellen Johns said, sick, it was horrible, horrible, but, Ewan, you knew that THAT was a lie. It was sickening of you to suggest that they let loose the gas deliberately...Ewan it's just cheating, it's not Communism! (GG p.486)

Ewan chooses a populist mode of discourse but it changes him inevitably; he "coarsens" becoming "all things to all kinds of keelies" (GG p.489) and this is the source of Gibbon's despair in the trilogy. Robert goes mad, unable to find the right discourse to act as a bridge between the religious ideology he wants to communicate and the community who refuse to listen, whilst Ewan corrupts by adapting his discourse to their own. As Bakhtin says, the word is a two-sided act rather than sign, so that what is spoken does not simply articulate the intention of the speaker; the subject always has to deal with the

pre-existing meanings and 'otherness' of intentions present in the other person in the dialogue:

within the arena of every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word is being waged.[35]

This is demonstrated frequently in the Quair (see, for example p.215, when Robert preaches his sermon and Chris says the congregation 'hadn't a notion' what he meant, because they choose to interpret whatever he says in their own interests) so that in the sense that it seems impossible to establish ideological control it may be said that the speak is resistant to monoglossia.

Throughout the Quair, people are shown to be constituted by a range of contradictory discourses, religion and socialism in Robert's case, communism versus an intense individualism in Ewan's case and Scottishness versus Englishness in the case of Chris. Gibbon's mode of characterisation illustrates Bakhtin's point that "our development as individuals is prosecuted as a gradual appropriation of a specific mix of discourses that are capable of best mediating their own intentions"[36]

As I have said, the discourses constituting each character undergo changes and appropriations as the character experiences crises or points of transition.

35. Bakhtin, M., (1981), The Dialogical Imagination, University of Texas Press, p.353

36. Ibid., p. xx

Within each character, in fact, the different discourses may be said to exist in dialectical relationship to one another. This dynamic view of the subject as an ongoing series of conflicts and oppositions which are essentially ideological is central to the dramatic effect of the trilogy; it seems to me that Gibbon dramatises the way in which first one predominates then another, but the individual fails to make an adequate synthesis. Robert lapses into madness, Ewan into corruption and Chris into silence; Gibbon seems to be suggesting that the capacity to resolve fully the contradictory discourses lies outside the individual, that, perhaps, in a society which has become so fragmented and estranged, as Jameson notes, the "loss of immediate comprehensibility" must always be reflected within the individual.[37] Jameson suggests that the language a novelist chooses should reflect the process of fragmentation, thereby revealing the internal, underlying contradictions of capitalism and exposing the "strategies of containment"[38] i.e. ideologies, which mask this truth. I suggest that this is precisely Gibbon's aim in developing his distinctive linguistic style. He presupposes, not the existence of the individual, but the pre-existence of narratives and discourses which determine the contradictory nature of the development of the individual and the course of his/her life.

37. Dowling, William C., (1984), Jameson, Althusser, Marx, An Introduction to the Political Unconscious, Methuen, p.166

38. Ibid., p.76

Bakhtin wrote that a novel is an artistically organised system for bringing different languages into contact with one another, and that the 'primary stylistic project' of the novel is to create images of language, either through its characters, who are themselves images of language, or through the use of different registers in the narrative, or "internal quotation marks" etc., to create a polyphonic narrative with varying relationships between the narrator and the narratee.[39] He cited Dostoevsky's novels as examples of non-linear narratives with a 'protean gaze' and multiple voices which are allowed a certain 'freedom' by the narrator so that in the end the text appears to be ideologically open-ended. Nancy Glazener has suggested that Joyce posits a language of absolute heteroglossia, but these terms also seem to be descriptive of Gibbon's prose, and the multiple voices of the narrative. The characters articulate different kinds of conflicting discourses, religious/political, Scottish/English etc. without achieving the kind of comfortable resolution frequently imposed on a narrative by the omniscient narrator typical of nineteenth-century novels, who frequently told the reader how to interpret any aporia or how to resolve the ideological problems imposed by the text. The extract below, with its shifting tone and registers, demonstrates some of the internal divisions within the community:-

39. Bakhtin, M., (1981), The Dialogic Imagination, The University of Texas Press, p.353

So the most in the bar took a taik to the door with their drams in their hands and sat on the steps and looked at the sky, evening in Spring, bonny the hills,... the temples of God the creature would call them, him that died in the pulpit preaching a sermon - fair heathen it was, ay a judgement of God. And now this slip of a wife of his had less than two hundred pounds to her name, living up there in one room folk said...it just showed you what happened to proud-like dirt, she'd intended the loon for an education and a braw-like life in the pulpit, maybe, with nothing to do but habber and haver and glower over a collar on back to front: and instead he'd be just a common working chap.

Ake Ogilvie had new come out and heard that last speak of wee Peter Peat's. Well, God, YOU'RE common enough, he said, though it's damn little work you ever manage. And then he went swaggering across the Square...fair a tink Ake, aye sticking up for the working man, you were maybe a working man yourself, but you were hardly such a fool as stick up for the brutes. (GG p. 360)

This extract contains several typical features of Gibbon's narrative technique; firstly the change in voice, signified by the transition from 'they' to 'you', the anonymous folk narrator (identified at the end, in this case, as Peter Peat, in order to render the dialogue with Ake more dramatic) the narrative shifts into the reported speech of Rob and the voice of Ake. The strength of the passage is drawn in part from its conflicting viewpoints, emphasised throughout the Quair, since the speak is perhaps the main means of conveying a sense of the divided and alienated community, as well as from the changing relationships between the narrator and narratee. More importantly, however, it illustrates an essential feature of the speak, one that has caused Alan

Bold to describe it as a 'two-edged weapon'[40] since it is directed against both the object of discussion and the anonymous speaker. It highlights the prejudices of the anonymous folk voice in a series of statements which might be placed in internal quotation marks. In this sense it acts as a kind of double lens, so that, by removing conventional quotational markers Gibbon orchestrates a multi-layered perception and ensures that the reader must play an active role in interpreting the text.

In his article "Who is You? Grammar and Grassic Gibbon"[41] Graham Trengrove remarks upon the extent and flexibility of the use of this personal pronoun in the trilogy, from the exclusively personal, "she was blithe and sweet, you knew, you saw her against the sun as though you peered far down a tunnel of the years" (SS p.34,) to the colloquial, "It just showed you the way that the world was going" (CH p.285,) to the universal and generalising "oh! life was a flurry like a hen coop at night, you flew here and there, were your portion the ree or the corner of a midden you could not foretell from one night to the next" (CH p.208.)

As Trengrove notes, this device solves the problem of presenting the interior monologues of characters.

40. Bold, A., (1983), Modern Scottish Literature, Longman, p.131.

41. Trengrove, G., (1975), The Scottish Literary Journal, Vol. 2 pt. 2, pp. 47-61

Gibbon's interior monologues are not separated artificially from the narrative, or presented in a contrasting prose (Standard English/dialect) but flow in and out of the narrative in stream of consciousness style. The stream of consciousness technique is also used for the collectivity, when the 'you' becomes plural or generalised, and the varied use of this pronoun generates an effect of a flow of voices from which individual voices appear and disappear, so that the individual is always seen in the context of the collectivity rather than in isolation, as is usually the case in the stream of consciousness novel. This may be said to subvert the traditional concept of a central hero in the novel whilst positing a different kind of relationship between the individual and the collectivity, although, by frequently assigning to Chris a 'you' that is both personal and universalising, Gibbon is able subtly to raise her status in the novel so that a balance is achieved between centrality and an undifferentiated spread of voices.

The colloquial use of 'you', as Trengrove observes, has the effect of undermining the framework of conventional narrative so that events appear to be presented orally and dramatically rather than in a literary narrative. The removal of conventional linguistic markers enables Gibbon to shift the point of view without abrupt transitions, and this, importantly, draws the reader in to an active engagement with shifting

subject positions, so that Gibbon may be said to achieve Benjamin's ideal of revolutionising the relationship between reader and text. As the 'you' moves through total shifts in subject position, from the directly personal to experience which is also generally applicable:- "But through the window when you swung it out wide you saw sudden hills rise up in your face, with below you the roll of long grass-grown mounds" (CH p.221), or to the plural subject:- "Why the hell should you waste your time in a kirk when you were young, you were only young once." (CH p.208) or to the singular, masculine:- "for the Mill was a place you could take your quean to, you'd lean your bicycles up against the wall and take a peek through the kitchen window" (CH p.185), or the singular, feminine:- "In other bit places where a quean would fee...the mistress would aye be glad of a news...you'd got it direct from so and so's maid" (CH p.210) or to an indeterminate subject as in the proem and prologue where the narrative shifts rapidly through many anonymous voices, and finally to a voice or subject which might be described as universal, embodying collective feelings, though most frequently attributed to Chris:- "young as you had never yet been young, you'd been caught and ground in the wheel of the days.. the things you had missed, the things you had missed" (CH p.250) it might be said that the role of the reader, who must engage with these shifts, is destabilised along with the subject in the text. Also it seems that, by varying the use of the pronoun Gibbon is exploring the unstable nature of the

subject in language, and suggesting the multiple and complex ways in which individual lives are integrated into society.

The universal voice is most frequently attributed to the 'third Chris's, though often in moments when the third Chris is predominant the third person pronoun is used as if to emphasise the transpersonal nature of her experience:-

And so for a little while she stopped and looked, that third Chris holding her body a while, how strange it was she stood here by Robert, so close that the warmth of his body warmed hers--when in such a short time she would die down there in a bit of land as deserted and left. (CH p.257)

In all of the above quotations the distinction which is least clear is, significantly, that between the purely personal and the general or collective subject, so that splits and divisions are suggested, not only within society but within the individual subject, and the idea of individual integration and autonomy is undermined.

Any text which foregrounds the divisions and contradictions in society, language and the individual may be said to be unmasking the processes of concealment which allow us to believe in a consistent reality, and it is in this sense, rather than in the more doctrinaire sense of a simple support of the Communist cause, that the text of A Scots Quair is subversive.

It must be said, however, that these characteristic features of Gibbon's work are not merely stylistic tricks or "intolerably mannered"[42] his style is an aesthetic and linguistic realisation of his historical and political vision. As Ramón López Ortega writes, Gibbon had to use a prose "both mixed and multi-valent to convey the dynamic, historical, collective experience"[43], a vision of society drawn at least partially from the discourse of Marxism.

In his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts Marx wrote that the history of the relationship of man to nature is the history of labour, and the alienation of man from his own labour has produced all the splits and oppositions of our society. Such fundamental dichotomies as subjective/objective, material/spiritual, which lie at the heart of our culture and of language itself would lose their antithetical character in a fully developed Communist society.[44] As it is, however, capitalism is founded upon contradictions, upon the contradictory and antagonistic class system created when one class appropriates the labour of another, and these contradictions and divisions are embedded within the structures of language which constitute the psychic structures of the conscious and unconscious mind. As

42. Gibbon, L.G., (1934), Scottish Scene, Jarrolds, p.205

43. Ortega, R.L., (1984), "The Language of the British Working-class Novel of the Thirties", in Klaus, H.G. (1984), The Socialist Novel in the Thirties, Harvester p.127

44. Marx's Early Writings, Penguin, (1974), p.354

Marx said, "the mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general." [45] In Gibbon's work an awareness of this process is always embedded within his linguistic and narratorial style, which exposes the conflicts and divisions in a society caught in a linguistic divide, whose national language is in a state of decline.

45. Ollman, B., (1971), Alienation, Cambridge University Press, p.6

CHAPTER III: A POLITICAL EPIC

The notion of history and its interpretation is of crucial importance to the Marxist critic. In Marxism and Literary Criticism Terry Eagleton suggests that it is only the writer who grasps his own present as history who can truly fulfil the principles of socialist realism.[1] Other writers such as Macherey and Bakhtin have suggested that the relationship of the novel to orthodox historical documentation is that the novel exists in the gaps and silences, illuminating the incomplete and contradictory nature of the prevailing historical view.

Grassic Gibbon's abiding interest in history is evident in all his writings but A Scots Quair is his most comprehensive exploration of the means of representing Scottish history in a fictional text, and I want now to consider the influence of Marxist discourse on the fictional work, its construction and production in terms of the materials used and transformed, its constituent genres and discourses which in the end contribute vitally to the political aesthetic realised within the text.

In The Dialogic Imagination, as I have said, Bakhtin wrote of the novel's tendency to "ingest" other genres, such as the saga, lyric or folk tale.[2] This correlates

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1. Eagleton, T., (1976), Marxism and Literary Criticism, p.26
 2. Bakhtin, M., (1981), The Dialogic Imagination, University of Texas Press, p.7

closely with the Marxist assertion that the author should be seen as producer, rather than in the more mystical light of creator, working with given materials to make new products. These ideas are particularly relevant to a discussion of A Scots Quair in which Gibbon makes the method of appropriating other genres essential to the historical themes within the trilogy. Of these different genres perhaps the most important is epic, elements of which are most noticeable in the first book of the trilogy.

In "Epic and Novel", Bakhtin suggested that the novel form is opposite to the epic, particularly in the "radical change it effects in the temporal co-ordinates of the literary image" and in the "new zone it opens for the structuring of literary images, namely the zone of maximal contact with the present, (contemporary history) in all its openness". The novel's stylistic three-dimensionality is linked to the "multi-languaged consciousness" realised in the novel.[3] These points in Bakhtin's definition of the novel form are entirely relevant to A Scots Quair. The novel certainly foregrounds a multi-languaged consciousness, and its ingestion of past genres in no way detracts from its contemporary relevance. Malcolm states that Gibbon's work is "comprehensively true to the spirit of its age".[4] He writes that in an earlier work, The

3. Ibid., p.14

4. in Malcolm, W.R., (1984), op. cit., p.xiv

Thirteenth Disciple there is a bonfire at midnight, New Year's Eve, at the turn of the century which symbolically represents the burning out of the nineteenth century and all the values associated with it. Malcolm claims that Gibbon's work has a 'startling modernity'. Whilst this may be true I would like to suggest that in part the 'modernity' derives from Gibbon's assembly of past genres in order to create the multi-layered effect which is one of the novel's most distinctive features.

Bakhtin identifies three characteristic features of the epic form:- 1. a national epic past which is an absolute past serves for the subject of the epic; 2. national tradition rather than personal experience and free thought serves as the creative source for the epic, and 3. an "absolute distance" separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is the time in which the singer, or author, and his audience live.[5] Enlarging upon this definition Bakhtin speaks of the epic having its own language and its own formal constitutive characteristics.

In the light of this definition I want to consider the passage at the end of Sunset Song in which Robert Colquhoun makes a speech at the burial of the Kinraddie men who have been killed in the Great War. For ease of later reference I will quote the passage in full.

5. in Bakhtin, M., (1981), op. cit., p.15

FOR I WILL GIVE YOU THE MORNING STAR

In the sunset of an age and an epoch we may write that for epitaph of the men who were of it. They went quiet and brave from the lands they loved, though seldom of that love might they speak, it was not in them to tell in words of the earth that moved and lived and abided, their life and enduring love. And who knows at the last what memories of it were with them, the springs and the winters of this land, and all the sounds and scents of it that had once been theirs, deep, and a passion of their blood and spirit, those four who died in France? With them we may say there died a thing older than themselves, these were the Last of the Peasants, the last of the Old Scots folk. A new generation comes up that will know them not, except as a memory in a song, they passed with the things that seemed good to them, with loves and desires that grow dim and alien in the days to come. It was the old Scotland that perished then, and we may believe that never again will the old speech and the old songs, the old curses and the old benedictions, rise but with alien effort to our lips.

The last of the peasants, those four that you knew, took that with them to the darkness and the quietness of the places where they sleep. And the land changes, their parks and their steadings are a desolation where the sheep are pastured, we are told that great machines come soon to till the land, and the great herds come to feed on it, the crofter has gone, the man with the house and the steading of his own and the land closer to his heart than the flesh of his body. Nothing, it has been said, is true but change, nothing abides, and here in Kinraddie where we watch the building of those little prides and those little fortunes on the ruins of the little farms we must give heed that these also do not abide, that a new spirit shall come to the land with the greater herd and the great machines. For greed of place and possession and great estate those four had little head, the kindness of friends and the warmth of toil and the peace of rest - they asked no more from God or man, and no less would they endure.

So, lest we shame them, let us believe that the new oppressions and foolish greeds are no more than mists that pass. They died for a world that is past, these men, but they did not die for this that we seem to inherit.

Beyond it and us there shines a greater hope and a newer world, undreamt when these four died. But need we doubt which side the battle they would range themselves did they live today, need we doubt the answer they cry to us even now, the four of them, from the places of the sunset?(SS p.193)

The passage ends, appropriately enough, with the transcription of music.

In fact this passage contains a number of discourses, but for now I want to concentrate on the sense of epic which the author creates.

To take Bakhtin's previous points in reverse order, the poetic intensity of the language is heightened in accordance with the subject matter, towards which the speaker/singer has an attitude of reverence. the sentence structure is long and syntactically repetitive, the choice of words or word order frequently archaic. A pronounced rhythm intensifies the poetic effect and the sense of oral recitation is strong. In place of a harp or lyre there are pipes, the national instrument playing a national song.

The subject of the speech is not merely the four crofters who died in the war, but the passing of a whole way of life which will now exist only in memory or song. An absolute distance, therefore, separates us, the singer and audience, from the world in which the four heroes lived, for a world view, or system of values has also

passed with the "loves and desires that grow dim and alien". The way of life of the crofter who worked his own lands, and which is described in scenes of pastoral idyll similar to those found in older epics, (see, for example, pp.152-3) is a national tradition which is now lost.

In "Epic and Novel" Bakhtin goes on to say that the epic world is a world of beginnings, of peak times, of firsts and bests, and that the important point is not that the past constitutes the content of the epic, but that the "formally constitutive feature of the epic as a genre is rather the transferral of a represented world into the past...the position of the one who utters the epic word is that of a man speaking about a past that is to him inaccessible, the reverent point of view of a descendant." [6] The singer and the listener are located in the same time and value plane, but the 'represented' world of the heroes stands on an utterly different and inaccessible value plane. "To portray an event on the same time and value plane as oneself is to undertake a radical revolution and to step out of the world of epic into the world of novel." [7]

The sense of epic in the trilogy has far-reaching implications for the construction of character, plot structure, (especially with reference to time) and

6. in Bakhtin, M., (1984), op. cit., p.14

7. Ibid., p.14

linguistic choice and one of the major features distinguishing this novel from a mere account of the recent history of a small nation is this use of the qualities of epic in order to emphasise that what has passed should not be measured merely in terms of years but also of values. A whole way of life is ended with the first world war, which signifies a decisive break in history and which is symbolically linked to the coming of the great machines and the inexorable invasion of a foreign nation which destroys the farming community. The phase that is over is now located in the absolute past of the epic; it is complete in its content and meaning and unlike contemporary history in that it is unavailable for rethinking and re-evaluation. Like the epic, all points of this phase are "equidistant from the real, dynamic time of the present." [8] Time in this section of the book is not orientated towards the future but to the endless cycles of change, birth, death and fertility, present in nature.

It is by appropriating the linguistic structures of epic, however, that Gibbon realises the epic sense of fate, destiny, change or history in his narrative, and it is this, in turn, which gives the trilogy its grand scope. These concepts are realised through the consciousness of Chris, primarily, and then Ewan, the distinction being that whereas Chris perceives time, change and mortality to be indifferent to the individual

8. Ibid., p.19

human life, including her own, Ewan conceives of himself as being part of the process of change, "LIVING HISTORY ONESELF" as he expresses it on page 459.

The heightened linguistic mode of epic, with its long sentences, syntactical inversions and repetitions, is prevalent in moments of nostalgia or intense awareness, crisis or transition, or when painting the picture on a large scale, "into their bones the war had eaten" (SS p.156). Archaisms, alliteration and collocations such as "wind-loved world of men" (CH p.213) may also be used to heighten the linguistic register and tone. In general however the epic quality of the narrative is marked by a movement from the concrete to the abstract:

No worry could last beyond the last point, there was nothing awaiting her but her life, New Year and Life that would gang as it would, greeting or laughing, unheeding her fears.

And she went up the stairs to death and life. (GG p.434)

The epic sense forms a kind of background to the action of the novel and it is used primarily to convey an atmosphere of submission to the overpowering forces of time and change. The abstract metaphors and personifications suggest an eternal presence which cannot be adequately conveyed in more concrete language; a movement from the particular to the universal:

...she saw it now, sitting here quiet, that that Change who ruled the earth the sky and the waters underneath the earth, Change whose face she'd once feared to see, whose right hand was Death and whose left hand Life, might be stayed by none of the dreams of men, love, hate, compassion, anger or pity, gods or devils or wild crying to the sky. He passed and repassed in the ways of the wind, Deliverer, Destroyer and Friend in one. (GG p.496)

Bakhtin has noted, however, that in epic the language is in no way separable from its subject matter, and that also in epic the hero's view of himself coincides with the view that others have of him, and both are conveyed in the same formulaic language.

Jeremy Hawthorn has described the society which produced the epic as one in which "the individual does not feel himself to be in opposition to the collective or nature." [9] The author/composer creates a unity of character, atmosphere and setting. This is very much what Gibbon seems to be suggesting in the first book of the trilogy. Though the society of Kinraddie is already in decline, he implies that it still contains echoes of an older, unalienated world:-

Ewan with his horses halted on the side of the brae and the breath of them rising up like a steam. And she heard Ewan call Ay, man, Rob, and Rob call Ay, man, Ewan, and they called the truth, they seemed fine men both against the horizon of Spring, their feet deep laired in the wet clay ground, brown and great, with their feet on the earth and the sky that waited behind. And Chris looked at them over-long, they glimmered to her eyes as though

9. Hawthorn, J. "Individuality and Characterisation in the Modernist Novel", in eds. Jefferson and Martin, (1982), p.46

they had ceased to be there, mirages of men dreamt by a land grown desolate against its changing sky. (SS p.153)

Pastoral is frequently a component of epic, and this pastoral scene comes at a point in the text when Chris is most deeply embedded in the farming community, content with her marriage to a farmer, her son and her work on the land. Gibbon creates a sense of unity and harmony with the environment; these are people who belong where they are and who therefore seem to be a "race of superior beings".

Bakhtin's description of the folkloric complex is also relevant to the Quair. He states that the origins of the novel lie in the pre-class, pre-industrial society in which time was measured by the events of collective life, labour, food and drink. In this period everything within the community was related to labour, then gradually food and drink became a private affair, losing their ritual significance, and therefore their ancient link with the labouring community. When this happens, individual lives and sub-groups become opposed to the social whole and the organic unity of nature. Bakhtin suggested that the novel constituted a particular kind of split between the public and the personal, the construction of a "new world of interiority" in which the "isolated object becomes a substitute for the whole" and the destruction of the ancient idyll.

This might almost be a summary of the development of the Quair. In the first novel the events are integrated into the community and set against the background of sowing, ploughing and harvest. The effort to save Chae's farm or to help Chris with the harvest after her father dies are both communal, the funeral of John Guthrie and the wedding of Chris and Ewan involve the whole community. The events of Chris's life are set against the events of the fertility cycle, and are shown to be linked. She is kissed for the first time as she watches the fire with the rest of the community (SS p.76), her marriage swiftly follows her father's death, and later, when the consciousness of her second pregnancy is revealed to the reader she is in the graveyard, meditating on the dead and the "Chrises that had died". Moments of transition in her life are, up to this point, intrinsically linked to the ancient fertility cycle. This pattern is broken by the death of the baby, which seems to suggest the violent intrusion of political time into this organic cycle.

As Hawthorn says, modern man is abstracted and disembodied and this necessarily produces a complex, not a unitary subject. Hawthorn observes that when people are ranged in antagonistic classes, they are possessed of internally contradictory and antagonistic selves. Because there is such a powerful pressure in capitalist society to deny that such contradictions exist, the

portrayal of the split and contradictory psyche is itself, as Hawthorn notes, subversive.

I believe that this is at the heart of Gibbon's portrayal of identity. From an initial wholeness and unity with the environment, his characters become displaced, alienated, divided, and frustrated and, correspondingly, less attractive. Again he uses the components of the fertility cycle to suggest this deterioration. An early scene with Ake, for example, is described in this way:-

... ,she heard a pad of feet on the stairs, and there was Ake at the kitchen door, his mouser fresh-curl'd, in his waistcoat and breeks, no slippers, his kind never did have slippers Chris minded back to her farmhouse days: Ay mistress, I thought it would maybe be you. This'll be your kitchen place, no doubt. Chris said it was--Come in and sit down.

And in he came and sat by the fire and gave the cat Jock a bit of a stroke, and sat and drank the tea that she poured him, not offering to help her as Quaritch would have done, Lord be here it was a woman's work, wasn't it now, who'd ever heard of a man who sossed with the cups? And Ake drank the tea through his curling moustache, and wiped that and nodded Ay that's a good brew. I think I'll taik down every morning for one. Chris said There's no need to do that, Mr. Ogilvie, I take up cups for the folk that want them. And Ake said Oh to hell with that, he wasn't a cripple and could come for his own. Besides, he was used to getting up with the light and hadn't a fancy for stinking in bed. Chris thought, And suppose I've no fancy for you sitting about in my way in the kitchen?(GG p.402)

The kitchen for Chris has become a place of private ownership, no longer a site of communal activity and feasting, it is a place in which she wants to be alone.

This passage also demonstrates the way in which Ake's qualities, natural to the countryside, translate into the city as a kind of crude boorishness and an old-fashioned arrogance. His qualities, uncommunicativeness and indifference to public opinion, are similar to those of Chris's first husband Ewan, or Long Rob, but Ake is displaced and rootless and unable to find an outlet for his gifts, with the result that he appears as a stunted figure in the text, and the relationship with Chris never grows. I think of Ake as a less attractive version of Long Rob. He is described in a similar way, long, rangy and long-moussered, "throwing down his feet with a fine and measured stride, the earth's his, yielding the wall to none in Duncairn"(GG p.401.) he also performs a similar role in the community, that of scathing critic, yet his wit is more often described as sneering; bitterness over his 'strangled' poetic gift seems to affect his ability to relate or to fulfil himself in all aspects of his social existence. His presence in the text has less stature and commands less sympathy than Long Rob's.

In the epic, although an assertive spirit counts for more than fighting, as C.M.Bowra says, it is not enough for the hero to possess superior qualities, he must realise them in action. The hero is at one with his role and its underlying ethic. In the Quair people are denied access to the expression of their inner worth, the

"development of man's powers into full humanism through developments in the means of production" is actively prevented by the forces of capitalism. The result is a portrayal of a divided psyche, of characters who struggle and largely fail to maintain a sense of self in a society which forces them into "contradictory social and psychological positions".[10] To quote Jeremy Hawthorn again, "in an oppressed group individual subjectivities are framed in the mould of larger conflicts and tensions".[11]

During the course of the Quair Chris suffers several displacements and in fact from the time of the war her story is one of decline. The only character in the succeeding books whose stature is heroically enhanced is Chris's son Ewan, in part also because of his association with the past.

Gibbon draws on the technique of allegory in order to develop his theme of decline. Characters in later sections of the Quair echo ones in previous sections, in a way which is reminiscent of a mediaeval romance structure, yet are somehow distorted, less impressive or unfulfilled. In Cloud Howe Jeannie Grant, the socialist schoolteacher who eventually loses her job and then betrays her initial beliefs seems to be a precursor of Ellen Johns, and her eventual betrayal is given a clearer

10. Burton, D., "A Feminist Reading of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's A Scots Quair", in ed. Hawthorn J., (1984), p.36

11. Hawthorn, J., in eds. Jefferson and Martin, p.46, (1982)

focus in the story of Ellen and Ewan. Incidents of brutality to animals increase, or of unsatisfactory or brutal sex, which suggest an increasing disharmony with nature. In Chris's case, her life is increasingly lived at an interior level as she becomes increasingly divorced from the community (there is no sense of community at the two later weddings) as her outer activities become less and less congenial. Although she is criticised for her personal, subjective stance, I think that Gibbon wants to demonstrate the fact that this is the inevitable result of the social role into which she is economically forced. Significantly, within this role her perception of time changes. Whilst retaining its cyclical nature it becomes divorced from the organic cycles of the land and withers until it becomes merely the endurance of an endlessly recurring routine, and she feels that she is "trudging in the track of those little feet as a tethered beast that went round and round the tethering post in the midst of a park." (GG p.429)

In Heroic Poetry C M Bowra observes that "the epic hero is always somehow representative of the nation"[12] The same can be said of the saga, since in both epic and saga the author/composer draws on values which are used to create a national ideal in his portrayal of identity. Bowra writes that the epic poet "describes a race of superior beings, moved by the self-assertive principle in

12. Bowra, C.M., (1952), Macmillan, p.112

the human soul".[13] They have to endure certain ordeals in order to pass beyond the "oppressive limits of human frailty." The chief value of a hero is his willingness to risk and sacrifice his life; he lives with the continual awareness of mortality and frequently with the awareness of a hostile fate which has been foretold to him. The wisdom and wit derived from this consciousness enable him to assert a sense of perspective in the most critical situation; the subjective control and resourcefulness with which he responds to his fate are at least as important as acts of physical heroism. It might also be said that the hero is supremely self-conscious, or conscious of his role and its underlying ethic.

In the saga the hero is often shown experiencing changes of consciousness like a shaman (see, for example, Egils Saga, Grettirs Saga). Again this is connected to the ability to surrender the self, or to exchange one form of self-consciousness for another. The hero undergoing this change may experience the consciousness of a berserk, or a poet, or both, since poetry was associated with this 'magical' faculty.

The Icelandic sagas draw heavily upon the older Eddic poems and Norse myths in their portrayal of character, but the ancient heroes and heroines were translated into a more realistic social setting, the society of early Icelandic settlement. In some ways it

13. Ibid., p.4

resembled the society of Kinraddie, since it was made up of farmers who struggled to be self-sufficient in an intractable land and who suffered politically because of the imperialism of Norway.

There is no direct evidence to suggest that Gibbon was interested in the Icelandic sagas, apart from his avid interest in all forms of history and in the historic settlement of Scotland; and in William Morris who was interested enough in the sagas to translate several of them. He felt that the sagas depicted a relatively classless society which was an ideal of freedom and democracy, and he drew upon his idea of Icelandic society for many of his works, including the utopian text News From Nowhere, based upon the principles of anarchy.

Magnus Magnusson describes the sagas as "stories of property as well as passion".[14] They commemorate a "Golden Age" of colonisation before the political problems of the struggle with Norway, and describe "the effect of foreign influence upon a small self-reliant community, the vulnerable society of early Iceland".[15] As such they are "strung between two historical poles, the settlement, c.870, and the official conversion to Christianity, AD 1000." [16] Like the epic they are mainly concerned with the themes of national identity and

14. Magnusson, M., (1986), in eds. Magnusson, M. and Palsson, H., Laxdaela Saga, Penguin Books, p.10

15. Ibid., p.13

16. Ibid., p.11

ancestry. As it says in Landnámabók the book in which the first records of Icelandic society and settlement were kept "all civilised nations want to know about the origins of their own society and the beginnings of their own races".[17] Like the proem and prologue of the first two books of the Quair, therefore, the sagas do not begin with the story of an individual hero or heroine, but build up to it by means of a long introduction to the land and the history of its settlement, the network of kinship and the movement of private property. Also like the proem and prologue, this history contains references to mythical or magical phenomena, which gives it a semi-mythological status.

The original population of Iceland was mixed, and so the saga writers drew on a variety of sources when constructing their heroes and heroines. Magnus Magnusson notes that in Laxdaela Saga the three main characters are drawn from different literary traditions. Gudrun is a product of heroic Germanic literature, drawn from the heroines and Valkyries of the myths and Eddic poetry. Kjartan is apparently drawn from models in Celtic Christian literature and Bolli from European romance literature. In effect, therefore, character is presented as ideologue, and the story, as Magnusson says, is as much about a clash of distinct cultures as a love triangle.

17. Ibid., p.28

It is particularly true that the women of the sagas are drawn from older, mythical models. In The Role of Sexual Themes in Njals Saga Ursula Dronke writes that the 'Brynhild type' of woman is found throughout the sagas. Brynhild was a Valkyrie and her main characteristics were virginity, or sexual self-sufficiency and the self-affirmation of her sexual role, isolation and unusual powers of wisdom or prophecy. Frequently in the sagas the sexual self-possession of the Brynhild type is demonstrated in a woman who has three or more marriages (Gudrun, Hallgerd). The effect this has is that ultimately we associate her with none of them - she has her own independent identity. Frequently the women were also shown to be independent of their maternal role, like Gudrun of the Eddic poem Atlakvida, actively sacrificing their sons, either to foster parents or to some heroic cause. Whilst it cannot be said that Chris actively sacrifices Ewan, her presence in the Quair hardly depends on either her marital or her maternal status. Ewan himself hardly thinks of her as his mother, and even when he is very young she allows him to go his own way, without the usual constraints of maternal protectiveness:-

Ewan ran wild, Chris seldom saw him all the length of the summer days, he was out in Segget, exploring the streets, Chris at first had been feared for him - that he'd fall in front of a horse, or a car, or one of the buses that went by to Dundon. She tried to tell him to be careful, then stopped, he'd take his chances with the rest of the world.
(CH p.237)

The virtues usually ascribed to Icelandic women could well be applied to Chris; intelligent, shrewd, well-spoken, with dignity, generosity and wit (see Gudrun of Laxdaela Saga). More importantly though, it is through Chris that the awareness of mortality is realised in the text. For Chris consciousness of death, which, as Benjamin says is generally repressed in modern society, is a primary fact of life, continually foregrounded throughout the Quair:-

And so for a little while she stopped and looked, that third Chris holding her body a while, how strange it was she stood here by Robert, so close that the warmth of his body warmed hers - when in such a short time she would die down there on a bit of land as deserted and left. They were gone, they were quiet, and the tears that were shed and the folks that came and the words that were said, were scattered and gone, and they left in peace, finished and ended and all put by, the smell for them of forget-me-nots and the taste of strawberry eaten at night and the kiss of lips that were hard and kind, and the thoughts of men that had held them in love and wondered upon them and believed in God.

All that had gone by, now under the gold of the moon the grass rose from those bodies that mouldered in Segget, the curlews were calling up in the Kaimes, the hay lay in scented swathes in the parks, night wheeled to morning in a thousand rooms where the blood that they'd passed to other bodies circled in sleep, unknowing its debt. Nothing else they had left, they had come from the dark as the dustmotes come, sailing and golden in a shaft of the sun, they went by like the sailing motes to the dark; and the thing had ended, and you knew it was so, that so it would be with you in the end. (CH pp.257-258)

These moments repeatedly make strange Chris's social experience whilst seeming to increase her capacity to live in the present, in a state of heightened sensual

perception which is poetic in its intensity. They assert themselves as a change in consciousness, a slippage into the third Chris; by others she is described as 'fey' or dreaming in these moments. This third Chris has mystical perceptions and sees visions of ancient men, or of Ewan after his death. Like the hero of epic or saga, her stature is enhanced by this contact with the supernatural. It is also this third Chris which retains an organic connection to the land even in exile, and her consciousness of the land seem to be intrinsically connected to her consciousness of mortality. In this way her life and consciousness of time are linked in the text to the ancient fertility cycles of communal life described by Bakhtin. This seems to be an important link between Chris and the heroes of epic or saga. It grants her a larger perspective than those others whose lives revolve around their own personal concerns, and this larger perspective asserts itself especially in moments of personal crisis:-

And once ma came on you as you stood and wept, tearless, sobbing dry-eyed, and stared and knew, shook you and hugged you tight, it hurt: Don't greet, nothing's worth it, not a damn thing, no man that ever yet was, Chris! You'd stopped from that daft carry-on at once, shamed of yourself, bothering Ma, weeping like a fool over something as common as kale, losh, weren't there thousands of widows in the world worse off than you...?(GG p.367-368)

And when she faces Robert's rejection she

turned her back and pretended to sleep, but had wept a little instead, like a fool. Spring was here, she supposed it was that, daft to desire what no one could give except

with a flame of desire in the giving.(CH
p.317)

Chris generalises on a critical situation and responds to a hostile fate with subjective control in much the same way as the heroes of older genres. These moments in the text seem to lift her consciousness above the purely personal and subjective.

This similarity between Chris and older Germanic models in literature has the effect of creating a sense of timelessness about her. Her youthful appearance contrasts with the ancient places and texts with which she is associated, as on page 311:-

The wind goeth towards the south and
turneth about unto the north, it whirleth
around continually and the wind returneth
again according to his circuits.

That was Ecclesiastes,...

She is compared to Boadicea by one of the boarders in Ma Cleghorn's place, and is often seen against the setting of the standing stones or the Pictish fort. She visits these places so often that her personal history is stored up in them; her own past is closely associated with the past of the land. At times Gibbon associates her more overtly with the land itself, giving her a more than human status, as on page 273, when Mowat is introduced to Chris and stares at her and she stares back:-

...Chris had never met in with his like before and stood and looked at him, cool in surprise, taller than he was, he was to say

later he felt he was stared at by Scotland herself.

or when Robert says, in response to one of Chris's comments which asserts a pragmatic perspective on the experience of pregnancy and motherhood, "Oh Chris Caledonia, I've married a nation." (CH p.298)

In Ewan's case this association with the past takes the more concrete form of an interest in collecting flints, and the desire to realise the Golden Age of the past in the future. He shares two other characteristics with the ancient heroic type, however; he is marked out from an early age as being exceptional, and he accepts death, the death of Chris's baby and of old Moultrie, with equanimity.

Another saga technique, common also to the folk tale, of delineating a character swiftly by giving him a distinctive appellation, or by associating him with a particular phrase, (Long Rob, long rangy childe) is also appropriated by Gibbon, and in the saga both events and character are seen from the perspective of society in much the same way as in the Quair:

It is said that Unn was tall and stoutly-built. She walked briskly down the length of the hall and those present remarked upon how stately she was. There was drinking all that evening until it was thought time to go to bed. Next morning Olaf Feinan went into his grandmother's bedroom. When he entered, Unn was sitting propped up against the pillows, she was dead. Olaf went back into the hall and announced the news; everyone thought it

was most impressive how Unn had kept her dignity to her dying day.[18]

Unn is the founding matriarch of Icelandic society and also of dynasties on the Faroe and Orkney islands; as such she is mentioned several times in the poems of Hugh MacDiarmid. Her status must be portrayed from a communal perspective rather than through subjective narrative, since there is as yet no division between the individual subject and society. In the Quair, of course, the perspective of society is most commonly used to disparage individuals, Gibbon does not want to raise his characters to the status of heroes, but to show them and society in a state of decline:-

He thought himself a gey man with horses,
did Rob, and God! he'd tell you about horses
till you'd fair be grey in the head, but he
never wearied of them himself, the long rangy
childe." (SS p.28)

or

Now the eighth of the Kinraddie places you
could hardly call a place at all, for that was
Pooty's, midway along the Kinraddie Road...It
was no more than a butt and a ben with a
rickle of sheds behind it where old Pooty kept
his cow and bit donkey that was nearly as old
as himself and faith! twice as good-looking;
and folk said the cuddy had bided so long with
Pooty that whenever it opened its mouth to
give a bit bray it started to stutter. (SS
pp.29-30)

And to assert conflicting perspectives on individual characters which again has the effect of destabilising the subject within the text, whereas predominantly in the saga a single view of the subject is asserted.

18. Ibid., p.57

Ewan and Chris, however, share the economy of speech, wit and understatement of saga heroes. Ewan passes off his ordeal in prison lightly, saying merely, "They needn't bother to make a fuss, he'd got no more than any might expect who was out to work for the revolution." (GG p.457)

The sagas use a distinctive blend of realism and idealism in their portrayal of character. They draw upon a network of conventions which are instrumental to the creation of a national identity, yet each character is vividly and memorably particularised. I believe that Gibbon appropriated some of the features of this technique, also used in allegory, making his characters emblematic as well as individual, for instance. Angus Calder has suggested that Ake, as a joiner and vernacular poet represents the destruction of the tradition of the independent craftsman and of vernacular literature in Scotland[19]. Chris's role has been variously interpreted, as representing Scotland, time, or life itself. This appropriation suggests an awareness that character must be seen to be embedded in society - if an author wishes to portray a particular kind of society which is suggestive of an ancient community, then it is appropriate for him to borrow from older genres in literature in his portrayal of character, which were produced by similar societies.

19. Calder, A. "A Mania for Self-Reliance: Grassic Gibbon's Scots Quair", in eds. Jefferson, D. and Martin, G., (1982), p.105

In The Dialogical Imagination Bakhtin has written of the folk origins of the novel. The folk roots of A Scots Quair are consciously foregrounded. Apart from the anonymous folk voices presenting the narrative as a kind of gossip's tale, there are folk sayings such as "out of the world and into Blawearie", or the one about the steeple at Drumlithie, folk tales in the Prelude and Proem, folk songs which range from the elegiac to the abusive, the use of the colloquial 'you' to suggest the oral voice, and colloquialisations such as 'they tell' (p.16), 'some said' (p.19) 'you'd think', 'folk thought' etc., which place the narrative in a communal perspective. An economical, elliptical style emphasises the orality of the voice:

So the body would think there was no pleasing of the creature, and she was right well laughed at in Kinraddie, though not to her face. And that was a thin one...(SS p.24)

whilst the derogatory humour is characteristic of earlier folk tales:

old Pooty kept his cow and bit donkey that was nearly as old as himself and faith! twice as good-looking...(SS p.30)

The repeated phrases which characterise people and the way in which certain characters are repeatedly associated with a particular animal, the Reverend Gibbon with a bull, Mistress Munro with a futret and Ewan with a cat, is reminiscent of the superficial style of character portrayal in the folk tale.

Gibbon's minor characters, Feet Leslie, Baillie Brown, the Reverend McShilluck and Pootsie, seem often to resemble figures from a folk tale or music hall caricatures. Now in some respects these methods of character portrayal are contradictory. The epic and saga enhance the stature of the hero, music-hall comedy and folk tale tend to reduce it; the novel tends more towards portraying character from the inside, whereas the other genres concentrate on its external expression. The ultimate effect of these diverse elements is to suggest a deeply divided, contradictory society, in which, as Jeremy Hawthorn has noted, the divisions are often too deep for the human psyche to reconcile. "What if" he asks "the social reality within which an inner self has to be constructed is too contradictory for some people to coherently internalise".[20] This is exactly the situation expressed in the Quair. The different methods of character portrayal suggest the varying effects of alienation, some characters are reduced in scope and identity to the level of caricature, others are led away from themselves and deeply divided, and others, like Chris, must simply surrender their social selves and place in society. As Hawthorn writes, if no consistent inner self is constructed then when factors change the individual is left selfless at the end[21] which is one

20. Hawthorn, J., (1982), in eds. Jefferson and Martin, p.47

21. Ibid., p. 47

way of understanding what happens to Chris at the end of the Quair.

The diverse effects created by Gibbon's appropriation of the linguistic traits of other genres generate a shifting and doubly-focussed narrative, and may be seen as a kind of "subversive polyphony". He does not use only the older genres of folk tale, saga and epic, but in Grey Granite also there is the linguistic appropriation of a kind of newspaper 'journalese', and the sloganising of political propaganda. Grey Granite has sometimes been criticised for the loss of the poetic intensity of the first book, but this is entirely in keeping with Gibbon's theme of decline and the use of appropriate linguistic registers.

Certain critics seem to have felt that Gibbon failed in the third book; that the speak could only be a suitable medium for the small social unit of the village or parish. Gibbon himself worried about this and in Scottish Scene stated his awareness of the problem:

His scene so far has been a comparatively uncrowded and simple one--the countryside and village of modern Scotland. Whether his technique is adequate to compass and express the life of an industrialized Scots town in all its complexity is yet to be demonstrated.[22]

22. Gibbon, L.G., and MacDiarmid, H., (1934), Scottish Scene, Jarrolds, p.205

It is also true that Gibbon's representation of epic leads at times to an overstated prose; the heightened emotionalism occasionally seems forced and the repetition and abstract quality of the metaphors seems out of place in the novel in which the tendency is increasingly towards a spare and original narrative with concrete and particular detail. The capital letters, e.g. "He was turning to look in the face of Life"(CH p.342) do not always take the strain, yet it might be assumed that he was deliberately rupturing the smooth flow of the narrative of the modern novel and that the very strangeness of some of the effects in the narrative might lead us to question our assumptions about the prose style of the novel.

In part Gibbon's problem with the genres of epic and saga is the fact that there is no national literary linguistic tradition in Scotland. In the novel, however, according to Bakhtin, epic distance disintegrates and, as Kristeva has written, literature is a practice in which the tension between the subject and the language within which the subject is inserted is rendered explicit.[23] Jameson observes in Marxism and Form that the full use of epic is only possible when daily life is still felt to be meaningful and immediately comprehensible, since epic narration is at one with its subject matter.[24] Because

23. Moi, T., ed., (1989), The Kristeva Reader, Basil Blackwell Ltd.

24. Jameson, F., (1971), Marxism and Form, Princeton University Press, p.160

we can no longer think ourselves into the kind of collective experience of primitive communism we need to find narrative solutions for the aporia which opens between subject matter and style. Gibbon's solution is to juxtapose different registers and styles of narration. In the third book, Ewan's story contains its moments of epic intensity, most notably when he has his vision of identification with the historical suffering of the poor in the museum. There is also a kind of chorus, or repeated commentary, made up of the Reverend McShilluck and Pootsie, Baillie Brown and the Tory Pictman, etc., but Gibbon also reproduces the "dog Latin and constipated English" (p.485) of the newspapers and the language of political propaganda. In this way he creates a complex narrative for a complex society, realising that the narrative of epic can never be fully appropriated in the modern novel, and in any case would hardly be suitable for conveying the experience of the contemporary world.

Malcolm observes that in Grey Granite Gibbon "considers the possibility of a universally liberating concerted effort and this effort he identifies as communism." [25] He finds it paradoxical that Gibbon adopts a militant political stance in order to bring about an ideal which is "essentially apolitical". "Mitchell advocates Marxist violence as opposed to Proudhon's pacific methods to destroy capitalist society

25. in Malcolm, W.R., (1984), op. cit., p.21

as a necessary prerequisite to the establishment of an anarchist state."[26]

Gibbon himself, however, never precisely discriminated between the ideologies of diffusionism, anarchism and communism. His non-fiction writings embrace the cause of the working class with a fervour that is essentially a-political, in the orthodox sense.

There is nothing in culture or art that is worth the life and elementary happiness of one of those thousands who rot in the Glasgow slums. There is nothing in science or religion. If it comes (as it may come) to some fantastic choice between a free and independent Scotland, a centre of culture, a bright flame of artistic and scientific achievement, and providing elementary decencies of food and shelter to the submerged proletariat of Glasgow and Scotland I at least would have no doubt as to which side of the battle I would range myself. For the cleansing of that horror, if cleanse it they could, I would welcome the English in suzerainty over Scotland till the end of time. I would welcome the end of Braid Scots and Gaelic, our culture, our history, our nationhood under the heels of a Chinese army of occupation if it could cleanse the Glasgow slums, give a surety of food and play - the elementary right of every human being - to those people of the abyss.[27]

This tendency to question the effectiveness of a militant political stance, its ability to return freedom and a full humanity to the exploited and impoverished working classes runs throughout Gibbon's work and is possibly one of the reasons why the Communist party is not treated with wholehearted enthusiasm in Grey Granite.

26. Ibid., p.21

27. Gibbon, L.G. "Glasgow", in Gibbon, L.G. & MacDiarmid, H., (1934), pp.140-1

For the moment, however, the main factor is that Gibbon's concept of the ideal society as it is expressed in A Scots Quair, bears a strong similarity to Marx's concept as outlined in his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844. It is based on the fundamental idea of man owning his own labour.

Certainly this idea is not glamourised in the trilogy. It is primarily the land, or an infertile corner of it, which is responsible for the mental, physical and spiritual breakdown of John Guthrie. Perhaps a question is being implicitly raised here - can all men fully and equally develop their powers by the full appropriation of nature when the earth itself varies so much in its capacity to produce. At times it is a wholly intractable, destructive force.

Even so, the concept of man owning his own labour is fundamental to Gibbon's vision of a free society and an essential pre-requisite for the qualities with which he invests his favourite characters - independence, energy, courage - summed up by the Sottish word 'smeddum', itself the title of one of his short stories.

It might also be said that Gibbon is similar to Marx in the breadth and scope of his vision. History does not consist of the immediate past; in order to truly understand historical movement the overview of history

must be immense, epic in scale. Like Marx also Gibbon conceived of history in terms of conflict and change, and this is most apparent in the prologues to the first two books. If there is less overt emphasis here on the dialectic of class struggle it is because Gibbon's technique as a novelist is to reveal the conflicts of history on a personal scale, through the actions, crises and conflicts of key characters. This technique does not reduce history by personalising it; rather it enlarges the scope of the individual by showing him to be inextricably linked to the society in which he is embedded, and therefore subject to the same crises and concerns. How then does Grassic Gibbon realise his conceptions of history in the text? The opening chapters of each book, the prelude, proem and epilogue, are crucial in this respect. In the prelude and proem Gibbon conveys the scope of the trilogy by establishing a broad backcloth of historical movement and change. The prelude to Sunset Song encompasses nearly a thousand years of Scottish history, beginning with the granting of Kinraddie lands to the "Norman childe" and closing in 1911, when Chris's story begins. Significantly the story opens in the days of myth and marvellous beasts, and is related by unnamed oral voices who have contradictory attitudes to the unfolding history. Gibbon posits this semi-mythical history against the more conventional documentation, which he clearly felt inscribed the dominant viewpoint, or viewpoint of the dominators. In "The Antique Scene" he shows himself to be keenly aware

of the discrepancies and distortions arising from this particular construction of history:-

Few things cry so urgently for rewriting as does Scots history, in few aspects of her bastardized culture has Scotland been so ill-served as by her historians. The chatter and gossip of half the salons and drawing-rooms of European intellectualism hang over the antique Scottish scene like a malarial fog through which peer the fictitious faces of heroic Highlanders, hardy Norsemen and dashing Jacobite rebels.[28]

If the real Scottish history does not lie in recorded history, then presumably it exists in the gaps and silences of which Macherey wrote. Against this written, authorised version, therefore, Gibbon posits the anonymous oral voice and a self-conscious, semi-fictional version of Scottish history. The implicit suggestion is that this is at least as valid as the prevailing version.

The anonymous oral voices narrating this version place it in the realm of the folk tale, or folk history. This is history as seen from below rather than from the perspective of the ruling class - an important factor in socialist realism. The changes in voice undermine the notion of a central authoritative figure, especially since the voices embody contradictory attitudes, in one paragraph mocking Kenneth for his belief that all are free and equal and in the next asserting that "the dirt of gentry sat and ate up your rents but you were as good as they were," and in the next "the boy Cospatric...was

28. Gibbon, L.G., "The Antique Scene" in Gibbon, L.G. and MacDiarmid, H., (1934), p.19

douce and saving and sensible and set putting the estate to rights. He threw out half the little tenants..."[29]

If the authorised version masks contradictions in the interests of an ideology which "offers partial truths in the interests of a false coherence"[30], this version foregrounds plurality, exposing contradictions and rejecting the idea of a unified coherence. The text does not present itself as definitive and the reader is required to take an active role questioning it. If no definitive version is offered then, Gibbon may be implying that the notion of 'real' Scottish history is both elusive and illusory. Another passage in The Antique Scene reinforces this idea.

The Kelt, the Scot, the Norseman, the Norman, were no more than small bands of raiders and robbers. The peasant at his immemorial toil would lift his eyes to see a new master installed at the broch, at the keep, at, later, the castle; and would shrug the matter aside as one of indifference, turning with the rain on his face to the essentials of existence, his fields, his cattle, his woman in the dark little eirde, earth-house.[31]

It is as if, in Gibbon's view, all recorded history, of war and victories and heroic deeds, is a 'tale full of sound and fury', inconsequential and ultimately irrelevant. Real history is unrecorded and possibly unrecordable. But the prelude and the proem deal with the former kind of history as much as the authorised

29. Gibbon, L.G., Sunset Song, Penguin, (1986), p.17

30. Althusser, L., quoted in "Feminist Scholarship", in eds. Greene, G. & Kahn, C., (1985), p.3

31. Gibbon, L.G. & MacDiarmid, H., (1934), p.24

version does, omitting the true history which is that of man's relationship to the land. In his article The Land, Gibbon states that the ploughmen and peasants are the "real aristocracy of Scotland"[32] Their concerns, we infer, are the true concerns of history, even whilst they may be said to exist outside it. These concerns are eternal and unchanging since at the heart of human existence there is always the relationship with the land.

Three million years hence our descendants, out on some tremendous furrowing of the galaxy, with the Great Bear yoked to the Plough and the wastes of space their fields, will remember this little planet, if at all, for the men who conquered the land and wrung sustenance from it by stealth and shrewdness and a savage and surly endurance. Nothing else at all may endure in those overhuman memories. I do not think there is anything else I want to endure.[33]

Because this true history is unrecorded, therefore, the opening narrative must be self-consciously fictional.

Does it have anything else to offer, though, besides a questioning of the forms historical presentation may assume? In fact Gibbon uses the prelude and proem to convey more than one perception of history. A major theme is that of conflict. Although Sunset Song ends with epic connotations it does not begin in a Golden Age in which man lives in harmony with nature. In the opening story a mythical beast preys on the folk of Kinraddie and is defeated by the Norman childe. For this

32. Ibid., p.297

33. Ibid., p.305

initial heroism which has a fictional status, he is granted the lands of Kinraddie. The story is already one of the movement of private property, which results in the indigenous inhabitants being reduced to servitude:-
 "Cospatric got him the Pict folk to build a strong castle...he had the Den drained and he married a Pict lady and got on her bairns and he lived there till he died and his son took the name Kinraddie." [34]

It is the story of a culture becoming colonised and hybridised and consequently it is also the story of decline, the most predominant of Gibbon's great themes. The lands of Kinraddie are divided and wasted, the Kinraddie family ends in lunacy, the big house crumbling and the estates, managed by a corrupt Irishman "mortgaged to the hilt" to unknown trustees. The rest of the book, with chapter headings such as 'Seed Time', 'Harvest' etc., begins in the gaps and silences left by the folk narrative, and has a different, non-linear structure.

In the proem of the second book, the themes of conflict and hybridisation are even more pronounced, a Lombard being granted the land of the Kaimes, and brutality and violence are emphasised to a greater extent than in the prelude, and in place of the lyrical intensity of the first book there is only the "rhyme that some coarse-like tink of a spinner made" (p.203) The theme of decline is therefore continued and Gibbon

34. Gibbon, L.G., Sunset Song, p.16

skilfully weaves into it the third great theme of alienation. We are not introduced to the people of Segget as we are to the folk of the Unfurrowed Field. Here the community is much larger and instead of individually named characters Gibbon introduces us only to conflicting groups, such as the farmers and the spinners. In Grey Granite of course, we are taken straight into the industrial city and Chris's story. The sense of community and of connection to the past has wholly disappeared.

The prologues are important in establishing one particular framework of time as a kind of backcloth against which other temporal frameworks operate; the sense of epic time in the first book which is linked to the eternal cycles of nature marked out by seasonal change and the communal rituals of birth, death, fertility and feasting; political time which predominates in the third book (although still written from the viewpoint of the lower rather than the ruling classes) and which is marked out by strikes and other forms of political activity, significant dates and the rise of the communist party (which signals the culmination of the trend away from national tradition towards international organisation); and the personal histories of key characters. It is the juxtaposition and inter-relation of different temporal frameworks, effected in part by the ingestion of different genres, which makes the trilogy so distinctive and complex, open to multiple

interpretations. These different frameworks are subtly interwoven yet remain distinct; for instance, the trilogy takes us through the political changes which occur in Chris's lifetime, yet the political time scheme operates on a different value plane from the personal. Although Bakhtin has said that in the novel time rather than values is the primary organiser,[35] these two factors are closely linked in A Scots Quair.

The concept of time as eternal cycles of change never entirely fades from the text, although the farming community which is its proper expression disappears. The perception of it remains with Chris and is closely linked to her perception of the land, and with the 'fugitive' or third Chris (GG p.434) who lives in exile from it yet remains intrinsically connected. In Gibbon's work the land is seen as layers of history, containing relics of old communities. In "The Land" Gibbon writes:

They are so tenuous and yet so real those folk- and how they haunted me years ago! I had no great interest in the things around me...but the ancient men haunted those woods and hills for me, and do so still.[36]

Gibbon presents eternity in his trilogy as a series of interlocking frameworks of time, all different yet simultaneously co-existing. The sense of history being focussed through human perception demonstrates the deep connection between man and nature and the ancient history

35. in Bakhtin, M., (1984) op. cit. p.85

36. in Gibbon, L.G., & MacDiarmid, H., op. cit., p.301

of the species. In this way the potential wholeness and depth of the human psyche, which is always so much more than can be realised in the scope and span of a single life, is realised in the trilogy. Humanity establishes a temporal framework and it is man who perceives the contradictions and inadequacies of the framework he creates, and therefore man who is always aware of something lost, elusive, just beyond the doors of his perception. That this sense is foregrounded in the novel is a tribute to the comprehensiveness of Gibbon's approach, which includes the intangible within the scope of the material; rather than creating an artificial dichotomy between the two he explores the links between economic marginalisation and the psychological effects on the individual who loses his/her capacity for social expression. In this way psychological attributes normally considered to be beyond the scope of the material, the visionary, 'fey' or creative aspects of the human psyche, are shown to be equally dependent upon the socio-economic or linguistic web. When an individual, because of marginalisation, feels himself or herself to be falling through that web, his or her perceptions inevitably alter.

The different genres, therefore, do not exist in isolation in the text; they are located within the discourses of Marxism, nationalism, anarchism and diffusionism. In the passage I quoted earlier, for instance, Robert's tribute to the crofters, Gibbon makes

explicit the connection between the passing of a way of life, (an epic theme) and the economic forces which are the dynamic factors in the process of change. The small parks give way to larger and larger farming estates as the trilogy unfolds and the indigenous population are reduced to the status of servants or exiles. The passage seems to imply that those who cannot tolerate oppression must leave, or die, and the idea of battle at the end is interpreted politically by those who hear the speech, though it is also an epic battle encompassing the previous age. The men who own the 'great machines' which make possible the wasting of the peasant population and the countryside are not only from a different class but also a different nation since the forces of imperialism and class war are intrinsically linked in Scottish history (and therefore also in the Quair). They are also the symbols of a larger process of change, epic in its scope, which brings increasing oppression.

The radical change in society brought about by this process inevitably generates changes in the people of that society and later I want to consider the extent to which these changes are seen from a Marxist perspective. For now, however, I want to restrict myself to the observation that Gibbon makes explicit the connection between economic forces and change in the community and social relationships. Economic change has wide implications because Gibbon's concept of history and human society, like Marx's, is a comprehensive

understanding of inter-related factors which makes no artificial distinction between the economic, the social and the spiritual forces in the life of man.

Gibbon's attention to this theme creates a visionary, almost mystical effect within the text. His writing shares this quality with that of a number of working-class authors, such as Patrick MacGill, the Irish journeyman, who, in his semi-autobiographical novel, Children of the Dead End (1914), written when he was only twenty-four, foregrounds a similar sensibility to that foregrounded by Gibbon, particularly in passages allocated to the third Chris, or, in the museum scene, to Ewan. MacGill's character, Dermot Flynn, experiences semi-mystical perceptions in a state of profound isolation and rootlessness:-

I was close to the earth, almost part of it, and the smell of the wet sod was heavy in my nostrils. It was the breath of the world, the world that was in the eternal throes of change all around me. Nature was restless and throbbing with movement; streams were gliding forward filled with a longing for unknown waters; winds were moving to and fro with the indecision of homeless wayfarers; leaves were dropping from the brown branches, falling down the curves of the wind, silently and slowly to the great earth that whispered out the secret of everlasting change...The fire burned down but I could not go to sleep. I looked in the dying embers and saw pictures in the flames and the redness; pictures of men and women and strange pictures of forlorn hopes and blasted expectations. I saw weary kinless outcasts wandering over deserted roads, shunned and accursed of all their kind. Also I saw women, old women who dragged out a sordid existence, labouring like beasts of burden from the cradle to the grave. Also pictures of young women with the blood of early life in them,

walking one by one in the streets of the midnight city, young women fair and beautiful, who knew of an easier means of livelihood than that which is offered by learning the uses of sewing needle or loom spindle in fetid garret or steam driven mill. I saw pictures of men and women who suffered; for in that and that only there is very little change throughout the ages. (pp.164-5)

Also in the work of Lewis Jones, the Welsh miner and communist, (one of only two Communist county councillors for the Rhondda) there is a persistent emphasis on the vision of what could be if the people were really to unite, and at times this vision takes on a mystical significance in the text:-

They both looked simultaneously past Len, and he, seeing their amazement, turned his head to look in the same direction. He drew his breath sharply and his perspiring face went a shade whiter. The mountain which separated Cwmardy from the other valleys looked like a gigantic anthill covered with a mass of black moving bodies. "Good God" the man next to Mary whispered. "The whole world is on the move." Mary did not reply for some time, unable to take her eyes from the scene. Then she murmured, "No, not yet, but the people are beginning to move it now". She said no more and even the bands were quiet. The people seemed overwhelmed with the mighty demonstration of their own power which they could now see so clearly. Their voices suddenly became puny and articulation was left to their feet which rattled and sang on the roadways with music more devastating in its strength than all the bands of the world.

Len momentarily felt himself like a weak straw drifting in and out with the surge of bodies. Then something powerful swept through his being as the mass soaked its strength into him and he realised that the strength of them all was the measure of his own, that his existence and power as an individual was buried in that of the mass now pregnant with the motion behind him. The momentous thought made him inhale deeply, and his chest expanded, throwing his head erect and his shoulders square to the breeze that blew the

banners into red rippling slogans of defiance and action. Time and distance were obliterated by the cavalcade of people, whose feet made the roads invisible. (We Live 1939 pp. 242-3)

In this extract the visionary sense is experienced through the collective rather than in isolation, as it tends to be in Gibbon's or MacGill's work. The collective is not a threat to the individual, as it is in many nineteenth-century novels by bourgeois writers, but a source of strength.

In the semi-autobiographical work of Lionel Britton, Hunger and Love (1931) which focusses on a brief period of time in which the central character works as a shop assistant, the stream of consciousness narrative moves restlessly between considerations of the amoeba, the furthestmost stars and galaxies, and the pre-history of man, in a continual visionary flow. Examples of this sort can be multiplied indefinitely, and in some way these experiences are all shown to be predicated upon economic marginalisation and the loss of what is traditionally considered to be the 'self', either because of isolation and the loss of a social place, or rootlessness, or through identification with the collective. In fact I am inclined to consider the portrayal of these kinds of mystical or visionary experience as being one of the defining characteristics of working-class fiction. It is the characteristic of work written by someone who identifies with a class of people who throughout recorded history have been

oppressed and exploited so that the writer seeks to project his vision outside recorded history, or the narrow bounds of self, in order to create scope for a new identity. The sense that present circumstances and known history have little to offer the working-class person is the source of the interest in pre-history, or the distant future or the infinite reaches of space. In Gibbon's work, as in the work of other working-class writers, this visionary quality replaces the role of religion in the text, particularly institutionalised religion which Gibbon sees as being simply irrelevant:-"One sees rise ultimately (in that perfect state which is an ultimate necessity for human survival, for there is no sure half-way house between Utopia and extinction) in place of Religion - Nothing." [37]

In Marxist philosophy religion is one of the end products of alienation. God derives his character from the powers surrendered by the individual in the process of alienation, in which, as the process culminates, man's powers in the things he produces begin to exercise power over him.

Gibbon's thoughts on religion do not seem to be quite so thoroughly worked out. In his essay on religion he states that it is essentially the "relics of the corpus of archaic science." [38] As I have mentioned,

37. Gibbon, L.G., "Religion" in Gibbon, L.G. & MacDiarmid, H., (1934), p.326

38. Ibid., p.313

Gibbon believed that man in his natural or ideal state is irreligious. He criticised religion mainly on social, rather than philosophical grounds, as an institution which is at best ineffective and at worst destructive. His portrayal of religion in the trilogy, however, is also a portrayal of alienation. Those who suffer most from it are those who believe in it most intensely, the ministers. The first minister to go to Kinraddie is broken by it (Sunset Song p.73) and Robert's fate is even worse. He undergoes a kind of persecution in which the suffering caused by war and the suffering caused by religion are subtly linked, and the result is a kind of split personality, as if his natural self and better instincts towards socialism cannot take the strain of something so fundamentally alien.

With the exception of John Guthrie, who uses the Bible to justify his sickness and whom Chris sees as being defeated by God in the end, the congregation is scarcely affected by anything that goes on in church. In fact they generally express very well the Bakhtinian principle that meaning may be defined by the hearer rather than the speaker. On page 215 Chris says "They hadn't a notion what the sermon meant, themselves the Philistines and someone else Samson. Robert stared. But I made it plain as plain. Chris laughed. To yourself." [39]

39. Gibbon, L.G., Cloud Howe, Penguin, (1986), p.215

Malcolm suggests that ultimately Gibbon apprehended life materialistically and believed that the majority of Scottish people shared his pragmatic approach, remaining unmoved before the most impassioned sermon:—"Men and women sit and listen with a placid benignancy to sermons as varied in opinion and scope as are the political reaches between fascism and communism...and they are quite unstirred." [40]

Malcolm believes that Gibbon's philosophy of change is fundamentally opposed to religion's emphasis on eternal values and its search for stability of meaning, but that in his philosophy of eternal change, the 'motes' of matter endlessly reforming into new combinations (as the author describes in Grey Granite) Gibbon comes close to reworking materialist discourse into a concept of eternal life. Yet ultimately religion simply passes away in accordance with the philosophy of change, the dialectic of materialism in the text, and it hardly features in the last book of the trilogy.

Before leaving this section I want to consider an article by Jenny Wolmark, "Problems of Tone in A Scots Quair" (Red Letters 11) because it addresses the question of the interpretation of political history as presented in the trilogy and also leads usefully into my next section by treating each character as ideologue.

40. Gibbon, L.G., "Religion", in Gibbon, L.G. & MacDiarmid, H., (1934), p.319

Wolmark suggests that a socialist interpretation of A Scots Quair is reductive; it is really an exploration of the crisis in hegemonic capitalism in the 1920's. The contradictions and irresolutions of the trilogy do not make of it a flawed masterpiece as Douglas F. Young has suggested in Beyond the Sunset, but are valid expressions of the split between socialism and liberalism in the period. The real revolutionary content of the book lies precisely in its presentation of these different ideologies as being irreconcilable; its foregrounding of antagonistic differences and contradictions within the prevailing ideology which are normally concealed in the interests of presenting an image of ideological unity and coherence. These internal political dissensions are made internal to the style of the book and are reflected in the narrative structure itself. No attempt is made to reconcile the contradictory perspectives of Chris and Ewan.

Wolmark interprets Chris's ideological perspective as a "profoundly conservative idealisation of the past and a fatal acceptance of history as something to be endured, not understood." [41] She claims that the novel's structure reveals a deep ideological uncertainty, ultimately upholding the assumptions of liberalism (embodied in Chris) whilst exposing their weaknesses in a

41. Wolmark, J., (1981), "Problems of Tone in 'A Scots Quair'", in Red Letters no 11, p.17

critique. The obviousness of the critique of capitalism may serve to hide the real relation of the fiction to the prevailing ideology, and the divided commitment in the trilogy to the two main characters.

The development of Ewan's political consciousness, as Wolmark notes, is not identified with the peasant crofters but with the industrial proletariat. His intellectual commitment contrasts with Chris's emotional commitment to the past and the land, and her nostalgia. In the end Chris's search for an "outmoded autonomy" is achieved at the cost of relinquishing her place in society; the attempt to remake her past confirms her displacement. Ewan on the other hand, rejects nostalgia and emotionalism in favour of a political stance which becomes his means of re-integrating into the community. His individual autonomy is regained within a meaningful social context. The liberalism expressed by Chris is not wholly refused but shown to be incapable of reconciling and re-ordering different practices and interests into a hegemonic unity.

Whilst accepting the idea of character as ideologue in the Quair, I differ in my interpretation of Chris's ideology. Chris has great stature and presence in the trilogy. She does not adhere to any conventional system of beliefs and is remarkably unaffected by both her husband's Christianity and her son's communism, giving allegiance to no authority. For these reasons, which I

will elaborate in the next section, I believe she is more closely associated with anarchy than liberalism, the ideal stage which humanity will reach after the earlier, necessary if unpleasant stage of communism, the 'creed that cuts like a knife', as it is described in Grey Granite. Malcolm states that Gibbon believed that communism was the surgery required by a sick society, though it was more important to him as a "system offering the means to achieve his personal political objectives than as a vision embodying these ends themselves." [42] He felt that anarchy would never be achieved without the method of revolutionary communism.

Gibbon's distinctive method of allowing different temporal frameworks to co-exist within the trilogy, and within the context of its epic scope, expressing themselves through the consciousness of key characters, allows him to present the different but related ideologies of anarchism and communism through two characters whose ideologies in their discrete time-schemes temporarily overlap. Gibbon's relativistic concept of time and its realisation in the novel is complex, requiring a multi-layered stylistic and structural technique. This technique has left the novel open to multiple interpretations. Mine is that Chris, with her relative ideological autonomy and sense of organic connection to the past, carries more weight and compels more sympathy in the text than Ewan, with his

42. Malcolm, W.R., (1984), op. cit., p.21

cold-blooded, surgical approach, despite her inability to find a true social place in the present, although in the last novel it is Ewan's time rather than Chris's that has come.

CHAPTER IV : Ideology and Identity

In Socialist Propaganda in the twentieth-century Novel David Smith writes that in the end the Quair emphasises "life over dogma". He praises Chris for her "instinctive wisdom" in rejecting all creeds and remaining "obstinately unideological" throughout.[1] This interpretation of the Quair is quite a common one, and it is also usual for critics to describe Chris as retreating into a personal, subjective dream (cf. Johnson '82 and Wolmark '89) and that this portrayal provides a contrast to Ewan's ideological commitment, yet I feel that this simplifies, or even denies, the ideological content of the novel.

Gibbon differs from the nineteenth-century social realist writers in that his characters are more self-consciously constituted and defined by their respective ideologies. His writing shares this quality with the writing of other working-class writers, who foreground a character's ideology, and its interaction with his/her economic situation, rather than masking a character's ideology as 'human nature' or presenting the values of a text as universal truths. Critics of working-class writing have described this approach as simplistic and lacking in subtlety, yet it may also be considered to express an insight; that an ideology may act as a pivot

1. Smith, D., (1975), Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century Novel, p.126-7

around which the unstable or contradictory forces of the ego may group or construct themselves. The ideology may then come to have power over the individual in the process in which man's products do come to have power over him, as Marx has noted. This process is described in full in Bertell Ollman's book Alienation in the section which deals specifically with the alienation of labour:-

man's productive activity however is objectified in his products in all societies. What distinguishes such objectification in capitalism is the presence of two further relations which have their root in alienated labour. These are that man's product exists outside him independently as something alien to him and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. (p.143)

In the Quair no character can escape his or her ideology; Gibbon seems to be suggesting that it becomes his or her fate. If the land is the basis of Chris's ideology, then it may be seen to draw her, to pull her along a path which seems somehow inevitable, and eventually she is subsumed by it. In Ewan's case, his empathy for all the tortured souls and victims of the past begins on p.404, "For days you couldn't forget that scream, tingling, terrified, the lost keelie's scream as that swine Sim Leslie smashed him down", before he actually experiences this role himself at the hands of the police. It is as if his life must develop along the lines laid down by his ideology.

There are times in the text when it does seem that Chris believes in nothing, as on p.300 when she describes all men's ideologies and beliefs as "Clouds that swept through the Howe of the world, with men that took them for Gods, just clouds, they passed and finished, dissolved and were done." Yet Chris, of all the characters, is most prone to 'reading' nature symbolically, drawing time-honoured parallels between the seasons, or the clouds, and men's lives. She does not think in cliches - we feel that these insights are fully experienced by her, and she lives out her ideology of man and the land to the extent of it taking her over completely. At no time is her departure from the land presented as a choice, something she is actually capable of choosing:-

She walked weeping then, stricken and frightened because of that knowledge that had come on her, she could never leave it, this life of toiling days and the needs of beasts and the smoke of wood fires and the air that stung your throat so acrid, Autumn and Spring, she was bound and held as though they had prisoned her here. (SS p.97)

Chris is not 'true to herself', because her self is fragmented and unstable, and at least one of the Chrises, the English Chris, is abandoned or suppressed on the path she has to take. She is not held prisoner by the land, either, to be specific. The land, as Gibbon presents it is not a direct contact between Chris and reality, but her experience of truth - "the only truth there was, that only the sky and the seasons endured, slow in their

change"p.207. Chris is true to her experience of truth, which is, in fact, her ideology. Of all the characters she is the most memorable for her reflective moods in which she constantly forges a relationship between time, nature, and change. In this way she creates a measure of consistency in a highly unstable life.

I feel that Gibbon is deeply interested in the process by which ideologies are built up and derive power; in the way in which the human mind works symbolically, by linguistic association, at the most profound level. When a character assigns meaning, by a process of symbolic association, and then finds that meaning void, it radically affects his capacity to find meaning in the rest of his life, and therefore his whole sense of identity is threatened. This in effect is what happens to Robert after the loss of his baby and the collapse of the miner's strike. We see him building up the symbolic associations between the miner's strike and the Kingdom of Heaven:-

Then he started talking of the Miners, of Labour, of the coming struggle in the month of May, he hoped and believed that that was the beginning of the era of Man made free at last, Man who was God, Man splendid again. Christ meant and intended no more when He said that He was the Son of Man, when He preached the Kingdom of Heaven - He meant it on earth. Christ was no godlet, but a leader and hero--
(CH pp.300-301)

Later there are the associations with spring and the new life in Chris:-

He seemed to have altered too with the Spring, the black mood came seldom or never now, nor that red, queer cough that companioned it. You'd hear him of a morning go whistling away under the yews, on some kirk concern, blithe as though the world had been born anew. It wasn't only the coming of the baby that had altered him so and kindled his eyes, all the air of the country was filled with its rumour, that thing awaited the country in May, when the Miners and the others had threatened to strike. Robert said that more than a strike would come, the leaders had planned to seize power in May. (CH pp.301-302)

The build-up of symbolic associations is so intense that its destruction is devastating, Robert's entire metaphorical connection to his world is threatened and imbalanced.

This capacity is very pronounced in Robert because it is reinforced by his socio-economic role which involves him directly in the creation of meaning by the symbolic association of various discourses, (politics, religion and the everyday life of the community). It is called "bunk symbolism" and a blunted tool by Ewan, (p.489), but it is, in fact, the fundamental tool by which the individual relates to his environment, and is present, of course, in Ewan's own discourse, when he makes the connection between the slaves led by Spartacus and the unemployed in Duncairn.

The ideological factor is emphasised in all the relationships between characters in the Quair. Ewan, for instance, from early childhood seems to single out for preference people of a socialist persuasion, such as

Chae, long before he ever hears about socialism. Gibbon seems to be suggesting here that ideology goes far beyond a chosen creed. The individual's relationship to the world about him, to the means of production, is determined by his ideology, which places him, therefore, in the whole social network, determining his means of relating to others and to his own self, so that the self is constituted by its ideology. The equations Gibbon makes between a character's ideology and (say) his sexual preferences, therefore, (Mowat, Dite Peat) are not as crude or simplistic as they initially seem. Occasionally Ewan will single out a character no one else likes, such as Moultrie, for friendship; none of them turn out to be Tory. Before he learns about socialism he appears to have a predisposition for it; he is intelligent, independent, indifferent to the values of conventional hierarchies and authorities. Again Gibbon seems to be implying that ideology, far from being an external creed or orthodox system of beliefs, is an internal disposition to enter into the world's structures and relations and metaphorical connections in a certain way. For this reason all kinds of relationships are constituted and defined by ideology. When Chris meets Mowat, for instance, her reaction against him takes an ideological form - she is politicised by him:-

Then she looked at Mowat, elegant, neat, with his London clothes, with his tended hair and his charming look; and the saggy pouches under his eyes. And it seemed she was looking at more than Mowat, the class that had made of

the folk of Segget the dirt-hungry folk that they had been and were - made them so in sheer greed and sheer brag. You had little hope what the Miners could do, them or the Labour leaders of Robert, but they couldn't though they tried make a much worse mess than Mowat and his kind had done, you knew. (CH p.304)

She is also shown to be affected by Robert's discourse, though she cannot believe in his God:-

...Oh Ewan, you're as hard and cool as - grey granite! When you too grow up you'll find facts over much - you'll need something to follow that's far from the facts. And she said something else, about a pillar of cloud, and was suddenly angry. Don't stare at me so! (CH p.283)

Later she alters her perception, "Not even for Robert could she change and pretend"(p.322), but at this point their relationship is already over and they are growing apart. When she makes the earlier statement she is still in love with him, and Gibbon seems to be making the point that the most intimate relationships necessarily involve an ideological transaction. This point is reinforced by the relationship of Ellen and Ewan, brought together by socialism, and separated when she deviates from their ideology but he does not. In this way ideological conflicts are shown to constitute insurmountable barriers in relationships.

Throughout the text ideological changes are experienced as personal crises by the individuals concerned. Chris's first husband, Ewan, is taken over and radically changed by the ideology of the war. It is repeatedly demonstrated that a character may fall victim

to this kind of change because of outside forces which are beyond his/her control. It happens to Robert, Ewan and Else, and in each case the fact that this can happen demonstrates the unstable, fragmentary nature of the ego and its partial vision.

In Else's case the force which brings about the change in her takes the shape of Dalziel of the Meiklebogs, and it hardly seems to be an ideological intrusion. The reason why she stays with him, however, is never explained, and the details of their relationship, after the initial event, are related entirely through the speak, so that a social rather than a personal perspective is presented:-

...Dalziel of the Meiklebogs a decent-like childe and an Elder of Segget kirk forbye. So he must be, but you knew a man's nature, he needed a woman just now and again - no, no, you didn't blame him overmuch, but she fairly must be an ill tink, that Else Queen. (CH p.285-286)

Social values are hostile to Else, and it is made clear that her social position changes, especially when she has the baby. It also affects her personal behaviour - she is said to have grown vulgar and coarse, and the implication seems to be that this is because she internalises the values of a hostile society, becoming more or less what they think she is. Robert, Ewan and Else are all paralysed by internalising the values and ideology of conventional society, religious, political

and sexual. The ego is shown to be unstable and changes in it are instigated through the medium of ideology.

Portraying character as ideologue in this way allows Gibbon to link the small unit of the individual firmly to the larger one of society, so that the ego is shown to be at the mercy of larger forces, and changes occurring in the larger unit, (the war, the collapse of the strike) necessarily affect the individual at the most profound level. It also enables him to "express the partial vision of characters whilst suggesting a larger perspective", one of the problems which, according to David Craig, perpetually faces the socialist writer[2] and which is also, of course, a problem found repeatedly within the working-class text. Similarly, changes or betrayals on a personal level put the larger changes and betrayals in context. When Robert says, for example, on page 333 that he does not believe in contraception it is like a betrayal of his whole life with Chris and is profoundly shocking to her. These relatively minor incidents give a clearer focus to the implications of the larger betrayals of Labour leaders such as Ramsey Macdonald, and their devastating effects, since they are all shown to be embedded in the same network of ideological transgressions and deceptions.

2. Craig, D., (1974), Marxists on Literature, Penguin, Books, London, p.10

Gibbon's characters are motivated by ideology rather than any desire for personal glory - their ideologies are not the ideology of individualism. This is especially true of Ewan who, although marked out for leadership is repeatedly shown to be indifferent to personal glory, even at school when he frequently lends out his homework to less clever pupils. Nonetheless the net effect of ideology in an alienated society is to increase alienation, to place insurmountable barriers between one individual and another, and to make it impossible for one character to clearly perceive another. At the end of the trilogy, for instance, Ewan says "there will always be you and I, I think, mother,...it's the old fight, the fight in the end between Freedom and God." (GG p.495) The more I think about this statement the less it seems to relate to any of Chris's beliefs. Ewan seems to be interpreting Chris in such a way as to fit her in with his own ideology, and this is in fact the essence of relationships. Individuals relate by placing one another in their ideological schemes. This is demonstrated repeatedly in the Quair, and frequently it is shown to involve a massive distortion of perception, especially where Chris is concerned. I want to discuss this in more detail in my chapter on feminist discourse; in this section I merely want to make the point that Gibbon was aware, like Macherey, of the extent to which ideology distorts perception in the interest of masking contradictions (see for example the section on form and content in Terry Eagleton's Marxism and Literary

Criticism (pp. 34-5) in which he explores Macherey's idea of a text being 'ideologically forbidden to say certain things', so that it is the task of the critic to 'seek out the principle of conflict' in the text rather than attempting to see it as a coherent unity, which will only mask its inherent contradictions.)

In the end Gibbon does not seem to be implying, as many critics have suggested, that the reader should side with one or another of his characters. The whole issue of ideology seems itself to be in question, and I feel that in the trilogy all ideologies are shown to be rooted in alienation. Ideology is presented as taking over from man's primary relationship to nature and his capacity for appropriation. Man constructs himself primarily in relationship to an ideology and is then seen to be appropriated by that ideology, because of the need of the ego for an illusion of stability.

Meanwhile, not unlinked to all the ideological conflict in the novel, but largely unaffected by it, the movement of private property goes on, with its profound effects upon individual lives, and I now want to discuss this further.

Benjamin, as well as most other Marxist critics, believed that character should be presented as being historically produced and therefore capable of change. Marx himself said that it is "the illusion of each epoch

in history" that the individual is taken to be "something given, like the sky or the earth".[3] The socialist writer should question this assumption, portraying the individual as a product of his/her time and making explicit the relationship between character portrayal and ideology, as well as exposing the contradictions in the psyche of the individual who is embedded in the contradictory society of capitalism. In a letter to Margaret Harkness Engels made the comment that realism consists of the reproduction of typical characters in typical circumstances and it has been suggested that the socialist realist author should mediate in his portrayal of character between the individual and the general type. Gibbon achieved a method of character portrayal which fulfilled all these requirements, by drawing from past genres and by portraying character as ideologue which has the effect of 'typifying' the individual and by foregrounding each character's consciousness of history.

It might be said that each character in the Quair is placed according to his or her perspective on history, and is given greater status according to the extent to which they attempt to appropriate history, giving it meaning in their own lives. This is true of the major characters, Chris, Robert, Ewan and even Ake, who writes of Valkyries in his poems. Yet it is shown that each fails to appropriate history fully or to realise fully its meaning in the present, so that their perspectives

3. Ollman, B., (1971), op.cit., p.x

remain partial and limited. Chris, Robert and Ewan, for instance, share the discourse of the Golden Age, but fail to synthesise their varying interpretations of it. Chris thinks of it as a time 'long syne' which will never return, Ewan as a time that must be brought into being in the future by political change, and Robert equates it with the kingdom of heaven. These visions remain incomplete and unresolved because Gibbon's characters are shown to live in a deeply divided society in which each has access only to a severely limited vision. Furthermore they fail to communicate their visions because each is economically set apart from the other characters, the people of Segget, for instance, cannot even relax in Robert's presence:-

The whispers went round the minister had gone, the ploughmen and spinners gave a bit laugh and took a bit squeeze at the queans they held; and some of the folk that were hot with their collars pulled the damned things off and threw them in the hedge. (CH p.250),

and in the end all visions diverge, though they start from a common point, as the lives of all three characters diverge into deepening alienation. This is the end result of all the socio-economic forces described in the Quair, and perhaps the most important aspect of Gibbon's portrayal of character, so that any discussion of his work is incomplete without an exploration of the effects of alienation upon the individual and society.

In Illuminations Walter Benjamin quotes Moritz Heimann as saying that "a man who dies at thirty-five is

at every point of his life a man who dies at thirty-five".[4] Benjamin uses this quotation to illustrate the idea that the function of death in the novel is to reveal the meaning of a character's life. This is increasingly important in a society in which:

in the general consciousness the thought of death has declined in omnipresence and importance...Bourgeois society has, by means of hygienic, social, private and public institutions realised a secondary effect which may have been its subconscious main purpose; to make it possible for people to avoid the sight of the dying.[5]

Benjamin suggests that the ancient art of storytelling derived some of its creative impetus from the omnipresence of death in society. The storyteller has, in effect, borrowed his authority from death, "death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell." [6] This is because death gives completion to a character's life. The novel took over from storytelling and was, according to Benjamin, the earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling.

In Gibbon's trilogy, however, death, and the consciousness of mortality are repeatedly foregrounded in the text, and this is just one of the ways in which he deliberately creates echoes of an older consciousness, yet in the deaths of his main characters there is no real sense of completion or fulfilment. Ewan's death is described as a lie, with no reality to it; Robert's death

4. Benjamin, W., (1968), Illuminations, Schocken Books, New York, p.100

5. Ibid., p.101

6. Ibid., p.94

is almost an interruption, and in Chris's case the issue of death is itself in doubt. I think that the effect of this is partially to frustrate the reader's ability to assign meaning to the lives of these characters, or to the characters themselves. The reader must remain engaged with the issues and difficulties and irresolutions surrounding each character.

It might be said that Gibbon's characters are alienated from their own deaths, or that their deaths are the logical outcome of an increasing trend of alienation in their lives. According to Marx, the absence of meaning is one of the key constituents of alienation. Meaning is derived from the experience of appropriation, in which the thing perceived is made human by the perceiver, made his own, so that it ultimately enriches him by increasing his powers. To subvert meaning in a character's life is therefore to suggest alienation.

Now I propose to examine Gibbon's exploration of the varying symptoms and effects of alienation, ranging from inner conflicts and irresolutions to, especially in Chris's case, a deepening sense of loss. In later subsections I want to show that Gibbon clearly perceives the fact that the roots of alienation lie in the socio-economic system and in the historical conditions of the time which, as Marx said, bring about the "estrangement

of all physical and intellectual senses" within the individual.[7]

In Marx's view, a fully developed society "produces man in all the richness of his being".[8] In such a society the splits and oppositions upon which capitalist society, and language itself, is predicated (subjective/objective, material/spiritual etc.) lose their antithetical character and man becomes a whole, complete being, his latent powers fulfilled. Since the history of man's relationship to nature is that of labour, the alienation of labour is the primary cause of all splits and oppositions in society. When there is no alienation of labour, man's powers develop. In keeping with Gibbon's portrayal of an alienated society, none of his characters show any noticeable development of powers, fulfilment of potential or even realisation of ambition. Most, in fact, deteriorate, and in the trilogy the major development is that of the movement of private property, which, in Marxist philosophy, is one of the end products of the process of alienation.

This process, as Bertell Ollman defines it, begins with the initial "break between the individual and his life activity" which is, in effect the severing of the link between the individual and the material world.[9]

7. Marx, K., (1975), Early Writings, Penguin Books, p.353

8. Ibid., p.354

9. Ollman, B., (1971), Alienation, Cambridge: University Press, p.133

In Chris's case this begins with her movement away from the farm and self-sufficiency, leading to a loss of the "organic body" nature and to a subsequent loss of control, and culminates with her "selling herself like a cow for a roof".[10]

Throughout the Quair Gibbon takes pains to emphasise the point that Chris is not alienated by internalising the values of conventional society. He repeatedly demonstrates her indifference to the values of the society around her; her behaviour (and even her dress and hairstyle) is frequently shown to be unconventional, most strikingly at points in her life which might be described as rites of passage, (i.e. points at which the individual normally becomes more fully integrated into society). Her marriage to Ewan, for instance, is considered to be too close to her father's death for propriety, and later she outrages Segget by having her second husband cremated. Also she is not interested in the "speak" as related by Else at the Manse. She retains a high degree of integrity throughout the text; perhaps because for the most part she has no aspirations, and no affiliation to any orthodox creed she does not seem to suffer from a sense of betrayal or guilt to the same extent as some of the other characters. Also each crisis seems to serve the purpose of affirming her self in some way and she is described as moving through the suffering caused by men

10. Gibbon, L.G., (1986), Grey Granite, Penguin Books, p.447

to a place of serenity and self-sufficiency. On page 172, for instance, when Chris has been suffering in her marriage to the changed Ewan, she hits a kind of rock-bottom point one night, and then passes the crisis:-

And suddenly then, as always these changes took her, she was calm and secure, putting Ewan from her heart, locking it up that he never could vex her again, she was finished with him either loving or hating. And at that release she rose and went slow about her work, a great load had gone from her then, John Brigson coming down in the morning heard her sing and was cheery himself, cheery with relief, but she sang her release.

And on page 469 she sees a vision of the men she has known and suffered with, which enables her to move beyond them:-

Not Ake alone, but beyond them all, or they beyond her and tormenting her. And she knew in that minute that never again in memory, or reality might any man make in gladness unquiet a heart passed beyond love and lust alike.

And on page 487:- "She'd passed beyond men or the need for them, no more that gate might open in her heart."

Each time the passing of these crises is described as a release into quietness after turmoil, but the question is whether Chris is experiencing self-affirmation or a loss of self, a 'release' into deeper and deeper alienation, not only beyond the suffering caused by men, but beyond any kind of social relationship, or relationship to herself.

It is hard to think of Chris as being self-alienated, though she is obviously and increasingly alienated from the society around her. Yet it is not quite true to say, as Angus Calder has said, that she "survives her calamities unutilated"[11] In this passage in Cloud Howe for instance, Gibbon appears to be suggesting that Chris experiences alienation at the most profound level:-

And you knew that you stood on the brink of that sea that was neither charted nor plumbed by men, that sea-shore only women had known, dark with its sailing red lights of storms, where only the feet of women had trod, hearing the thunder of the sea in their ears as they gathered the fruit on that waste, wild shore...

So: and his lips were in yours, and they altered, and you were gladder than you'd been for years, your arm went round his bared shoulder quick... and suddenly you were lying as rigid as death. Robert said Tired out after all Christine?

For months after that she remembered that moment, her voice hadn't come from her lips for a minute; then she said, Just a bit, and heard him draw breath, and she said again, soft Not TOO tired, Robert, and had set her teeth fast after that, for an age, the thunder of that sea cut off by a wall,...(CH p.259)

Chris has felt the scar on Robert's shoulder which was made by shrapnel in the war, and it kills her dream of having a child by him because she cannot stand the thought of it being butchered in another war as Ewan was. It might be said that Chris is as much a victim of forces beyond her control, the economic and imperialist forces

11. Calder, A, "A Mania for Self-Reliance: Grassic Gibbon's Scots Quair", in eds. Jefferson, D. & Martin, G., (1982), p.101

of war, as are Ewan and Robert, and that this is the essence of alienation.

Other indications of the damage done to Chris occur throughout Cloud Howe and Grey Granite. On Armistice Day, when she stands with the crowd around the war memorial, the speak calls her:-

a common bit quean the minister had wifed, folk that had known her well in Kinraddie said she had once been as blithe as bonny; but now she was altered out of all manner,... (CH p.266)

In Grey Granite there are frequent references to Chris being old, though she is only 38 when the book opens, and Gibbon describes her physical deterioration in some detail:

Then you'd shake yourself to sense, get down with a pail of water and a scrubbing brush, scrub and scrub till your fingernails, so smooth and round shaped in your years in Segget, come jagged again, hacks in your fingers that caught the blankets as you turned in unease of a night and sent a shrill stream of pain up your hands. Queer to work again in such a fashion, use all your body till you ached dead tired, by the time you'd finished the upper floor your hips were filled with a stinging and shooting, like a bees' byke with bees, bad as having a baby...you felt like a greasy dish-clout, just, ready to be wrung and hung out to dry. And when you got down to the kitchen at last Ma Cleghorn would skeugh at you over her specs, Fegs, lass, you take well with a slammock of work. Like a cup of tea?- Here give me the basses, I'll take them out while you sit down a minute. You'd say I'll shake them myself, I'm fine, and she'd look at you grim, It's your funeral then. But die where it's easy to spread out the corp.(GG p.366)

Economic pressures have cut Chris off from the land she once thought she never could leave (SS p.97) and it is clear that this is not a question of choice. She used to work desperately hard on the land, but "she worked never knowing she tired"(p.153) and the deteriorative effect seems to be felt solely in the work of Duncairn. I feel that Gibbon's point here is similar to the point made by Marx about the alienation of labour "work that does not belong to the essential self does not affirm the self, it mortifies the body and ruins the mind"[12] It actively consumes the powers of the individual so that he becomes less human.

Alienation of labour is the fundamental step towards alienating one class from another, one individual from another and alienating the individual from himself, from his or her own self and body.

Chris's relation to her body seems initially to be self-affirming. She is repeatedly portrayed naked in the text, viewing herself rather than being voyeuristically constructed by an outside male gaze, except of course for the male gaze of the author. Most strikingly, she approves of what she sees. This in itself seems to suggest that she has not been socialised into self-alienation, since few people perceive beauty in themselves, they rely on the gaze of the Other.

12. Ollman, B., (1971), Alienation, Cambridge: University Press, p.137

In her article on Bakhtin,[13] Ann Jefferson writes of the body as the site and focus of a power struggle with far-reaching ramifications since it is what the Other sees but the self does not. She states that we are all subject to the grasp or gaze of the Other since we are all placed in relation to the Other via the body. The subject requires the Other to complete his perspective, since the subject experiences the external self as a series of fragments. Beauty, in this sense, is always in the eye of the beholder, the subject requires the eye of the Other in order to perceive it in himself. In the moments when she views herself in the mirror, however, Chris seems to be re-claiming the power to perceive and evaluate herself, to become her own object, participating in a kind of subject/object unity and completeness. This completeness and self-sufficiency is in fact her most striking trait. She does not seem to construct herself with reference to society, she seems to become her own referent, relying on herself as a guide rather than on social values. She is rarely affected by the response of others to her physical appearance, wearing her hair in an old-fashioned style, and dressing in clothes that are considered to be "too fancy", though she is not deliberately or self-consciously unorthodox. It is probably this quality which prompts Ewan's comment that Chris, presumably in contrast to those around her,

13. Jefferson, A., "Body Matters", in eds. Hirschkop, K. and Shephard, D., Bakhtin and Cultural Theory, Manchester: University Press, (1989), pp.152-177

is real (GG p.470). She is not subject to the gaze of the Other in the sense of being constituted or defined by that gaze. She has, in fact, a kind of autonomy.

Deirdre Burton, however, has written that she considers the novel to be an exploration of split identity and the many scenes in which Chris reflects on her own image are essential to Gibbon's portrayal of the split subject. At these moments, when she is most powerfully aware of herself, she is also most separate from others. On page 301, for instance, whilst Robert is preaching to her in an impassioned way about the Kingdom of Heaven, Chris is "seeing herself globed earnest, half-smiling and with trembling lips there in the deep gray pools that hid away Robert, never hers for long if ever at all."

Then again on page 255 "Chris took off her clothes in front of that other who watched and moved in the mirror's mere."

Chris seems to be searching for a point of identity. She constructs herself feature by feature in the mirror as if to give herself reality, as if the dimple in her breast confirms her existence, or is at least a point of stability. Her social status fails to confirm her reality since it changes so regularly, and in any case does not allow her to express much of herself.

At such points I feel that the text becomes an interrogation of the question of identity. The novel has generally presented identity as a fixed point around which other factors change and revolve. We ourselves usually mean by the term something essential, a kind of unchanging core unique to the individual because it may be outside our capacity, (or outside the capacity of language) to think ourselves in any other way. We seek a sense of self in points of stability, as Chris does. The body's features change extensively in the course of a lifetime, yet we look in the mirror as Chris does, not to see change but to reassure ourselves with familiarity. When Chris looks in the mirror, she looks selectively, at those features which do not change, her long slim build, for instance, the dimple and the red hair because she cannot think herself any other way, even though she accepts the notion of there being many Chrises. She often returns to the mirror at moments of change and transition in her social identity, on her wedding day for instance, constructing a familiar image for herself, and at such points the text foregrounds the contradictions in the ways in which we construct a sense of self, and the limitations on our ability to think of the self.

By page 470, Chris has little sense of identity left. Pushed by economic forces into marriage with Ake, she has become "the woman-body who did the cooking and attended the house" and sex is merely her way of "paying her share for the price of things." By this point not

even her image in the mirror truly affirms her sense of self. On page 434 she views herself on her way to her third marriage.

And so she supposed, behind this newness and those cool eyes in the mirror, the fugitive Chris was imprisoned at last, led in a way like the captives long syne whom men dragged up the heights to Blawearie Lock to streak out and kill by the great grey stones. (GG p.434)

She acknowledges that there are aspects of her identity which cannot find expression in the mirror, or in capitalist society. There is always this tension in the trilogy between what she sees of herself and the role she has to play in society, and it is always the social role to which she has to submit. In the end this accounts for her deepening sense of loss.

It came sudden on Chris, with her feet in the grass, her hand in Ewan's, that that's what they were - old, she who was not yet thirty years old! Old, and still how you'd like to dance, out under the brightening coming of the moon, drop away from all the things that clung close, Robert and Ewan and the Manse--even Chris--be young and be young and be held in men's arms, and seem bonny to them and look at them sly, not know next hour who would take you home, and not know who would kiss you or what they would do...Young as you never yet had been young, you'd been caught and ground in the wheels of the days, in this dour little Howe and its moil and toil, the things you had missed, the things you had missed! The things that folk had aye in the books - being daft, with the winds of young years in your hair, night for a dream and the world for a song. Young; and you NEVER could be young now. (CH p.250-251)

The whimsical tone of this passage is deeply suggestive of Chris's alienation. She is yearning for something that does not exist, an idealised, generalised, romantic image of youth. The yearning has become detached from the world around her, and is directed towards what in essence is given up in the process of alienation, youth as vitality, fulfilment and freedom. This image is made to contrast with the image of Else, who is young, and who dances all night not knowing who will take her home, but whose experience is ultimately one of brutality and degradation.

Alienation is frequently described in this way; as an accretion of things that detract from the self and drain away energy and vitality, so that the self feels old, and the 'things that cling close' take over more and more completely. Yet it is also described as a kind of 'stripping away', until it seems like there is nothing left:

Far away through the snow beyond Footforthie the lighthouse winked on the verge of morning, and a feeling of terrible loneliness came on her standing so at that hour, knowledge of how lonely she had always been, knowledge of how lonely every soul was, apart and alone as she had been surely even at the most crowded hours of her life...

And she thought of the croft in the north wind's blow, of the snow driving about it this night lashing the joists and the window panes, the fly and scurry of the driving flakes about the Stones high above the loch, the lost rigs sleeping under their covering, the peesies wheeping lost in the dark. Oh idiot, weeping to remember all that, all things gone and lost

and herself afraid and afraid and a morning coming she was feared to face, lost and alone.

And again she got to her feet and wandered through the hush of the sleeping house, and stood in her own room, with the sickly flare of the gaslight behind her and looked at herself in the mirror, hands clenched, forgetting herself in a sudden wild woe that wouldn't stop though her mind clamoured it was daft, things would redd up in time, she wasn't hungry or starved, she had friends, she had Ewan....SHE HAD NOTHING AT ALL, she had never had anything... (GG p.428-9)

One by one attachments are stripped away from Chris, and this does not leave her "naked, cultureless" and free as Gibbon once wrote of his hunters of the Golden Age, but with a sense of absolute loss and aloneness.

Marx's concept of appropriation was that of a creative process, "always referring to the realisation of man's powers".[14] Ultimately it transformed man's relationship to nature, making the thing perceived part of the perceiver and enriching his powers. If this process occurs, therefore, then no sense of loss could possibly be experienced; the one process precludes the other. In the text, however, Gibbon seems to suggest that Chris comes to terms with the process of 'stripping away'.

That dreadful storm she'd once visioned stripping her bare was all about her, and she feared it no longer, eager to be naked, alone and unfriended, facing the last realities with a cool, clear wonder, an unhating desire. Barriers still, but they fell one by one-- (GG p.487)

14. Ollman, B., (1971), Alienation, Cambridge: University Press., p.88

This has sometimes been interpreted as a kind of self-affirmation, a kind of stripping down to an essence, yet it may also be seen to be a culmination of the trend of alienation in Chris's life, since what she is finally embracing is the complete loss of self, non-existence "a dream of no-life that could not endure" (GG p.498). This is the last perception of a woman with no social place, whose powers, potential and aspirations have all been denied and for whom no form of appropriation has been possible.

The ending of A Scots Quair has been endlessly debated and interpreted. Roy Johnson suggests that Chris is "attempting to step outside history" so that she inevitably disappears[15], and Angus Calder suggests that Chris represents Scotland at the end, attempting to return to an exhausted peasant tradition, and Jenny Wolmark thinks that Chris is "attempting to re-create an outmoded autonomy" by restoring the organic connection between the individual and the land.

All these interpretations express the idea of alienation, especially since there is no suggestion that Chris is successful in the attempt to restore an organic connection with the land. Throughout the Quair Chris is increasingly isolated from the land, eventually resorting

15. Johnson, R., "Politics in the Novel", in ed. Lucas, J., (1978), The 1930's A Challenge to Orthodoxy, Harvester Press

to trying to produce a garden from the poor soil at the back of the boarding house in Duncairn, and from a society which is increasingly alienated from the land. The ending seems to me to suggest the failure of the individual to restore any kind of true connection between humanity and the land outside a social context. As Dietzgen says "anything that is torn out of its contextual relations ceases to exist"[16] and this, more specifically than death, seems to be implied by Chris's quiet absorption into the land.

Of course the theme of alienation is not expressed solely by the story of Chris. The minor incidents and details throughout the trilogy seem orchestrated to emphasise and develop this theme. The increasing alienation of society is demonstrated in the speak, the incidents of brutality to animals, on page 261, for example, when Dite Peat kills the pig:-

So Dite turned the brute over, slow, with his axe, and took out his knife and cut its throat, slow, and held the throat open to let it bleed well.

Or on page 290, when Dalziel of the Meikelbogs lets his horse suffer so that he can claim the insurance, and the incidents denoting an increasingly brutal or callous sexual attitude. On page 51, for instance, there is an incident with Andy the Daftie:-

Cuddiestoun was on top of him in a minute, bashing in the face of him, but Alec Mutch just stood and looked on, maybe working his

16. Ollman, B., (1971), Alienation, Cambridge: University Press, p.96

meikle ears a bit, it was no concern of his. The daftie's hands went up to his face as the bashings came and then Cuddiestoun gripped him in a tender private part, he screamed and went slack, like a sack in Cuddiestoun's hands.

And on page 227 Dite Peat boasts of his seduction of an English woman whose husband has just been killed;-

Well she wasn't so bad, but far over-thin; and God! she was fair a scunner with her laughing, every now and then she would laugh like an idiot, he supposed the English did that in their pleasure. So he took her a clour or so in the lug, to learn her manners, and that quietened her down. Oh ay, she was tasty enough in her way.

There is also the assault on Else, the assault on Ewan in the jail and the deterioration of Chris's own sexual experience. In addition the stories of all the major characters are histories of alienation. Ewan (the elder), Robert and Else all experience alienation as a kind of dark, destructive dream which leads them away from themselves.

The important factor in all these cases is that at no time are the characters themselves seen to be in control of the situation; there is no element of personal choice, normally a crucial factor in the novel and its portrayal of identity. The alienated character suffers a complete loss of control and identity; in each case the dream devours something of the character's sense of self. Else becomes "vulgar and coarse" (CH p.285), and both Ewan and Robert are compared to animals. Ake's case is rather different, he is not so much led away from himself

as stifled, the gift within him is described on page 458 as being strangled.

Gibbon has been criticised for being inconsistent in his portrayal of character (Douglas F. Young, Gustav Klaus) yet I believe that he is innovative in his portrayal of the unstable ego, powerful in its capacity to alienate and yet subject to socio-economic forces. I want to examine this point more closely in a later section on working-class discourse.

In common with other working-class writers, Gibbon has been criticised for a stereotyped presentation of character. Valentine Cunningham, for instance, makes this criticism of the scene with Mowat and the spinners (CH p.324). The Reverend McShilluck and Pootsie and Baillie Brown are used by David Smith as examples of inadequate character portrayal. Again I want to deal with this point more fully in later sections of the thesis, but for now I want to make the point that in part the function of stereotypical representation in the novel may be to convey an extreme form of alienation.

Of the other major characters in the book Ewan stands out as an example of alienation. He is set apart from an early age by his aloof independence, dislike of physical contact, and complete disinterest in the values and opinions of others. Whilst this is not precisely the same thing as alienation, Gibbon does seem to suggest

that all of these qualities are found in him in an extreme form. He is almost unnaturally unaffected by the values of his parents, and frequently disclaims ordinary human relationships:-"though my father was a ploughman and you come from a kitchen, that's nothing to do with me, is it? I'm neither you nor my father."(GG p.375) This declaration has a disturbing effect on Chris, and I think that his chilling responses on the emotional level are meant to disturb the reader. He is socially and economically set apart from his workmates, whom he calls keelies, because of an upbringing that is basically middle class, and there is a curious tension between this early stage and the later one in which he experiences a sense of universal identification. He seems to entirely by-pass a sense of ordinary fellowship with his peers going straight into a kind of mystical consciousness. In showing him to disclaim ordinary human relationships in favour of universal brotherhood, Gibbon seems to be setting him up as some kind of saviour. Yet he is also "humanised" by his experience, losing his indifference to sex and feeling a degree of warmth towards the 'keelies' for the first time:-

...it seemed to Ewan in a sudden minute that he would never be himself again, he'd never be ought but a bit of them, the flush on a thin white mill-girl's face, the arm and hand and the downbent face of a keelie from the reek of the Gallowgate, the blood and bones and flesh of them all, their thoughts and their doubts and their loves were his, all that they thought and lived in were his. And that Ewan Tavendale that once had been, the cool boy with the haughty soul and cool hands, apart and alone, self-reliant, self-centred, slipped

away out of the room as he stared, slipped away and was lost from his life forever. (GG p.430)

It is perhaps significant that Ewan does not identify or empathise on a personal, individual level, but with humanity in the most generalised terms. This seems to be in keeping with Gibbon's concept of a true leader - it follows an earlier pattern in Spartacus in which a consciousness of universal brotherhood is experienced after terrible suffering. On a personal level, however, Ewan still seems to be extraordinarily deficient in his ability to give either comfort or commitment. Angus Calder suggests that Gibbon is using Ewan to demonstrate the debilitating effect that revolutionary commitment has on personal relationships, but I think that Gibbon is emphasising a fundamental dichotomy created by capitalist society, the apparent antithesis between the personal and the political. In the trilogy the one kind of commitment is usually made at the expense of the other, especially in the story of Ewan and Ellen, yet it is clear that in the end both kinds suffer and deteriorate because of the inability of the individual to resolve the apparent contradiction.

Ewan's time, i.e. the rites of passage which mark his development, is much more closely associated with political time than with the cycles of an agricultural community. His transition into adulthood is marked by his expanding political consciousness. After the closure of the mill, when he encounters Charlie Cronin's poverty,

it says in the text that "he was turning to look in the face of Life"(CH p.342), and his deepening empathy for the 'keelies' is associated with the growth of his capacity for sexual feeling.(GG p.431) Because of this he is able to find some kind of a place in society in spite of his unemployment. It also means, however, that his 'time-scheme' diverges from Chris's and that there is no further place in society for Chris's awareness of time, and so their paths inevitably separate.

The new humanised Ewan becomes subject to deterioration like the other characters as he suffers discrimination for his socialist activities and looks unsuccessfully for work:-

...that quality she'd likened to grey granite itself, that something she'd seen change in Duncairn from slaty grey to a glow of fire, was transmuting again before her eyes--into something darker and coarser, in essence the same, in tint antrin queer. (GG p.469)

If anything his consciousness of universal brotherhood makes it easier for Ewan to be ruthless on a personal level, a quality he shares with the other communists:-

And Ewan sat and looked on and spoke now and then, and liked them well enough, knowing that if it suited the Party purpose Trease would betray him to the police to-morrow, use anything and everything that might happen to him as propaganda and publicity, without caring a fig for liking or aught else. So he'd deal with Mrs Trease if it came to that...And Ewan nodded to that, to Trease, to himself,

commonsense, no other way to hack out the road ahead. (GG p.482)

The mystical experience of universal brotherhood translates into the terms of an alienated society as a capacity to destroy on a personal level, and on the social or political level, as the urge to control, or 'lead' the proletariat. This is the inevitable route of the revolution, the "creed that cuts like a knife" in a profoundly alienated society. By problematising Ewan's relationships, both personal and political, and his class position, and therefore his effect on the reader, Gibbon makes the reader engage throughout the text with the implications of alienation.

Although David Smith writes that "Chris completes the cycle of her life by returning to her own realities"[17] it cannot be said that she returns to a place in the original community:-

And the folks around helped, were kind in their way, careless of her, she would meet them and see them by this road and gate, they knew little of her, she less of them, she had found the last road she wanted and taken it, concerning none and concerned with none....
(GG p.496)

I feel that her return completes the theme of alienation - more of a downward spiral than a cycle.

It is true that in some respects Chris is alone throughout the Quair; her sense of self is already

17. Smith, D., (1975), Socialist propaganda in the Twentieth-Century Novel, p.125

divided when we meet her, between the Scottish and the English Chris, which sets her apart from most of the community, and her consciousness of her own alone-ness is often most pronounced at moments of communal activity, as on the day of her marriage to Ewan. This is not exactly the same as alienation, which I feel relates more to the idea of being unable to express one's self in society, and, in Chris's case, in becoming increasingly divorced from events in the life of that society. In the first book her sense of separateness results partly from a full involvement with her own life, which makes her indifferent, for instance, to the development of war. In the later books she just seems to be cut off from political developments, especially after the death of her baby, hardly responding even to Ewan's unemployment, and unable to cope with such developments as the radio or 'talkies'. She is nonetheless shown to be deeply embedded in the dialectic of social change, however divorced she is from the society around her. Although apparently unaffected by what is termed the 'madness' of war, her life is torn apart by it, and in fact her response to the death of Ewan is described as a kind of madness. Social change or crisis instigates personal crises in Chris's life, and after each crisis it is emphasised that she is never quite the same again - it is said that many Chrises have died. And in the end these changes take their effect upon her ideology, which develops along the lines of envisioning life as a process of stripping away down to nothing (GG p.429) and from

this point along lines which enable her to adjust to having nothing (GG p.487), so it could be said that her ideology performs the service of adjusting Chris to the role in society into which she is economically forced. Again capitalist society is shown to work on the individual through the medium of ideology. This is true also of the other major characters, Robert and Ewan, who respond ideologically to social change, and then change personally, so that their lives reflect the larger forces of change and struggle continually at work in society, the carving up of Scotland's parks and woodlands during the war, the selling of Kinraddie lands at the end of it, the collapse of the General Strike, the poverty which causes Chris to leave Segget and eventually to marry Ake, Ewan's unemployment and Ellen's betrayal, and Ake's departure for Canada - all is shown to be "under the sway of an inhuman power"[18] and this might be said to be the essence of alienation. Ultimately all these stories seem to demonstrate the Marxist point that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness"[19] or that, as Benjamin writes "the wise man in the Brechtian sense is the perfect showcase of (society's) dialectics." [20]

18. Marx, K., Capital I, p. 349, quoted in Ollman, B., (1971), Alienation, p.132

19. Marx, K. and Engels, F., (1958), Selected Works, vol.I, Moscow, p.363

20. Benjamin, W., (1968), Illuminations, Schocken, p. 149

CHAPTER V : Chris Caledonia; Colonising the Woman

In this chapter, I want to consider Chris's increasingly elliptical presence in the Quair. Used as a figure to explore a variety of feminist issues and discourses Chris eventually becomes an ellipsis between them; a kind of absent presence.

In her book Feminist Thought - A Comprehensive Introduction (Unwin Hyman 1989), Rosemarie Tong examines the plethora of ideas and ideologies converging under the general umbrella of feminism. Her chapter headings categorise feminist thought into different branches - liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytical, existentialist, socialist, and postmodernist, and I have followed the same organisation throughout this chapter in the hope of avoiding confusion in a complex area, for although the different branches overlap in some respects, in others they diverge quite widely, and Grassie Gibbon's awareness of the problems of women in society, and of the difficulty of representing the feminine in text, is wide-ranging enough to incorporate ideas from most of the different strands. This is in spite of the fact that feminism in the 1930's was less politically complex, and the official position of traditional Marxism on the issue (insofar as there was one) was that the problems of women were caused directly by capitalism and would be solved by the communist revolution.

The traditional position of communism has led to discontent amongst feminists who have developed different theories of society. This has been evident ever since the Russian revolution, when it first became obvious that the orthodox categories of communist thought were 'gender-blind'. Rosemarie Tong quotes Lenin's rebuke to Clara Zetkin for encouraging women members of the Communist Party to discuss sexual issues:-

The record of your sins, Clara, is even worse. I have been told that at evenings arranged for reading and discussing with working women, sex and marriage problems come first. They are said to be the main objects of interest in your political instruction and educational work. I could not believe my ears when I heard that. The first state of proletarian dictatorship is battling with the counter-revolutionaries of the whole world. The situation in Germany itself calls for the greatest unity of all proletarian revolutionary forces. But active communist women are busy discussing sex and the form of marriage...[1]

Marxist thought has never fully engaged with the forms oppression takes in the private as well as the public domain. Its analysis of the "mode of production of material life" has substantially failed to take into account women's domestic labour, including pregnancy and childbirth.

Gibbon makes a point of demonstrating this in the

Quair:-

1. Lenin, V.I., (1934), quoted in Tong R., (1989), Feminist Thought - A Comprehensive Introduction, Unwin Hyman, p.173

And Trease came back and smiled at Ewan, big, creased: Ay. Think her a funny bitch?

Ewan said No, she seemed all right, was she a Communist as well? Trease gave his head a scratch, he'd never asked her, he'd aye been over-busy...

Ewan nodded and said he saw that, there wasn't much time for the usual family business when you were a revolutionist. (GG p.481)

A little later Ewan observes that if Trease thought it necessary for the cause he would betray both Ewan and Mrs Trease to the police tomorrow, and use whatever happened to them as propaganda, "without caring a fig for liking or much else". (GG p.482)

For the good of the cause the communists ignore what are commonly termed 'human values' - empathy, personal loyalty, family love etc. Interestingly, in the Quair, this also specifically involves a rejection of the women of the text and the values they represent.

The political categorisation of women is a complex issue; they cannot be considered as a class in the orthodox Marxist sense of the word, and historically their oppression is older than capitalism or even feudalism. So although Marxists such as Madeleine Vincent still claim that "only the revolutionary movement as we know it will provide the real solutions"[2] Gibbons view of the situation, as dramatised in the stories of Ellen and Ewan and Chris herself, is more complex. In

2. Vincent, M., (1981) "A Basic Fact of Our Time", in eds. Marks, E. and de Courtivron, I., New French Feminisms, Harvester, p.125

this chapter I want to argue that in the Quair Gibbon explores the relationship between patriarchal politics and female experience, and that this, in fact, is the main reason that Gibbon fails to entirely commit himself in his text to the communist cause.

My main reason for believing this is as follows. The plot of the Quair may be summarised as the decline of the peasantry in Scotland and the rise of a revolutionary working class in the industrial city - apparently a straightforwardly Marxist theme. Yet these events are largely filtered through the consciousness of Chris, who therefore carries great weight in the text, whilst her relationship to them remains complex and ambiguous. Communist politics, the institutions of capitalist society and traditional religion are all contrasted with the experience and perceptions of this female character, whose class position, apart from any other consideration, is a changing and ambiguous factor in the Quair. Because of this, Gibbon seems to me to be exploring the relationship between patriarchy and all forms of political oppression, not just capitalism, whilst simultaneously examining the whole question of feminine identity.

I now want to look at the different kinds of feminist discourse underlying the representation of women in the Quair. I shall be using the basic categories Rosemarie Tong applies to her study of feminism, and her summaries

of them, in order to structure my argument into some kind of coherent response to the text as a whole. I will begin with liberal feminism since in the 1930's this particular ideology predominated over other aspects of feminist thought.

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism evolved from liberal humanism and the rationalist philosophies of the Enlightenment. It was adapted into a feminist doctrine by Mary Wollstonecraft, and developed by writers such as J.S.Mill. These writers maintained that women had a right to equal access to education and to the institutions of society; in other words, to fulfilment outside marriage. Underlying this is the assumption that if women were granted these social rights their oppression would be ended.

Liberal feminists notoriously ignored issues of class. Harriet Taylor Mill, for instance, insisted that married women should combine marriage with a career outside the home, and in order to do this they would of course require a "panoply of domestic servants" whose sex she didn't even consider.[3]

Despite Jenny Wolmark's assertion that Ewan's communism and social commitment are contrasted with

3. Mill, H.T., quoted in Tong, R., (1989), Feminist Thought, Unwin Hyman, p.19

Chris's subjectivity and liberalism[4] I believe that Gibbon's representation of Chris's position and of the oppression of women generally goes far beyond the assumptions of liberal humanism. The Quair in fact seems to me to present a critique of this particular political stance.

I have argued previously that Chris's rejection of orthodox creeds and ideologies seems to align her implicitly with anarchism if anything, the social state Gibbon envisaged as being both the original 'natural' state of mankind and also the ideal to which communism would eventually lead. In the first book John Guthrie is explicitly associated with liberal politics. He evidently believes that Chris should be educated and rise in the world:-

at school they wrote that she was the clever one and John Guthrie said she might have the education she needed if she stuck to her lessons. In time she might come out as a teacher then and do him credit. (SS p.36)

The idea that Chris will do her father credit by rising in the world goes neatly to the heart of the problem of liberal feminism: women are to be granted access to the world on men's terms, in order to be made into better wives or mothers or to be improved in other ways which will ultimately serve the interests of men.

4. Wolmark, J., (1981), "Problems of Tone in A Scots Quair", in Red Letters no.11, p.17

For all his liberal ideology, John Guthrie's behaviour towards both Chris and her mother is sexually oppressive. He is a split character, self-alienated by what he tries to bring under his control. This includes the physical realm of the earth and the body, and also women, because women occupy a similar place in the symbolic discourse of traditional humanism. Ultimately he is destroyed by the alienated Other (to use the terms of existentialist feminism), or that which he has constructed as Other, and in this way Gibbon suggests the contradiction at the heart of liberal ideology, which professedly seeks to include the feminine into a patriarchal framework without acknowledging the possibility that to give the feminine real space might destroy that framework.

It cannot be said that liberal ideology helps Chris in any way. She has a better education than her brother, Will, but in the end the course of her life is dominated by both patriarchal and economic oppression, forces against which her education is ineffective.

Tong has noted that liberal humanism "locates our uniqueness as human beings in our capacity for rationality"[5] in the form of either morality or prudence. This ideology places the supreme value on autonomy and self-fulfilment, but in Gibbon's interpretation of capitalism it is precisely these values

which are negated by economic oppression (see earlier section on Identity). Throughout the Quair individuals are alienated from nature and the land, and consequently from the products of their labour, from each other and from themselves. Although she has always worked hard, Chris's work situation deteriorates to one which is fundamentally dehumanising - "you felt like a greasy dish-clout, just"(GG p.366). This analysis of a process in society in which 'human nature' is broken down into separate components which then deteriorate is fundamentally Marxist, but the question arises, does Gibbon show this process to be experienced differently by women and men? This leads me to consider radical feminism, which emphasises the idea that women and men experience the world differently and which, of all the strands of feminist thought, most consistently locates this difference in biology rather than culture.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism differs most clearly from Marxism in its insistence that women's oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression. Tong quotes Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenburg's analysis of the claims of radical feminism:-

1. Women were historically the first oppressed group.
2. Woman's oppression is the most widespread, existing in virtually every human society.
3. Women's oppression is the deepest in that it is the hardest to eradicate - it cannot be

removed by other social changes such as the abolition of class society.

4. Women's oppression causes the most suffering to its victims, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, though the suffering may often go unrecognised because of the sexist prejudices of both the oppressors and the victims.

5. Women's oppression provides a conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression.[6]

More than other feminists, radical feminists have concentrated on the ways in which men attempt to control and colonise women's bodies, constructing female sexuality and motherhood in ways which serve men's needs. They stress the importance of "reconceiving female sexuality, this time in the image and likeness of women"[7]. Radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone have taken on the discourse of Marxism and revised it, rather than dismissing it, in order to underline the idea that all forms of oppression are rooted in the biological inequality of the sexes. She introduces the term "sex class" as the central concept of her version of historical materialism, rather than economic class, and paraphrases Engels in this way:-

Historical materialism is that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all historical events in the dialectic of sex: the division of society into two distinct biological classes for procreative reproduction and the struggle of these classes with one another, the changes in the modes of marriage, reproduction and childcare created by these struggles, in the connected development of other physically differentiated classes (castes) and in the first division of

6. Jaggar, A. and Rothenburg, P., (1984), in Tong R., (1989), Feminist Thought, p.71

7. Ibid., p.72

labour based on sex which developed into the economic-cultural class system.[8]

Firestone considers relations of reproduction rather than production to be the driving force of history, and that women's liberation depends upon a biological revolution rather than an economic revolution, or simple entry into the workforce. The central aim of this biological revolution will be to grant women control of the means of reproduction with the ultimate result of establishing an androgynous society. The elimination of different reproductive roles will lead to the elimination of all sexual roles, lesbianism and homosexuality will no longer be viewed as deviations from the norm since there will be no institutionalised norm, and the family will be eliminated as a biological as well as an economic unit.

The novelist Marge Piercy explores the far-reaching implications of this theory in her science fiction novel Woman on the Edge of Time. Since, however, at least in the Quair Gibbon is not writing science fiction he does not explore the issue of biological control to the same extent as Firestone and Piercy. Nonetheless I believe that similar points underpin his analysis of female experience, and so I want to consider the Quair in the light of Firestone's description of historical materialism.

8. Firestone, S., (1970), in Tong R., Feminist Thought, (1989), p.73

On one level Chris's story is the same as that of other members of her peasant class. Because of the economic forces of capitalism the land is destroyed and re-mortgaged and the peasant population displaced. Chris is displaced along with the rest, forced to live in the city when she cannot even bear the town (Cloud Howe p.213). Dispossessed by the movement of private property, she is eventually left, like Ake, without a place in society.

However Chris's oppression is more complex than this. The theme of her oppression by men and patriarchy runs concurrently with the theme of capitalist oppression. Although these themes occasionally overlap, one is not encompassed by the other. The incident in which Chris loses her baby with the collapse of the General Strike illustrates this. The collapse of Chris's hopes and Robert's hopes coincide but are contrasted. Whilst all the country is agitated over news of the strike, Chris "put the whole thing out of her mind, busied in making the baby's clothes, busied in going long walks by herself." (CH p.305) If anything she becomes more inward-looking:-

...her interests strange-twisted back on themselves, as though she re-lived that Chris of long syne, far from the one that had taken her place, that Chris of kirks and Robert of books - they sank from sight in the growing of the spring, quick on the hills, on the upland parks, ... (CH p.301).

Paradoxically, Chris's experience of the forthcoming event is one in which she re-lives the past, whereas to Robert it signifies the future. This is because of her biology; she is repeating her earlier experience of pregnancy. Gibbon seems to be foregrounding the idea that because of woman's biology her experience of life is different, more cyclical. Kristeva has said that the biology of woman is potentially subversive, forming in pregnancy a unity which undermines the subject/object division upon which the whole of culture is predicated. Whilst Gibbon does not use these linguistic terms the emphasised difference between Chris and Robert's apprehension of the coming event is suggestive of profound differences in their approach to the world. Whilst the baby and the General Strike and the coming of Christ are almost interchangeable in Robert's discourse, Chris's response is self-reflective and self-sufficient, making fewer connections, yet practical (making clothes). She does not enter into other discourses. The operations of patriarchy, however, affect her at the deepest level; the baby is lost, the unity of subject and object split and Chris's biological self-sufficiency destroyed. This necessarily affects her in a different way from Robert - she becomes physically, he mentally, ill. It is difficult not to feel that Chris retains her mental wholeness precisely because she has not strayed as far into the field of metaphysics and symbolic discourse. In Robert's case the baby becomes part of his ideological discourse so that when it is destroyed his whole value

system collapses. Interestingly, Gibbon does not tell us what the baby means to Chris, he suggests only that she becomes more inward-looking, as if her response is, in some mysterious way, outside discourse and therefore cannot be represented. Robert's discourse is perhaps a substitute for this mysterious self-involvement and biological wholeness.

Gibbon repeatedly makes links between Chris's biology and her psychology. Whereas it is repeatedly emphasised that Robert desires to effect change in Segget and the world, Chris accepts change as a force that operates beyond her control; she lives it in her body and this predisposes her to accept it externally or to 'read' the world as patterns of change. Of course, without the desire to effect change there would be no politics, and perhaps no form of social organisation at all, so that Chris's attitude is potentially subversive as Kristeva has said. However, for various reasons which I will examine in later sections, the potential is not realised, nor are the implications fully explored. Gibbon goes so far as to show that women are the perpetual outsiders of political systems, and that the effect of politics on them is generally destructive.

Although Gibbon's analysis of female oppression is not limited to specific issues, an issue with which he recurrently concerns himself is contraception; a woman's right to access to information about her body and to the

biological control of it. This issue recurs persistently throughout the trilogy and is given dramatic focus by the death of Jean Guthrie, yet significantly it is not taken up by any of the political movements - trade unionism, communism or the traditional Tory and liberal parties. To this extent it is an issue which exists outside history. It is temporarily eclipsed by more dramatic events such as the war or the General Strike, but it is taken up by women from one book to the next. In the first book, after the death of Jean Guthrie and on the eve of Chris's wedding, Mistress Mutch says:-

Don't let Ewan saddle you with a birn full of bairns, Chris, it kills you and eats your heart away, forbye the dirt and the unease of it...you belong to yourself, mind that.(SS p.127)

Chris's ignorance is emphasised at this point. She is too shy to ask Mistress Mutch what she needs to know and assumes she will have to find out. Earlier it is Will who tells her about the relationship between men and pregnancy - "Don't you know? What's a bull to do with a calf, you fool?" (SS p.38). So Chris has no access to information about her body except through men, and this is perhaps the most effective way in which she is deprived of control. Later, when she is more knowledgeable, she tries to pass on her knowledge to Else before Else's marriage (CH p.333), but Else reacts in an uncharacteristically inhibited way:-

Else had stood and listened with red-tinted ears, and stammered and blushed, it was funny and sad, Chris knew how she felt, she had once felt the same. Else said Oh Mem, but I couldn't do that - it wouldn't be right to do anything like that! Chris said, It's surely better to do that than have the bairns that you can't bring up? Else shook her head, They'll just come and we'll manage. But I couldn't do things to myself like that.

This comes after Else has defied the conventions of society by living with Dalziel of the Meiklebogs and having his illegitimate child, so that this suggests the depth of prejudice in Else against taking control of her own body - a fear which can only have been inculcated by a patriarchal society, which must exercise control over women at the deepest level, coming between them and their own biology.

In the third book it is the church and education authorities who are against the teaching of sex education by Ellen Johns, but there is a progression here in that politically aware women are finally infiltrating the education system. And Chris's marriages are different from her mother's marriage primarily because of contraception. So although the cause does not build into a dramatic climax like the war or the General Strike, Gibbon still suggests that feminism, dispersed and intangible though its effects are, is nonetheless an effective vehicle for historical change - changing the 'modes of marriage' as Firestone put it, in spite of the fact that it exists outside conventional political

parties and institutions, and outside the historical dialectic of class war itself.

In her article "Problems of Tone in A Scots Quair" Jenny Wolmark has noted that the trilogy is structured round a series of oppositions - Marxism/diffusionism, capitalism/socialism, Chris/Ewan etc. Angus Calder goes further than this, however, saying that the struggles and oppositions are primarily between the masculine and feminine, and suggesting that all the men in the Quair are contrasted somehow with Chris.[9] When comparisons are made, the men usually emerge in an unfavourable light, from Uncle Tam who cannot cope with the storm, to Ewan and Robert who cannot cope with war or religion and who fall into dark, obsessive dreams, whilst Chris always maintains a certain distance between herself and orthodoxy. Gibbon is therefore radical in promoting a sense of the superiority of women, (not just Chris) in his text. In the cases of Robert and Ewan the urge to participate directly in world change is described as a kind of madness, so that Chris's stance is supported in the text. In fact it may be said that whilst the men of the Quair lose their perspective the women assert one, from Mistress Mutch, who says repeatedly that "it'll make not a difference in a hundred years' time and we're dead"(e.g.. SS p.127), to Else, who says when Chris

9. Calder, A., "A Mania for Self-Reliance: Grassic Gibbon's 'A Scots Quair'", in eds. Jefferson, D. and Martin, G., (1982), The Uses of Fiction, Open University Press.

wishes her happiness in marriage, "as for being happy, och, nobody is"(CH p.332), to Chris herself who perceives all creeds and ideologies as clouds. Any wisdom the text has to offer comes from women, the men seem to have none to offer, or what they offer is derived from the orthodoxies of Marxism or Christianity. By contrast, what the women offer seems to come directly from experience, as when Ma Cleghorn comes upon Chris crying and says "Don't greet, nothing's worth it, not a damn thing, no man that ever yet was Chris!"(GG p.367) This kind of perspective generalises, translating the particular into universal terms, as if individual women somehow mysteriously have access to the experience of all women. This idea is reinforced by the passage in which Chris walks with Cis and reflects upon the experience of women:-

So she'd heard it all as she sat knee-clasped, there, in the play of the wind and the sun, a tale so old--oh, old as the Howe, everlasting near as the granite hills, this thing that brought men and women together, to bring new life, to seek new birth, on and on since the world had begun. And it seemed to Chris it was not Cis alone, her tale--but all tales she harkened to then, kisses and kindness and the pain of love, sharp and sweet, terrible, dark, and the wild, queer beauty of the hands of men and their lips and the sleeps of desire fulfilled, and the dark, strange movements of awareness alone, when it came on women what thing they carried, darkling, coming to life within them, new life to replenish the earth again,...(CH p.320)

In this conversation Chris says to Cis that they might try living without men. Also Cis begs her not to

tell Robert about Cis' problems -"what have men to do with it, it's not their concern, they don't understand." In this extract Gibbon seems to be approaching the politics of separatism - the need for women to restore to themselves the power of self-definition by rejecting male-defined relationships, institutions and roles.

Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millet believed that a biological revolution would make it possible for society to become androgynous, and also, if necessary, separatist. In A Room of One's Own Virginia Woolf also envisaged androgyny as a solution, though in her case the idea was based upon the concept of 'inner integration', the premise that each of us contains masculine and feminine traits, and in an ideal world these would be fully integrated.

In the Quair Gibbon suggests that Chris contains androgynous qualities. In the first book it is repeatedly said of her that she should have been a boy, and at one point she says she wishes she had been (SS p.75). Her name is androgynous and her sexuality ambiguous. Gibbon seems to imply that the purely heterosexual role she must play in society is grafted onto her:- "and her[Cis's] lips came to Chris's and Chris thought at that moment no men could kiss-- not as they should, they'd no notion of kissing....."(CH p.321)

In the discourse of radical feminism, lesbianism is often considered to be a paradigm for female-controlled sexuality, a fundamentally liberating concept and a prerequisite for the politics of separatism. In Adrienne Rich's use of the word, lesbianism means woman-centred experience, and strong bonding between women, not just of a sexual nature. In the Quair Chris repeatedly makes strong bonds with other women, from her mother and Marget Strachan to Else and Ma Cleghorn. Yet despite the weight and presence of these women and the strength of their affections the bonds are always broken, in the first three cases by men - John Guthrie, Chae Strachan and Dalziel of the Meikelbogs. However strong the women are the men ultimately control their relationships with one another. And when Chris finally rejects men (GG p.487) she seems to be left with no social space. There is always this tension in the Quair between the potential autonomy of women and their desire for self-definition which is frequently reiterated:-

--she'd used often to think I wish I were single, trig on my own, not handled, not kenned, with nobody's seed ever laid in me!(GG p.363)

and what is possible in the terms of a capitalist patriarchy. I think Gibbon is highlighting a primary contradiction in the lives of women between their psychological needs and the social space they must occupy.

He also explores the contradiction between the psychological desire for wholeness and integration and the biology of women, more specifically the experience of pregnancy:-

No night would she ever be her own again, in her body the seed of that pleasure she had sown with Ewan, burgeoning and growing, dark, ... (SS p.137)

Pregnancy is not at all romanticised in the text; it becomes the primary means by which men oppress women; why Else stays with Dalziel of the Meikelbogs for instance, when he treats her so badly, and why Jean Guthrie commits suicide. For women the experience of male sexuality is predominantly destructive, and one of the main means by which solidarity and bonding between women is truncated:-

And then an awful thing happened, mother's face went grey and old as she stopped from her work at the kitchen table, she went whiter and whiter second on second, Chris near went out of her mind at the sight. Oh mother I didn't mean to vex, she cried and flung her arms round mother and held her tight, seeing her face then, so white and ill-looking it had grown in the last month. And mother smiled at her at last, putting her hands on her shoulders. Not you, Chris quean, just life. I cannot tell you a thing or advise you a thing, my quean. You'll have to face men for yourself when the time comes, there's none can stand and help you. (SS p.57)

The solidarity between Chris and her mother extends to the point that her mother doesn't blame her at all for her father's sexual interest, but her powerlessness is so deep that it can go no further. She cannot rescue Chris from the situation or even offer advice, since the

experience of powerlessness has robbed her of all wisdom, except for the wisdom that you have to stand alone and endure. This aspect of her mother's experience affects Chris deeply, passing into her discourse and shaping her own experience of life. The only wisdom her mother has to offer becomes a kind of bottom line for Chris as well, a perspective to which she recurrently returns at moments of transition or crisis.

This perspective is also a psychological state and it is used to characterise the third Chris in particular, which in turn is repeatedly linked to an awareness of the land and its cycles of change which no one can control or even affect:-

In a ten years' time what things might have been? She might stand on this hill, she might rot in a grave, it would matter nothing, the world would go on, young Ewan dead as his father was dead, or hither and borne far from Kinraddie: oh, once she had seen in these parks she remembered, the truth, and the only truth there was, that only the sky and the seasons endured, slow in their change, the cry of the rain, the whistle of the whins on a winter night under the sailing edge of the moon--(CH p.207)

There is a long tradition in Western culture of associating women with nature and the land. Whereas some radical feminists have chosen to emphasise and celebrate this connection others have treated it with suspicion. In "Enslaved Enclave" Catherine Clements writes "it is an error to make a value of the female body and to mystify

its ties to the moon, tides and nature." [10] She suggests that to do this is to construct a kind of 'counter-penis', the myth of the eternal feminine. We cannot approach nature directly in the way this assumes, we have only cultural readings of it. Other feminists such as Nina Baym or Susan Griffin feel that the emphasis on the mythical connection of woman to the land has done much to reinforce images of women as passive, silent and endlessly nurturing. [11] One of the pitfalls of this kind of radical feminism is that it can stray into essentialism, the belief that there is some kind of predetermined female essence which is universal and unalterable. At its worst this simply reverses the terms of patriarchy whilst remaining within the patriarchal framework, generating stereotypes of women which are extrapolated from female biology and nature. I believe, however, that Gibbon avoids this particular pitfall, even though there is a tension in the Quair between a socially realistic portrayal of Chris and Chris as myth, linked to nature and to Scotland itself. He emphasises, for instance, that her bonding to the land stems from her national and class affinities, rather than from an inherent femininity:- "The crofters' relationship to their land is articulated through Chris," as Wolmark

10. Clements, C., "Enslaved Enclave", in eds. Marks, E. and de Courtivron, I., (1981), New French Feminisms, Harvester, p.141

11. Baym, N., "Melodramas of Beset Manhood", in ed. Showalter, E., (1986), The New Feminist Criticism, Virago, p.75

says.[12] And on page 97 Chris weeps because she realises she can never leave the land which is her heritage. On the whole Chris's experience of the land does not affirm her femininity so much as intensify the difference between her and a society which is increasingly alienated from the land. In fact it generates a split between the Chris who wants to belong to a society in which women can be educated and rise in the world and the Chris who belongs to the land:-

So that was the college place at Duncairn, two Chrisses went there every morning, and one was right douce and studious and the other sat back and laughed a canny laugh at the antics of the teachers and minded Blawearie Brae and the champ of horses and the smell of dung and her father's brown, grained hands till she was sick to be home again.(SS p.45)

Also her perception of the land is closely bound up with her awareness of mortality and this gives her a larger perspective so that the concerns of the community frequently seem petty to her and she can't join in.

In her article "A Feminist Reading of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's A Scots Quair" Deirdre Burton comments on the superior role given to women in the text. She feels that the reader instinctively trusts the women, Chris, Ellen, Ma Cleghorn, more than the men, despite, or perhaps because of, their failures in political commitment.[13]

12. Wolmark, J., (1981), "Problems of Tone in A Scots Quair", Red Letters No 11

13. Burton, D., in ed. Hawthorn J., (1984), The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century, Edward Arnold, p.39

In spite of this, however, the women disappear from the text as the men gain ground. At the end the only indication of future hope lies with Ewan and the Communist Party. Gibbon seems to suggest that in part this is because of woman's inability to define themselves sexually or to create for themselves an autonomous identity. In the end Chris cannot lead a woman-centred existence and lesbianism is not presented as being a social space she can occupy. A Marxist interpretation of this would be that this is because the women are kept economically dependent in society, but in fact the key women in the Quair are economically independent, and patriarchal power operates in spite of this. Chris's economic independence when she marries Ewan, for instance, is no defence against his later behaviour.

Shulamith Firestone believed that the way forwards for women lay in biological engineering which would eventually eliminate sex roles. This theory was explored creatively by Marge Piercy who envisaged a future in which babies were developed in incubators and men would take hormones to enable them to breast feed. Gibbon's vision of the future was not centred around technology in this way. Inspired by diffusionism, his portrayal of a future world in Gay Hunter was one in which men and women had reverted to the primitive state of hunter-gatherers. Without religious or political beliefs they were entirely equal - "naked, cultureless". This suggests that, unlike Firestone, Gibbon does not see the social inequality of

women as being entirely rooted in biological difference, though he certainly concedes the force of this factor, but in the cultural values ascribed to this difference. I now want, therefore, to explore a branch of feminism which has its roots in a theory of anatomically determined sexual inequality, but which has moved on to consider the cultural factors affecting the position of women in society.

Psychoanalytic Feminism

Psychoanalytic feminists have undertaken revisions of Freud reinterpreting his more oppressive theories such as penis envy in order to explore more liberating notions of female sexuality. In order to understand the nature of the departure, I want to give a brief outline of Freud's ideas.

Although Freud believed that to some extent we are all androgynous, especially in childhood, he thought that, because of anatomy, women would develop feminine traits and men masculine ones, the critical stage being the child's resolution of the Oedipus and castration complexes. The boy overcomes his Oedipus complex - the desire to possess his mother sexually and to kill his rival, his father, out of fear of his father. Specifically this is the fear that his father will castrate him - having seen his mother or some other female naked he assumes that she is a castrated man. In

order to avoid this he must grow away from his mother and towards his father. He therefore begins to repress his mother love, a painful process during which he begins to develop what Freud called the superego - the internalisation of the father's values, a patriarchal social conscience which teaches boys to give up mother love and submit to the authority of the fathers.

Like the boy the girl's first love is for her mother; unlike him, however, she has to switch from desiring a woman to desiring a man, initially her father, then other men as substitutes for him. The transition from a female to a male love object occurs when she realises she does not have a penis - she is castrated. Obsessed by her lack she blames her mother for not having equipped her adequately and in her resentment she transfers her affections to her father, whilst identifying with her mother because she wants to take her place in her father's affections. She comes to hate her mother as a rival. At first she desires her father's penis, but later she begins to desire a baby as a penis substitute. This is normal development. Girls who fail to develop in this way become neurotic, frigid or masculine and lesbian. They remain indefinitely in the Oedipal stage, without developing a superego to the same extent as men. This makes them morally inferior and narcissistic, though subject to an exaggerated sense of shame.

Feminists have criticised Freud from various angles, but primarily for a failure to focus on power-relations rather than anatomy. Critics such as Kate Millet have also asserted that Freudian logic has succeeded in converting childbirth, "an impressive female accomplishment, into nothing more than a hunt for a male organ".[14]

Adler, however, was the first to suggest that women desired the kind of power available to men rather than a penis, and that 'neurotic' women are actually registering a protest against patriarchy. Karen Horney argued that what Freud called femininity was a construction, a defensive adaptation to male domination which works by making women believe in it as their true nature.

Contemporary feminists such as Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow focus on the pre-Oedipal stage of psycho-sexual development. The infant's relationship with its mother is profoundly symbiotic and the maternal body is the infant's first encounter with the physical universe. It is experienced as an unreliable, unpredictable universe, the source of both pleasure and pain, so that the infant grows up feeling ambivalent towards all mother figures (women) and what they represent (the material universe, nature). Not wanting to re-experience total dependence on an all-powerful

14. Millet, K., (1970), Sexual Politics, Collier Books, p.109

force, men seek to control both women and nature, and women, fearing the mother in themselves, seek to be controlled by men. This results in various symptoms such as the increased sexual possessiveness of men and the muted eroticism of women i.e. an eroticism which is oriented exclusively towards male pleasure. Also, because the infant first experiences women before it is properly able to distinguish, in adulthood we never attribute full personhood to women - they remain all-powerful, all enveloping objects.

Chodorow focusses especially on the Oedipal separation of a son from his mother, which is made less painful by the awareness of the power and prestige to be gained by identification with men. Social contempt for women helps the boy to define himself in opposition to the female sex represented by his mother. The boy's separation from his mother is the source of his later inability to relate deeply to others, and this equips him for work in the public rather than the private sphere.

The mother/daughter pre-Oedipal relationship is characterised by a profound symbiosis and over-identification. This may be weakened but it is never broken. Whether a girl develops into a heterosexual woman or not, she will tend to find her strongest emotional connections with other women.

Other feminists have focussed on different aspects of Freud's theory. Carol Gilligan, for instance, has challenged the idea that men have a well-developed sense of justice and morality whereas women have not.[15] She argues that men and women have different conceptions of morality; men emphasise rules and principles, whereas women emphasise people's wants, needs and aspirations. Systematic bias in philosophy and psychology has hindered recognition of woman's morality as valid, consistently finding it deficient. And Juliet Mitchell has focussed on the fact that Freud's theory applied only to the nuclear family and relied heavily upon the incest taboo upon which Western culture and civilisation depends.

As I mentioned in the last section, Gibbon frequently foregrounds Chris's biological experience:-

...she saw her breast nipples change and harden and grow soft again, the breasts that Ewan had kissed and thought the wonder of God, a maid's breasts a maid's no longer, changing in slow rhythm of purpose with the sway and measure of each note in the rhythm, her belly rounding to plumpness below the navel,...(SS p.137)

But the primary emphasis seems to me to be on the psychological division this implies; the death of the old Chris and her new awareness of her mother's experience:-

And she wakened more fully at that...thinking of mother, not as her mother at all, just as Jean Murdoch, another woman who had faced this terror-daze in the night.(SS pp.137-138)

15. Tong, R., (1989), Feminist Thought, p.161

The biological experience has enormous power, but Gibbon links it to the psycho-sexual drama in which Chris, though separated from her mother comes to identify with her mother's experience which she had previously rejected:-

Glad she'd be when she'd finished her exams and was into Aberdeen University, getting her B.A. and then a school of her own, the English Chris, father and his glowering and girning forgotten, she'd have a brave house of her own and wear what she liked and have never a man vexed with sight of her, she'd take care of that. (SS p.57)

At this point the capitalist option, education and economic self-sufficiency, seems to offer Chris a way out of her mother's experience, which she has come to identify as being one of sexual powerlessness and oppression. Gibbon seems to be making a connection between capitalism and patriarchy here; Chris is attempting to internalise the values of the patriarchal order.

Chris's ambiguity about the female role seems to be generated in part by her relationship with her father. Gibbon is highly aware of sexual feeling in families, but interestingly he does not portray it in a morbid or shocking light when it occurs between Chris and Ewan (e.g. p.377) In the case of John Guthrie and Chris, however, the patriarchal power relations in the family are threatening and Chris's response is fear:-

...those evening fancies when father lay with the red in his face and his eye on her, whispering and whispering at her, the harvest in his blood, whispering her to come to him, they'd done it in Old Testament times, whispering You're my flesh and blood, I can do with you what I will, come to me, Chris, do you hear?

And she would hear him and stare at him, whispering also, I won't, they never spoke but in whispers those evenings. And then she'd slip down from his room, frightened and frightened, quivering below-stairs while her fancies raced, starting at every creak that went through the harvest stillness of Blawearie house, seeing father somehow struggling from his bed, like a great frog struggling, squattering across the floor, thump, thump on the stairs, coming down on her while she slept, that madness and tenderness there in his eyes. (SS p.89-90)

Because of the contrast between this and the situation between Chris and Ewan, Gibbon seems to suggest that it is not sexual feeling in itself which is threatening, even incestuous sexual feeling, but the abuse of power. And the link between the abuse of power and established patriarchy is made plain by John Guthrie's recourse to the bible to justify himself, a text which pre-dates capitalism, so that here Gibbon seems to be making a distinction between capitalism and patriarchy.

In this way Gibbon reinterprets Freud in accordance with a feminist perspective; demonstrating that it is the power relations in society rather than anatomical difference which determine both family relationships and sexual identity. The nuclear family represented by Chris

and her parents (which is the only kind of family situation Freud considered) is shown to be a fundamentally patriarchal institution; one in which the father may appropriate the mother and daughters and divide them from each other as well as from outside help in the form of either female solidarity or economic independence. Within this set-up women exist effectively outside capitalism or socialism; or rather in a kind of enclave within the prevailing political structure, affected indirectly by the conflicting discourses which affect men.

Ewan is not brought up straightforwardly in the nuclear family; his main bond is to Chris throughout. He is alienated from his father before his death (SS p.170) and shows little attachment to Robert. Yet in spite of his attachment to Chris he is allied from the start with misogynistic elements in the text. Rob Moultrie who has oppressed his wife and daughter for 40 years with his sexual contempt, will only speak to Ewan at the end of his life, and later, of course, there is the Communist party. It is repeatedly emphasised that Ewan has no time for girls (he calls one young girl who is attracted to him a "boring young beast" p.335); his attitude towards them is patronising at best, callous and brutal at worst, especially in his final rejection of Ellen. As Deirdre Burton writes:-

Ewan's recourse to the irrelevant insults of sexuality finally mark him out as a person of limited vision and growth.[16]

The interpretation of male development offered by Nancy Chodorow seems relevant here. The boy child must repress his love of his mother in order to grow away from the female towards the male and the development of a superego by internalising the values of patriarchy. Since Ewan lacks an adequate father figure he must strive even harder to repress the feminine and find an adequate substitute. Eventually he experiences a sense of identification with the tortured and oppressed men of all ages which, in psychoanalytic terms may be interpreted as a massive projection of the sufferings of both his fathers onto the large-scale, impersonal forces of history. The Communist party then becomes both an alternative model of masculinity and a weapon - a 'creed that will cut like a knife'.

The need to repress the mother is so powerful that Ewan has to control his response to 'the feminine' in general, (women, the emotions, family life) even more tightly than most men in order to enable him to establish himself in opposition to the female sex. As Chodorow has said, the boy's early separation from his mother is the source of his later inability to relate deeply to others.

16. Burton D., "A Feminist Reading of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's A Scots Quair", in ed. Hawthorn J., (1984), The British Working-class Novel in the Twentieth Century, Edward Arnold, p.45

As far as the development of a superego is concerned, Gibbon's tactic throughout the Quair is to contrast the values of women and men. He reverses the traditional judgement of women as deficient in this area by showing Chris's values to be deeply rooted in her own experience and therefore carrying a conviction and integrity which the men, dependent on slogans and creeds, lack. Gibbon repeatedly returns the reader to Chris's perspective, which seems to assert its value over the values of others (especially men). Between Chris and the main women of the text there is no essential disagreement; the main contrast is with the men and their dreams and ideologies, which are like clouds to Chris.

Gibbon explores the experience of having an undeveloped superego to a much greater extent than Freud. Chris's sense of the unreality of male ideology is a necessary result of the female failure fully to internalise patriarchal values. This in turn affects her ability to relate to the rest of society, to envisage or think it in the same terms as other people so that she is permanently displaced and a sense of unreality pervades her whole experience. This is the reason why she returns recurrently both to the land and to the mirror. In Gibbon's text the mirror is not so much an experience of narcissism as a quest for a sense of reality.

In her article "About Chinese Women" Kristeva writes about the relative fragility of the ego and superego in women:-

After the superego the ego founders and sinks. It is a fragile envelope, incapable of staving off the irruption of this conflict, of this love which had bound the little girl to her mother and then, like black lava, had lain in wait for her all along the path of her desperate attempts to identify with the symbolic paternal order. Once the moorings of the word, the ego, the superego, began to slip, life itself can't hang on, death quietly moves in. Suicide without a cause...is usually political; a woman can carry off such things without tragedy, even without drama, but rather as though it were simply a matter of making an inevitable, irresistible and self-evident transition.[17]

Although Chris's death is not portrayed as suicide it may be seen as a quiet, inevitable transition, the culmination of a process of self-effacement evident in her story throughout the Quair. At the end it is as though for Chris the boundary between being and non-being has become blurred. And it is also a return to the land, which, as I have already mentioned, is bound up in Chris's discourse with her experience of her mother and femininity, of powerlessness and the acceptance of change. Chris seems to overcome the ambivalence which Chodorow describes, towards the maternal, material universe, accepting its all-powerful, paradoxical role "deliverer and destroyer"(GG p.496) and submitting to it entirely. This means, however, in the terms of a patriarchal society, that she has ceased to 'be'.

17. Kristeva J., "About Chinese Women", in ed. Moi T., 1989, The Kristeva Reader, Basil Blackwell Ltd., p.157

A pre-requisite to the process of self-effacement is the process of fragmentation which is continually foregrounded in the Quair. Deirdre Burton has commented on Gibbon's "awareness of the massive centrality of the dilemma of contradictory subject positions in female experience." [18]

Throughout the Quair there is a recurrent representation of Gibbon's awareness of her own split subjectivity. This is related both to language (Scottish/English) and to her problematic identification with her mother and father:-

For to the College she'd been sent and found it strange enough after the high classes in Echt, a little ugly place it was below Duncairn station, ugly as sin and nearly as proud, said the Chris that was Murdoch, Chris of the land. (SS p.44)

The 'Chris that was Murdoch' i.e. of her mother's family, is associated in her mind with the land and with the Scottish language. Also the third Chris which is 'fey' is deeply linked to an awareness of the land, and it is this Chris which prevails at the end. There are more Chrises than this; as Deirdre Burton notes she is given "multiple refracted identities" in the text. [19] Successive Chrises emerge with the rites of passage,

18. Burton D., in ed. Hawthorn J., 1984, p.39

19. Ibid., p.37

marriage, motherhood, the deaths of Ewan, Rob and her baby:-

somehow it seemed that never again would she be herself, have this body that was hers and her own(SS p.116)

and

She seemed to stand here by the kirkyard's edge looking back on the stones that marked the years where so many Chrises had died and lay buried--(CH p.296-297)

Burton also points out that in the scenes in which Chris regards herself in the mirror she is separated from her body parts "which are re-constituted as the objects of her gaze." [20]

The men, particularly Ewan, are not depicted in the same way. They appear more frequently to develop a unified ego as Chris does not, despite the linguistic divide between Scottish and English. They place themselves more easily on one side or the other. This apparent unity falls apart at times of political crisis such as the war or the General Strike, so that it is clear that the unified ego is a social construct, but at other times there is the experience or semblance of unity, and this is an experience to which Chris does not have access. This is not, however, wholly negative. I think that Chris recovers from her crises rather than falling apart because she already lives her fragmentation, so she cannot fall apart. And it is

20. Ibid., p.37

interesting that whilst Ewan has to undergo an experience of violence, degradation and powerlessness before he can identify with the experience of all men, Chris seems to have automatic access to identification with all women (CH p.320). In this respect a failure to develop fully a superego may be seen as an advantage, yet in the end Chris must also undergo the process of disintegration, albeit in a different, less spectacular way than the men.

Postmodern Feminism

One of the main ways in which Chris's personality is presented as multiple is through the speak; she is continually translated by it into linguistic terms over which she has no control, and this leads us into the territory of postmodernism.

Postmodern feminism is influenced by the work of Freud, Lacan, Derrida and the psychoanalytic and existentialist branches of feminism. Postmodern feminists take from Freud the idea that the self is split between the conscious and unconscious and from this point question the whole idea of a unified or integrated self. They also question the idea that there is a relationship of truth between language and reality.

According to Lacan, the child first exists in a pre-Oedipal, Imaginary stage in which no distinctions are made. This is ended by the mirror stage in which the

infant first recognises his/her reflection as being distinct from its surroundings. This is an essential pre-requisite to the development of language. The mirror stage instructs us that the child must become two in order to become one. In order to see itself as a real self, the child must appear to itself as an image of its real self. This is a paradigm for all subsequent relations; the self is always seeking itself through relations in the Other.

Whilst boys go on from this stage to internalise the Symbolic Order, or Name of the Father, girls cannot do this. Women are either excluded from the Symbolic Order or repressed within it, according to which theorist you read. Femininity is, however, silenced because the only words women are given are masculine words. Women are permanent outsiders.

Derrida developed Lacan's thought by speculating not only on the repressed nature of the feminine but also on its potential plurality and difference. He wanted to liberate thinking from the assumption of singularity (logocentrism), the idea that there is one single truth or essence, and to liberate texts by looking at their suppressed alternative meanings.

Building on this idea, Hélène Cixous asserted the possibility of a feminine writing; one that puts into words the unthought/unthinkable, and which is not limited

by the rules which currently govern language. For Cixous, feminine writing is rooted in female sexuality:- "open and multiple, varied and rhythmic, full of pleasures and possibilities." [21] She believes that women can escape the dichotomous conceptual order described by Derrida by exploring her body in text.

Like Cixous, Irigaray believes that the female body and sexuality are the sources of feminine writing. According to Irigaray, girls remain to some extent in the pre-Oedipal Imaginary stage throughout their lives. She does not believe this to be entirely negative, however, since there may be untapped possibilities in this state. As things are, however, the only woman we know is "phallic woman" - woman as man sees her. Irigaray looks to the Imaginary as a way of bringing woman to self-hood and language without mediation through men. [22] She used the idea of the speculum in order to postulate a subject which is capable of reflecting on its own being. It is impossible for women to do this within the structures of patriarchal thought through which men specularise, i.e. see not women but images of men.

Unlike these two theorists, Kristeva believes that men can write in a feminine mode. She asserts that

21. Cixous, H., The Laugh of the Medusa, in eds. Marks, E. and de Courtivron, I., (1981), New French Feminisms, Harvester, p.243

22. Moi, T., (1990), Sexual/Textual Politics, Routledge, p.132

"woman as such does not exist"[23] - such concepts as woman and the feminine are rooted in metaphysics along with other groups which are excluded from the dominant (black, homosexual etc.) Kristeva wanted the marginalised discourses found in madness, the irrational, the maternal and the sexual to release their revolutionary powers into language. This is the repressed semiotic, in which time is cyclical, repetitive and eternal, whereas time in the Symbolic is linear and sequential, pointed towards a goal.[24] Thus the kind of writing that is linear, rational and objective with normal syntax is repressed, whereas the kind of writing that emphasises rhythm sound and colour , permitting breaks in syntax and allowing room for whatever disgusts/horrifies us (since this is traceable to the infant's pre-Oedipal experiences with its own body and with the body of its mother) is liberating. In particular this kind of writing liberates the chora, the "space underlying the written"[25]

The origin of the chora is in the "body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such"[26]. It may be described as a series of drives and stases moving rhythmically. These 'articulations and ruptures' form a rhythm which underlies all discourse. It precedes the acquisition of language and "organises pre-verbal

23. Kristeva, J., in "Tel Quel", in eds. Marks, E. and de Courtivron, I., (1981)

24. Kristeva, J., "Woman's Time", in ed. Moi, T., (1989), The Kristeva Reader, Basil Blackwell Ltd., p.187 -

25. Kristeva, J., "Révolution du Langage Poétique", in ed. Moi, T., (1989) p.97

26. Ibid., p.93

semiotic space according to categories which precede or transcend language." [27] All discourse simultaneously depends upon and refuses the chora. Kristeva describes literature as a "rhythm made intelligible by syntax".

To exist in society we must fit ourselves into the Symbolic Order; society and culture depends upon this. For this reason, writing which emphasises or makes explicit the chora is potentially subversive. The semiotic is, however, the "place where the subject is both generated and negated" and Kristeva says it is characterised by a "dominant destructive wave." [28] She equates it with the death drive described by Freud and in her article "About Chinese Women" cites the suicides of Virginia Woolf "who sank wordlessly into the river", Maria Tsvetaeva who hanged herself, "the most rhythmic of Russian poets" and Sylvia Plath "another of those women disillusioned with meanings and words, who took refuge in lights, rhythms and sounds" [29] all practitioners of a feminine mode of writing who found it appropriate to slip into a state of non-being. Kristeva says that this kind of writing is rare:-

among the capitalist's mode of production's numerous signifying practices, only certain literary texts of the avant-garde, (Mallarmé, Joyce) manage to cover the infinity of the process, that is, reach the semiotic chora which modifies linguistic structures. [30]

27. Ibid., p.93

28. Ibid., p.95

29. Kristeva, J., "About Chinese Women", Ibid., p. 153

30. Kristeva, J., "Révolution du Langage Poétique", Ibid., p.122

I think that this statement could be applied to Gibbon's Quair, especially when the passages which describe the third Chris are considered. The prose here is especially rhythmical and poetic, pointing to what language cannot describe:-

And maybe that third and last Chris would find voice at last for the whimsies that filled her eyes, and tell of rain on the roof at night, the terror and the splendour of it across the long slate roofs; and the years that faded and fell, dissolved as a breath, before those third clear eyes; and mother's face, lying dead; and the Standing Stones up there night after night and day after day by the loch of Blawearie, how around them there gathered things that wept and laughed and lived again in the hours before the dawn, till far below the cocks began to crow in Kinraddie and day had come again. (SS p.64)

The mere fact that there are three Chrises to consider moves Chris beyond the dichotomous conceptual order described by Derrida, into the realm of the Imaginary or the chora in which the third Chris exists, and which in the end quietly and unobtrusively takes over. This is described in a passage which might almost be a description of the chora itself:-

And that was the best deliverance of all, as she saw it now, sitting here quiet--that that Change who ruled the earth and the sky and the waters underneath the earth, Change whose face she'd once feared to see, whose right hand was Death and whose left hand Life, might be stayed by none of the dreams of men, love, hate, compassion, anger or pity, gods or devils or wild crying to the sky. He passed and repassed in the ways of the wind, Deliverer, Destroyer and Friend in one. (GG p.496)

Gibbon attempts to foreground the feminine not only in the content of his trilogy but in the style and narrative structure. In its non-linearity, its rhythms and repetitions it encodes a world view that is fundamentally Other to the world view of industrial capitalism. Whether or not it can be described as essentially feminine is a problematic and probably unresolvable question. In "The Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous says "there has not yet been any writing which inscribes femininity"[31] but her suggestions for the form feminine writing will take when the female libido is released into text seem to describe Gibbon's style - long, loose-flowing sentences and a repetitive, rhythmic prose.

As Graham Trengrove notes, the events of each section pass through the mind of Chris as she stands apart from the community, at the Standing Stones, for instance, and it closes as Chris returns to 'real' social time.[32] This cyclical structure, beginning and ending with Chris's perceptions, even in the book in which she plays least part, Grey Granite, greatly enhances her presence in the text, as does the fact that she is always up in the high places, taking an overview of the people below and events. All events ultimately appear to be filtered through her perceptions and this has the effect of

31. Cixous, H., "The Laugh of the Medusa", in eds. Marks E. and de Courtivron, I., (1981), New French Feminisms, Harvester, p.245

32. Trengrove, G., (1975), "Who is You? Grammar and Grassic Gibbon", in The Scottish Literary Journal, Vol. 2

'universalising' her consciousness - she contains somehow all these different stories and different temporal frameworks - her own story as it proceeds in more or less linear fashion, her awareness of the eternal cycles of change and the narrative in which her story and the stories of all the different characters are told in retrospect. In "Woman's Time" Kristeva suggests that 'feminine time' or time in the semiotic as experienced by women is fundamentally different from patriarchal linear time, cyclical and plural, and Gibbon subtly achieves a sense of this in his multi-layered narrative.

In these ways Chris's presence is embedded within the narrative itself, although she is given less physical space within the story-line of the trilogy as it progresses. Gibbon attempts more ways than one of giving Chris being and presence in his text, as if he is aware of the danger of simply reproducing "phallic woman" by the usual methods of representation. He is certainly aware of the difficulties involved in giving being and presence to the feminine within the masculine practice of writing. When representing female desire he strays into poetic metaphor:-

And you knew that you stood on the brink of that sea that was neither charted nor plumbed by men, that sea-shore only women had known, dark with its sailing red lights of storms, ... (CH p.259)

Here he seems to be expressing the point Irigaray makes when she says "woman's desire does not speak the same language as man's desire"[33] and to acknowledge at such points in the trilogy that female desire cannot be directly released into text; he can only suggest its presence by using the language of poetic symbol.

If, as Kristeva has written, "the belief that one is a woman is absurd, on a deeper level a woman cannot be"[34] then the whole question of representing the feminine in text is problematised. In the above quotation from the Quair however, Gibbon, unlike Kristeva, seems to be postulating the existence of the feminine, of a form of experience or desire that is distinctively feminine, yet he avoids essentialism because he does not draw conclusions about whether female experience is rooted in biology or in marginalisation and powerlessness. He chooses rather to develop a 'feminine' practice of writing, in Kristeva's sense of the term, and to explore the ways in which women are excluded from or repressed within the linguistic order. Ultimately Gibbon represents Chris's experience of fragmentation and split subjectivity as being rooted in language - firstly in the Scottish/English division, which is demonstrated most thoroughly through Chris and the impact it has on her

33. Irigaray, L., "This Sex Which Is Not One", in eds. Marks, E. and de Courtivron, I., (1981), New French Feminisms, Harvester, p.106

34. Kristeva, J., in Tel Quel, in eds. Marks, E. and de Courtivron, I., (1981), New French Feminisms, Harvester, p.126

life, and which is linked in turn to the psycho-sexual issue of parental identification, Scottish being the language in which she can think the land, and the land being more closely associated with her mother than her father in Chris's discourse. Secondly, of course, she is continually reinterpreted through the speak in ways she cannot control:-

But Segget would overhear what you said though you whispered the thing at the dead of night ten miles from a living soul in the hills. And it fair enjoyed itself at the news, God man! that was a right dight in the face for that sulky, stuck-up bitch at the Manse, her with her braw clothes and her proud-like ways, never greeting when her man died there in the pulpit, just as cool as though the childe were a load of swedes,...(GG p.359-360)

If the speak continually misconstrues and misrepresents Chris, so do the men in her life. At the end of their relationship she watches Ake go "facing the last realities with a cool, clear, wonder, an unhating desire. Barriers still, but they fell, one by one."(GG p.487) Whereas Ake interprets her stillness in a different way:-

Ay, a strange quean, yon. And not for him. He'd thought that glimmer in her eyes a fire that he himself could blow to a flame; and instead 'twas no more than the shine of a stone.(GG p.487)

Ake, of course, has misconstrued Chris throughout, marrying her on the assumption that she will change, but this is a recurrent theme in the Quair; not one of her

husbands accepts Chris fully, and at the end her son makes the remarkable comparison between himself and Chris, freedom and God, demonstrating not so much his awareness of Chris's true perspective but his own tendency to construct Chris in the light of his own ideology and in opposition to it and to himself. Chris therefore occupies the same place in the discourse of men as in the discourse of the speak - that of object, passive and continually redefined with reference to the subject, or in the subject's own interests.

In the article "Eccentric Subjects, Women and Historical Consciousness" Catherine Mackinnon is quoted as suggesting that woman is not only object to man but to herself; she is always the object rather than the subject of her own consciousness, and this factor determines the relations between men and women and between woman and herself:-

The constant turn of subject-object-subject is what grounds a different relation for women to the erotic and to consciousness and to knowing.[35]

She says also that "woman must continually watch herself; men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at...The surveyor of woman in herself is male, the surveyed is female."[36]

35. Mackinnon, C., quoted in de Lauretis, T., "Eccentric Subjects, Women and Historical Consciousness", in Feminist Studies, Vol. 16 No. 1, (1990)

36. Ibid., p. 119

When Chris looks at herself in the mirror it is often with an assessing, qualifying gaze:-

She was growing up limber and sweet, not bonny, perhaps, her cheek-bones were over high and her nose over short for that... (SS p.63)

Here she is clearly measuring herself against some kind of patriarchal ideal of perfection; the patriarchal gaze forms the background to her gaze. At other times she is represented as being a stranger to herself:-

looking down at herself naked as though she looked at some other than herself, a statue like that of the folk of olden time that they set in the picture galleries. (SS p.116)

Gibbon's recurrent mirror scenes show us the fundamental split in Chris which, according to Lacan, pre-dates the acquisition of language; she has no direct access to herself and must view herself through the eyes of the patriarchal ideal of beauty or art.

Similarly, as Penelope Engelbrecht writes, "a woman speaking occupies a male subject viewpoint, conditioned by phallogo-centrism".[37] In her analysis, only the lesbian is potentially capable of being woman-centred in language, naming the self and escaping phallogocentrism because she does not construct the female as Other by phallic absence, so that ultimately the linguistic model

37. Engelbrecht, P., "Lifting Belly is a Language", in Feminist Studies, Vol. 16 No.1, (1990)

centred around subject and object, i.e. difference from subject, collapses. As I have already noted, however, lesbianism is not represented as being a social space Chris can occupy. She exists within the social institutions of marriage and motherhood and must speak from them, until at the end, when, finally undefined by men, she disappears.

In his mirror scenes Gibbon suggests that the only possible result of woman's entry into language is fragmentation. Whether Chris is viewed reconstructing her body parts, or viewing herself voyeuristically through a male gaze, she never manages to fully occupy a subject position. Women are imprisoned in images of themselves which are male fantasies, as Toril Moi has said in Sexual/Textual Politics (p.55). Although Lacan has written that the subject experiences a kind of Gestalt in the mirror "a maturation of the power ideal which draws together a previously fragmentary sense of self"[38] Gibbon does not portray this as being Chris's experience. Although she searches in the mirror for a place of stability she cannot find in language, ultimately she can find little of herself there at all:-

And so she supposed, behind this newness
and those cool eyes in the mirror, the
fugitive Chris was imprisoned at last, led in
a way like the captives long syne whom men
dragged up the heights to Blawearie Loch to
streak out and kill by the great grey
stones. (GG p.434)

38. Lacan, J., (1989), Écrits, Routledge, p.2

Similarly she cannot find herself in any of the social institutions such as marriage, through which she is ultimately reduced to "selling herself like a cow for a roof".

Irigaray has said that the prevalence of the gaze is foreign to female eroticism. In "Spéculum de l'Autre Femme" she writes that the idea of woman viewing herself is outside representation, this form of subjectivity is denied to women.[39] So although we must always look at Chris through the eyes of her male author, this does not seem artificial, since as Catherine Mackinnon has said, the surveyor of woman in herself is male. In the same way, Irigaray has written that women are not the "active subjects of enunciation", they are spoken rather than speaking and bear the same relationship to language as the mad or senile.[40] This leaves woman with two choices, either to remain silent retaining her relationship with the Imaginary, or to enact the specular representations of herself as a lesser man - a form of hysteria in which the Imaginary is sacrificed. Chris's story seems to follow the former option. Throughout the Quair she lapses more and more completely into silence, but remains compelling as a character because she retains her relationship with the Imaginary, through the eyes of

39. quoted in New French Feminisms, p.132

40. Irigaray, L., quoted in Moi T., (1989), Sexual/Textual Politics, Routledge, p.127

the third Chris, who must always experience the problem of what language cannot describe.

Irigaray's point is that woman must either reflect man or cease to exist. Without an adequate reflection in language Chris ultimately disappears into silence. Postmodern feminists have argued that there is no healing of the subject split in the mirror apart from death, which is, as Freud said in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" the ultimate healing or resolution. This, I feel, is the process dramatised in the Quair, the feminine experience of fragmentation and the chora, that which is outside text and which culminates ultimately into a state of non-being.

Existentialist Feminism

Although existentialist feminism pre-dates post-modern feminism and to some extent post-modern feminism is influenced by it, I am examining these two branches in this order because to some extent existentialist feminism seems to me to bridge the gap between the biological/psychological and economic streams of thought.

Existentialist feminism is based around the ideas of Simone De Beauvoir (The Second Sex) and Jean-Paul Sartre (Being and Nothingness) who was himself influenced by both Freud and Marx.

Sartre took Hegel's description of the psyche as "self-alienated spirit" divided between the observed (e.g. the body) and the observer. He called these two parts Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself and added a third mode of being, Being-for-others. He suggested that each of these modes of being is inherently in conflict, because each establishes itself as a subject precisely by defining other beings as objects. Sartre described the process of self-definition as one in which power is sought over others. In establishing all other beings as Others, each self describes and prescribes roles to which the Other must conform.

Sartre's conception of freedom was related to his conception of nothingness. He insisted that nothing compels us to act in any one way, so that we are free and our future is blank. But when we start filling in the blank spaces we are overcome by a sense of losing, rather than finding, ourselves. When we elect one possibility we simultaneously destroy all others. This burdens us with a sense of loss, and in order to avoid this and the concomitant sense of the ambiguities of life, people tend in various ways to lose consciousness of what they are doing - becoming habit-bound, for instance, or entirely absorbed in a role. Ultimately, however, only death permits the conscious subject to escape from freedom, and from relations with others which are filled with conflict because the self's desire for absolute freedom is too absolute to be shared, and our attempts at love will

always deteriorate into mutual possession and objectification. The consequence of love is the prospect of losing our subjectivity in the Other, which is an invitation to be treated as mere object.

Simone de Beauvoir used Sartre's categories of Self and Other and claimed that man has named himself Self and woman Other. If the Other is a threat to the Self then woman is a threat to man, so that if man wishes to remain free he must subordinate woman. This form of oppression is unlike all others in that it is not a contingent historical fact; woman has always been subordinate to man, and has internalised the alien point of view that man is the essential, woman the inessential. However, de Beauvoir differed from Freud and the radical and psychoanalytic branches of feminism in that she argued that this oppression is not rooted in biology per se; biology sets forth facts that society will interpret to suit its own ends. Society locates the basic difference between men and women in the different reproductive roles, and de Beauvoir offered her own interpretation of this:-

The sperm becomes a stranger to him and separates from his body. The egg on the contrary begins to separate from the female body...but if fertilised by a gamete it becomes attached again through implantation in the uterus. First violated, the female is then alienated, she becomes in part an Other than herself.[41]

41. De Beauvoir, S., (1974), The Second Sex, in Tong, R., (1989), Feminist Thought, p.202

Because of her biology woman finds it harder to become and remain a self; however, de Beauvoir thought that how much value we attach to biology is up to us as social beings, and that women are oppressed not because they lack penises but because they lack power. Even in a socialist society women will still be Other, because the oppression of women is not solely caused by the institution of private property.

As civilisation developed, men found that one of the best ways to control women is to construct myths about them which simplify the complex and rationalise the irrational. These myths have two characteristics - firstly, what man wants from woman is everything man lacks, and secondly, woman is a chameleon whose being is as mutable as nature. In all cases the ideal woman is urged to forget, deny or negate herself. De Beauvoir described the ways in which men connect nature to women; like nature she reminds them of both life and death and so is both angel and demon. Her body reminds man of carnality and mortality, even though the ideal woman is self-sacrificing and pure. Women cannot reject these images because men have the social power. Instead they internalise myths of their Otherness and are made to feel shameful and inferior. Unlike the post-modern feminists who saw an advantage or an alternative way of being in Otherness (plurality, difference) de Beauvoir saw it as an entirely negative mode of being. She thought that

women were enslaved by marriage and motherhood, paying for contentment by being drained of their capacity for greatness. Pregnancy alienates woman from herself so that she cannot chart the course of her destiny. Mother and child regard one another not as subjects but as objects to be possessed and used. All women engage in some kind of feminine role-playing, but three kinds do it to extremes, the prostitute, the narcissist and the mystic. The narcissist cannot fulfil herself as subject so she becomes her own object. The mystic seeks to be the supreme object of a supreme subject, confusing man with God and God with man. The tragedy of all these roles is that they are not fundamentally of woman's own making. Woman is constructed by man, his institutions and structures.

However, since woman has no essence she can construct herself differently and become her own subject. De Beauvoir believed that women should work, no matter how menial the work, since this is a step towards becoming a subject. Also they can become intellectual and work towards a socialist transformation of society in the hope of ending the subject/object dichotomy, the struggle between one human being and another which she saw as being rooted in capitalism. She believed that one of the main keys to women's liberation is economic, but this is not the only key. She felt that women had to create themselves in every way, but she always retained an awareness of the fact that their freedom to do so is

limited by the kind of existence that has been given to them by society.

When Robert says to Chris "Oh Chris Caledonia, I've married a nation" it is possible to see that she has entered his discourse as mythological Other. He is robbing her of her humanity by comparing her to a nation or mass, simultaneously exalting and alienating her.

Chris's own existentialist attitude encourages this to some extent. She remains blank, refusing to fill in her future, and therefore (potentially) free, but the effect of this is to allow men to reconstruct her in their own interests. The fact that the men in her life construct her as Other means firstly that they want to possess her, like Ake, and secondly that she bears the brunt of their disillusionment or crises. When the world is going wrong for Ewan or Robert they are brutal to Chris because in their minds she represents the Other, i.e. everything they are trying and failing to control.

Once she has sacrificed her early dream of being a teacher, Chris lives with the blankness of her life without attempting to fill it in. She is described as confronting the nakedness Robert was so afraid of (GG p.487); she does not 'clothe' herself with either dreams or beliefs. Neither is she wholly absorbed into any of the roles she plays, wife, mother, vicar's wife, landlady. The people who do become fully absorbed into

their roles play either a tragic part (Robert as vicar, and Ewan for a time as soldier) or a comic role, (Sim Leslie as policeman). In each of these cases the role becomes destructive and brutal; Gibbon seems to suggest that they are weakened in some way, led away from themselves.

The 'emptiness' in Chris, however, her detachment from the roles she plays, which is connected to her inability to 'fill in' her future, makes it possible for the men to misconstrue her, and fill in the space themselves with whatever it is they cannot live with. None of the men in her life really attempts to know her; none of them asks questions; they make assumptions and demands. And Chris's apprehensions and values are frequently contrasted with theirs, as for instance when she is walking with Robert and when she begins to weep Robert says "It was Ewan? Oh Chris, he won't grudge you me." But Chris's perception has been of "Time himself...haunting their tracks with unstaying feet." (CH p.207)

Chris is certainly shown to be alienated from the experience of pregnancy and motherhood, the primary emphasis being on the psychological division and the subsequent sense of loss:-

And Chris Guthrie crept out from the place below the beech trees where Chris Tavendale lay and went wandering off into the waiting quiet of the afternoon, Chris Tavendale heard

her go, and she came back to Blawearie never again. (SS p.137)

Here Chris's divided self is articulated through the patriarchal name changes she must undergo in society, but however it is described, Chris is always shown to be Other to herself. And whilst Gibbon appears to suggest that for women alienation is rooted more deeply in bodily experiences over which they have no control, he also suggests that this alienation is generated by the cultural value placed on these experiences. The experience of female biology is supposed to remain hidden, so that Chris cannot ask Mistress Mutch what she needs to know and Else cannot discuss contraception. The rites of female biology are not celebrated and the women do not share their experience, so that each experience necessarily becomes one of alienation and loss. Whilst the experience of pregnancy is biological, then, Chris's apprehension of it is determined by the cultural value placed on women's biology.

It may also be said that Chris is alienated from her bodily experiences by the liberal-humanist ideology prevalent in society, which dictates that she should 'be her own person' a single, unified and autonomous entity, whilst her bodily experience militates against this. De Beauvoir realised that society limits our freedom to create ourselves, but Gibbon goes further than this. He amply demonstrates that neither work nor education do anything for Chris's sense of self-hood; if anything they

leave her more deeply alienated than before. To explain this I believe we have to return to Marxism. In a capitalist society man is divorced from the products of his labour and consequently from his work; his education relates less and less to the development of 'full humanism' through labour and relationship with nature and more to those structures, institutions and ideologies which place him within a framework he cannot control. These are two of the issues to which contemporary Marxist feminists have addressed themselves.

Marxist/Socialist Feminism [42]

These two categories are related so I am considering them together. The main difference is that whilst socialist feminists believe that gender and class play an approximately equal role in women's oppression, Marxist feminists believe that class ultimately provides a better explanation, since under capitalism, bourgeois women do not experience the same kinds of oppression as proletarian women.

Marxists believe that what distinguishes human beings from other animals is not rationality, as liberal humanists believe, but the fact that we produce our means of subsistence. For the Marxist material forces are the prime movers of history. Like Marxists in general,

42. summarised from Tong, R., (1989), pp.51-63 and pp.175-187

Marxist feminists believe that social existence determines consciousness. Aphorisms such as "woman's work is never done" explain a fact of woman's existence which also shapes her psychology. In order to understand why women are oppressed in ways men are not, we need to analyse the links between women's work status and their self-image. Marxist feminists assert that women's work shapes 'female nature' and that capitalism is a system of power relations, not merely exchange relations.

In The Origin of the Family Private Property and the State, Engels linked the oppression of women to the institution of private property, and the fact that the site of production changed at some point in history from the home to the herd - the domain of men. Eventually by trading men were able to raise a surplus and accumulate wealth. This led to changes in the laws of inheritance, patrilineage taking over from matrilineage, and ultimately to the overthrow of mother-right and the "world-historic defeat of the female sex".[43] Man's control of woman is rooted in the fact that he controls the property and that therefore female oppression will cease with the dissolution of private property. Interestingly, Engels believed that proletarian women experience less oppression than bourgeois women, for whom marriage is merely a form of prostitution, because in the proletarian family the lack of private property and the

43. Engels, F., in Tong, R., (1989), Feminist Thought, p.48

fact that woman works outside the home leads (Engels thought) to a measure of equality in the family.

Although influenced by Engels, contemporary Marxist feminists have developed more searching analyses of women's oppression, though these are still mainly focussed on work rather than sexuality or sexual difference.

At one time women's work was central to the economic activity of the extended family, but with industrialisation women who did not enter the public workplace were regarded as non-productive in contrast to productive, wage-earning men. Yet women produce people, and this is overlooked because women do not sell the products of their labour. Socialism does not budget adequately for the socialisation of domestic work and childcare, just as capitalism does not.

Contemporary Marxist feminists insist on women's role as producers rather than consumers. Margaret Benston described women as a class - that class of people "primarily responsible for the production of simple use values in those activities associated with the home and family." [44]

44. Benston, M., (1969), "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation", in Tong, R., Feminist Thought, p.53

Like other Marxist feminists, Benston believes that the main issue is to free women from their heavy domestic duties including childcare, otherwise their entry into the workforce will only increase their oppression. This has led to a debate between those who believe in the full socialisation of domestic labour and those who support the wages for housework campaign.

Critiques of Marxist feminism describe it as a simplistic account of woman's relationship to work and the family. Socialist feminists such as Alison Jaggar believe that Marxist feminists ignore the oppression of women by men, as opposed to capital. In socialist countries women still do two jobs, in the home and out of it, and socialism benefits from this as capitalism does. This is because Marxism does not incorporate an understanding of patriarchy as a powerful and tenacious system which intersects only partially with capitalism. Socialist feminism, therefore, is the result of Marxist feminists' dissatisfaction with the gender-blind categories of Marxist thought. In it, Marxist, radical and psychoanalytic streams of feminist thought are merged in order to attempt to explain exactly why it is women who are more oppressed by capitalism than men, and why women are oppressed sexually by men (pornography, rape, prostitution etc.) Two different approaches have developed within socialist feminism, dual systems theory, which analyses patriarchy and capitalism separately and unified systems theory which considers them together.

Dual systems theory offers a materialist account of capitalism with a non-materialist account of patriarchy. It maintains that only certain aspects of women's oppression are economic, others are 'bio-social', or ideological, the result of entrenched ideas about how women should relate to men. These will remain unaltered by changes in the mode of production and even under socialism women will remain oppressed unless the defeat of capitalism is accompanied by the defeat of patriarchy. This can only be effected by a re-writing of the psycho-sexual drama that pre-dates capitalism. Marxism and psychoanalysis must combine to effect woman's full liberation.

Acknowledging perhaps, the fact that there is no easy distinction between the economic and the 'bio-social' or ideological, unified systems theorists such as Iris Young have attempted to develop a feminist historical materialism, substituting an assessment of the gendered division of labour for class as the primary means of analysing society. This is more specific than a class analysis and takes into account (for instance) who gives the orders and who takes them, who does the stimulating work and who does the drudge work, who gets paid more and who less etc. In Young's view capitalism will always be a patriarchy; the marginalisation of women and their functioning as a secondary workforce is essential to the capitalist system. This replaces the traditional Marxist

view that male and female workers are interchangeable. Capitalism needs a large reserve of unemployed workers in order to keep wages low and to meet unanticipated demands for increased supplies of goods and services. Because of the entrenched gendered division of labour capitalism has identified men as the primary and women as the secondary workforce.

Another unified systems theorist, Alison Jaggar, has proposed alienation as opposed to class as the fundamental Marxist concept and a theoretical framework powerful enough to accommodate Marxist, radical and psychoanalytic feminist thought. For Marx, work is the humanising activity par excellence, but under capitalism work becomes a dehumanising activity. Labour is organised in ways which puts us at odds with everyone and everything, including ourselves. Woman is also alienated from the product on which she works, her body. She diets, exercises and dresses for men, and her body is appropriated against her will by rape, pornography, prostitution etc. She is in constant competition for male approval, and is also alienated from the product of her reproductive labour, children; pressured into having a certain number, or none at all. The child grows away from the mother, viewing her ultimately as an object who is perpetually guilty of caring too much or too little for the child. Women are alienated from their own sexuality, from the process of mothering and from their

intellectual capacities whilst men set the terms of thought and discourse.

These issues raise complicated questions when applied to the Quair. Does Gibbon portray capitalism as operating separately from patriarchy in his text or is it portrayed as being a form of patriarchy, so that both could be defeated by the socialist revolution? And, although the oppression of women does take distinct forms, related at least in part to biology and the cultural value attached to it, can it ultimately be accounted for in the ways suggested by the unified systems theorists, i.e. in ways which are still within the materialist conceptual framework?

Gibbon seems to me to discount earlier Marxist theories of woman's oppression. As I have said before, the fact that Chris is economically independent and property-owning when she marries Ewan does not help her in the end when he turns on her. And her marriage to Ake, which is probably the nearest she comes to a proletarian experience of marriage, is the most oppressive to her, partly because there is no love and she finds the sex repugnant, but also because Ake has clear ideas about the woman's role. Sex is "another function for the woman-body who did the cooking and attended the house." (GG p.470) The more bourgeois Robert will not have her slave and wait on him. This seems to directly contradict Engels' theory that women are

oppressed because men own the property. Chris is oppressed throughout by the gendered division of labour which prescribes different social roles for herself and Ewan, for instance, so that he goes to war and there, in his most patriarchal role, learns sexual contempt for women. Self-alienated in a situation he cannot control he turns on Chris in an attempt to re-assert his egoistic sense of authority, by forcing her further into the female role.

Gibbon also dismisses the notion that work outside the home will grant women greater equality. Because of capitalist economics any worker can work as hard as he/she likes without attaining economic independence or even solvency. And the work available to women is usually an extension of the feminine role - cooking and cleaning for Chris at Ma Cleghorn's, or looking after people and children, like Ellen, who is still under the control of the patriarchal authorities, so that oppression is doubly enforced, and this again is the result of the gendered division of labour.

Yet the degree of oppressiveness of women's labour seems to change as society changes. Chris is never too fond of it, as is demonstrated on pages 112-113:-

... ,Mistress Melon could do the cooking and cleaning, Chris preferred the outside, she'd milk and see to the kine; and they'd get on bravely, no doubt. Mistress Melon was a fell good worker...down on her knees she went and was scrubbing the kitchen floor, Chris was glad enough to see her at that, she hated

scrubbing herself. If only she'd been born a boy she'd never had such hatings vexing her, she'd have ploughed up parks and seen to their draining, lived and lived, gone up to the hills a shepherd and never had to scunner herself with the making of beds or the scouring of pots.

As Chris becomes divorced from the land, however, moved by the forces of industrial capitalism, increasingly the only work she can do is the "making of beds and the scouring of pots". She goes from working "never knowing she tired" (SS p.153) to work which leaves her feeling like a used dish-cloth. And in the first book she is not oppressed by motherhood - little Ewan goes with her to work, but it is hard to imagine a child fitting in with her later work situation. Gibbon shows that increasingly woman's labour exists outside society, it is supposed to be done invisibly without economic recognition. Dehumanised by her labour, Chris is brought to the point where she can consider selling herself "like a cow for a roof." In the Quair as in Marxism, only a relationship with nature in which the products of nature are not appropriated by others can lead to a development of man's powers, producing men who are "fine men against the horizon of the sky, brown and great." (SS p.153)

Iris Young's version of unified systems theory therefore, seems to go some way towards explaining Chris's oppression, but Alison Jaggar's theory, which considers woman's alienation, specifically from her own body, sexuality and motherhood, may also be productively

applied. For Chris, all aspects of female experience, marriage, motherhood and sexuality are simultaneously experiences of alienation and loss; she is divided within herself, or an old Chris dies, or she is suddenly fey, experiencing the third Chris who always exists in isolation from those around her. She is prevented from becoming woman-centred, in Adrienne Rich's use of the term, in a society which places no value on woman's experience, and ultimately she is prevented also from being centred in herself.

In the proem and prologue, Gibbon charts the course of Scottish history from early times through to industrial capitalism. Throughout this great span of time the story is one of the battle of men for private property, and women feature as the means whereby patrilineage is secured:-

...he had the Den drained and he married a Pict lady and got on her bairns and he lived there till he died. And his son took the name Kinraddie,...(SS p.15)

In this way women might be said to fit into the capitalist system, but it does not seem to me that Gibbon suggests that a socialist revolution is likely to overthrow patriarchy as well as capitalism. As Deirdre Burton has said, the attitude of the communist party excludes women, their insights and activities. Ewan's approach to history is straightforwardly Marxist, characterised, as Angus Calder has noted, by the use of

slogan-like capitals;[45] it is a linear concept of the march of the dialectic. Chris's apprehension of history is contrasted with this and corresponds more to Kristeva's view of the feminine experience of time, organic, cyclical and plural (since she lives also with the linear, sequential time of capitalism). For these reasons, Burton feels that the mobilised left are not portrayed as having an "adequate vision with which to transform existing power relations in society." [46]

In all of these ways, then, the Quair "contributes to an understanding of history beyond class relations" [47] by foregrounding feminine experience so that it expresses "radical sexual as well as class politics." [48] Chris's perspective is maintained in contrast with the perspectives of the men in her life, and repeatedly it is upheld and reinforced over theirs by events in the text. Gibbon maintains a tension between two interlinked yet imperfectly integrated ideologies, the Marxist and the feminist, without attempting to fully resolve them. The great strength of the text is its complex portrayal of feminine experience, constructed by a number of discourses and modes of representation. The idea of

45. Calder, A., "A Mania for Self-Reliance: Grassic Gibbon's 'Scots Quair'", in eds. Jefferson, D. and Martin, G., (1982), The Uses of Fiction, The Open University Press, p.123

46. Burton, D., "A Feminist Reading of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's A Scots Quair", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), The British Working-class Novel in the Twentieth Century, Edward Arnold, p.39

47. Ibid., p.49

48. Ibid., p.49

Chris as myth, for instance, linked to the land or to Scotland itself is certainly present, and in an earlier section I discussed the possible influence on Gibbon of the Icelandic sagas. She shares with the women of the sagas the virtues of the heroic Germanic spirit - stoicism, self-sufficiency, sexual independence, and wisdom, and also isolation in space and time. It is apparently not unusual for Scottish literature to contain semi-mythical (or straightforwardly mythical) portrayals of women as Alan Bold has noted[49]. Writers such as Neil Gunn, or Sidney Goodsir Smith or Hugh MacDiarmid all draw upon archetypal images of woman - the earth mother figure, the white moon goddess or, in MacDiarmid's case, Audh or Unn, the Icelandic matriarch who founded early societies in the Scottish islands and who represents in his poetry the unbroken spirit of ancient Scotland. In these instances however, the female figure is much more stereotypical, constituted by a single discourse, than Chris who is constituted by a complex of conflicting discourses - mythological, socially realistic, socialist, feminist, nationalist - and for this reason she succeeds as a compelling representation of femininity. It should also be noted that these discourses are outside Chris and beyond her control. Men assign her a mythological position, and attempt to fit her into their ideological discourses, which is a kind of colonisation affecting her life as profoundly as England's and capitalism's colonisation of the land she lives on. For these reasons,

49. Bold, A., (1983) Modern Scottish Literature, Longman,

and because Gibbon achieves a sense of the complexity of the historical situation of women in society, it is necessary to approach his text using a number of feminist discourses flexibly. The radical, psychoanalytic and post-modern explore reasons for the universal oppression of women by men yet tend to ignore issues of class and historical or cultural change, and the Marxist/socialist which look at the materialist causes firmly linked to historical change and class.

In "Feminist Scholarship" Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn note Barthes' comment when surveying a picture of women:-

Where then is man in this family picture?
Nowhere and everywhere like the sky, the
horizon, an authority which at once determines
and limits a condition.[50]

This is precisely the situation, chronically evident in most texts of Western culture, that Gibbon attempts to subvert in the Quair. He seeks to generate a sense of Chris's presence not only in the story but also in the narrative structure and style, whilst avoiding the pitfalls of both essentialism and individualism, and, at the same time, to demonstrate her increasing marginalisation. Unable to appropriate any of the discourses available to her, and never fully appropriated by any of them, she eventually lapses into silence,

50. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., eds. Making a Difference, (1985), Routledge, p.6

becoming an ellipsis between the conflicting discourses, a kind of 'absent-presence' in the Quair.

Kristeva has asserted that "truly good writing always bears witness to a traversal of sexual differentiation"[51] and also that writing which emphasises the chora is potentially disruptive and subversive. Although this is not a materialist analysis I feel that it is in this sense that Gibbon's text is radical rather than in the sense of an orthodox adherence to revolutionary creeds. His text explores the connections not yet fully made by theory, between language, economics, sexual difference and the unconscious mind, and is in this sense (to quote Deirdre Burton again) "a true counter to patriarchal capitalism". Yet in the end, of course, the tensions and oppositions are not fully resolved. Chris, dominated by the semiotic chora passes out of the Quair as the masculinist, materialist cause of Communism is gathering strength.

51. Kristeva, J., in Weedon, C., (1989), Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory, Basil Blackwell, Ltd., p.165

CONCLUSION

This brings me to the culminating argument of my thesis, which is the notion of silencing and ellipsis as a defining characteristic of working-class texts, in the same way as it has been identified as a primary feature of feminist and post-colonial writing. In Gibbon's Quair, the figure of Chris, marginalised by gender, colonisation and class, provides a particularly powerful example of this, and although it is not always possible to distinguish between the different kinds of marginalisation, in this conclusion I want to place the issues of silencing and ellipsis into the context of working-class writing.

The pressure of silencing affects working-class texts in a number of ways. The first and most straightforward way, easily identifiable in the autobiographies is the presence of secret experience - facts about the author's life deemed unacceptable to the bourgeois world, about which the author has therefore kept silent much of his/her life. In the autobiography of Emma Smith, (1894) for instance, the author mentions the details of her background for the first time in her life.[1] She was one of twenty-three children of a Cornish miner and her mother was also her sister. When very young she ran away from home and travelled the

1. For a fuller account see Gagnier, R., "The Literary Standard, Working-class Lifewriting and Gender", in Textual Practice, Vol.3 No.1, (1989), p.50 onwards

country with a hurdy-gurdy man and a sword-swallower, both of whom were having sex with her. At the age of eleven she ran away again and ended up in a penitentiary for prostitutes where she lived throughout her teenage years and was taught to read and write. She was also taught that she must never mention the details of her former history to anyone in order to get a job and a place in society. From the penitentiary she was given as servant to a vicar, and, in the interests of having two servants for one wage, he arranged her marriage to his gardener. Her adult life and marriage were marked by profound depressions and two suicide attempts, to which her doctor's response was to tell her to involve herself more with her family.

This kind of silencing is a common theme of working-class autobiography. In James Burns's Autobiography of a Beggar Boy (1855) for instance, he mentions that as a child he ceased entirely to confide in others, (p.47) and in Life As We Have Known It, (1930), a collection of texts written by women involved in the co-operative movement, most of the writers acknowledge experience of which they were not allowed to speak. Harriet Kidd, for example, raped by her employer, maintains a 22 year silence, bringing up her child in absolute secrecy, and Mrs. Layton does not tell her mistress of her fiance's attempted rape. In both these cases silence protects the powerful; in the first case from social retribution and in the second from the knowledge the middle class women

does not want - that of her common sexual vulnerability with her working-class servant. The subjectivity of the working-class woman is therefore powerfully articulated in terms of powerlessness and repression, and the repression, or experience of which she cannot speak, is defined and constituted by the repressed awareness of the ruling classes, which becomes her internalised, subjective awareness. This one fact has many repercussions for the kinds of images of self these women construct. Throughout Life As We Have Known It positive, acceptable emotions are emphasised and others excluded. Mrs. Layton, for instance, dwells on her pride in her little brother whilst glossing over her feelings on losing her own baby, failing her midwifery exams or being involved in her mother's gin addiction.[2] In such cases the silence is both instituted by and protective of the bourgeois moral code and notions of gender.

In the fiction the process of silencing manifests itself as a highly selective presentation of working-class life in which the sexual abuse of children, for instance, does not feature, and in which Harry, in Love on the Dole (1933) can share a bed with his beautiful sister Sally without experiencing sexual feelings for her (in Cwmardy the sexual feelings of a boy for the sister whose bed he shares are acknowledged). Also the key characters in working-class fiction have no platform from

2. Mrs. Layton, "Memories of Seventy Years", in ed. Margaret Llewelyn Davies, (1984), Life As We Have Known It, Virago, pp.1-55

which to speak. "Oh what's the use of talking Sal" as Larry says in Love on the Dole "It's...wanting decent things and knowing they'll never be yours that hurts. Aw, but what am I talking about..."[3]. Larry experiences the deep futility of wanting things to be different, and his sense of powerlessness makes him retreat into silence. Like Owen in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists the main platform from which Larry can speak is a political one, though this is insecure and rarely appreciated by his audience. The political discourse available is neither the language of their workmates nor an acceptable middle class code, and in each case it serves to intensify isolation. Nonetheless it is a form of discourse available to some of the male characters, almost as a substitute for the direct exploration of subjective feeling, which allows them to place feelings of injury and powerlessness into a social rather than a less acceptable, personal context, and to speak on the behalf of others assuming a shared experience. The female characters in the texts are less frequently politicised and therefore more thoroughly silenced; generally because of the gap between their own experience and notions of what is acceptable for women to express. It might be said that the bourgeois code of gender places women of the working class in an automatically illicit or disreputable position from which it is impossible to speak. Frequently because of this

3. Greenwood, W., (1987), Love on the Dole, Penguin, p.152

the heroine is placed in a position of tragic isolation which may culminate in her death. This is both romantic convention and an implicit acknowledgement that to be severed from the context of social relations is to cease to exist. Amongst the heroines who suffer silencing either because of inadmissible experience or social isolation or both, are Chris in A Scots Quair, Sally in Love on the Dole, Norah in Children of the Dead End and the unnamed heroine of A Manchester Shirtmaker (John Law/Margaret Harkness 1889).

It is true to say that in the case of both male and female characters a deep silence surrounds personal experience and this accounts for the importance of political discourse either in the speech of male characters or in the narrative. If a character is unable to speak the narrator may speak for him, or at least give political point to his silence. There is a different relationship in working-class fiction between silence and articulation from that generally found in bourgeois fiction. As Alan Sillitoe has said "emotions have to be delineated in the minds of people who are not normally prone to describing them"[4] and this may result in disjunctures in the narrative, when thought is transcribed into standard English but speech remains in dialect for instance. This particular form of disjuncture has been described as awkward by Roy Johnson

4. Sillitoe, A., in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p.ix

with reference to Love on the Dole, [5] whereas Roger Webster notes that this is one way in which the text "questions its own realism" and signifies entrapment in a bourgeois linguistic code whilst reflecting the inconsistencies and divisions in both the literary and social processes. [6] This 'entrapment' in standard English and the constant awareness of the bourgeois reader with whom the worker writer cannot assume shared experience results in the most profound silencing of all, in narrative ruptures and uncertainties, overcome in Grassic Gibbon's case by the device of the 'speak'.

One of the consequences of having no position from which to speak within the symbolic order may be the fact that there is no sharp dividing line between autobiography, diary, fiction and other kinds of prose. This is a feature common to both working-class and women's writing. When language does not express your reality, or in some way negates it, then you are already speaking from a fictional position. This may be one reason why different narrative modes are employed in the autobiographies, including folk-tale, or a variety of magic realism, and why a fictionalised Scottish history is presented in the proem and prologue of the Quair. So although Graham Holderness has said that the first task of a proletarian writer is to "demystify the mythological

5. Johnson, R., "The Proletarian Novel", in Literature and History, no.2, (Oct. 1975)

6. Webster, R., "Love on the Dole and the Aesthetic of Contradiction", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984) p.53

vision " found in the works of such writers as Zola[7] it may be the case that the writer feels his or her own identity to be deeply bound up with the fictionality of representation, so that it is therefore valid for him/her to explore his or her own fictionality in language, and the quality of myth which inevitably surrounds the marginalised.

Silencing therefore has effects not only upon the narrative and the representation of speech, but also upon the construction of identity. It is intimately connected to the awareness of inconsistencies and divisions within the individual as well as society. The construction of a stable ego, or even the illusion of a stable ego, depends on the ability to communicate, to articulate the self through language and to construct a sense of self through social relations. Being deprived of social space and any outlet of communication generates an awareness of the instability of the ego, and this is expressed in both the autobiographies and the fiction. Here is an extract from James Burns's autobiography:-

Amid the universal transformation of things in the moral and physical world, my own condition has been tossed so in the rough blanket of fate, that my identity at any time a reality, must have been one that few could venture to swear to.[8]

7. Holderness, G., "Miners and the Novel: From Bourgeois to Proletarian Fiction", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984),
 8. Burns, J., "Autobiography of a Beggar Boy", in Gagnier, R., "The Literary Standard, Working-class Lifewriting and Gender", in Textual Studies, vol.3 no.1, (1989), p.48

and this extract is from Patrick MacGill's Children of the Dead End:-

the heat of a good fire after a hard day's work caused me to feel happier, hunger made me sour, a good meal made me cheerful. One day I was fit for any work; the next day I was lazy and heedless, and at times I so little resembled myself that I might be taken for a man of entirely opposite character.[9]

In both the novels and the autobiographies silencing is firmly linked to social and economic deprivation, access to language and to an audience being granted to those with social power, and both factors are linked to the instability of the ego. It is this complex web of associations which requires fictional expression in a suitable narrative.

As far as the construction of identity is concerned, political involvement may serve as a kind of framework around which a sense of self is built. In Life As We Have Known It for instance, the writers frequently identify themselves as Guildswomen and the Guild gives purpose and shape to a sense of self previously defined only by oppression, becoming the focus of an 'I' which is constituted by awareness of resistance to oppression. In novels such as The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists the economic factor serves as a framework for the construction of identity - the more economically powerful

9. MacGill, P., (1914), p.252

a character the more caricatured he is in the text. In both novels and autobiographies therefore, economic and political factors tend to replace subjective experience, or are portrayed as constituting subjective experience.

The process of silencing applies to a whole class of people and awareness of this is one of the factors which requires representations of the collectivity - a feature of working-class texts which is also said to be characteristic of minority discourse. It is the collectivity, not merely the individual, which requires a voice and this naturally has implications for the construction of character and the kind of voice a character is given. It is probably the most pressing reason why semi-allegorical, representative types are chosen. Thus Sid Chaplin's work has been described as the "effort to give the people a voice"[10] and Tressell's mode of characterisation as the dissolution of individual identity into the representative.[11] In the case of the Quair, of course, the device of the 'speak' ensures that the collectivity is represented.

An important part of the process of silencing occurs during the actual transcription of experience into written text. As Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn have said of women's writing, the critic cannot assume that women's experience is directly available in texts written

10. in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p.viii

11. Miles, P., "The Painter's Bible and the British Workman", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p.9

by women, nor that language is a transparent medium reflecting a pre-existent, objective reality. This leaves unquestioned the view of "the text as the transmitter of authentic human experience" rather than a signifying system which inscribes ideology. [12] If we view language in the latter way we have to confront the problem of how to approach texts written by people with less formal education than most middle class writers, since to manipulate such a signifying system into reflecting ideology other than that which is already inscribed within it requires considerable expertise. In his article "Individuality and Characterisation in the Modernist Novel" Jeremy Hawthorn writes:-

people with no formal education...cannot project themselves into text or into situations not based on immediate personal experience, or scrutinise themselves from the outside.[13]

This may be going too far, or not far enough, in that to write of the self in any kind of text including autobiography requires an imaginative projection, and it is patronising to assume that the worker writer is less equipped to do this. However, traditionally it has been assumed that the less literate are more likely to stand in a one-to-one relationship with "truth" or "reality" and this assumption must be questioned. If the criteria of experience are themselves changed by the use of

12. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., "Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Women", in eds. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., (1985), p.25

13. in eds. Jefferson, D. and Martin, G., (1982), p.46

language, which involves at some level an absorption of patriarchal or bourgeois values, then from the moment of utterance the speaker/writer is alienated from his or her own reality. This creates special problems for the critic who may not want to assume that the transcribed experience is actually false. It is possible however, to be alert to the discourses which constitute the text, as feminist critics have suggested, not only in terms of genre, but also (to use Bakhtin's terminology) in terms of the ways in which language is stratified into different dialects and idiolects, one of the key aspects of heteroglossia. In Bakhtin's concept there is opposition and struggle at the heart of language and "our development as individuals is prosecuted as a gradual appropriation of a specific mix of discourses." [14] In working-class fiction the main conflict is between working-class and middle class dialects. Representations vary greatly from one text to another, but in most this conflict can be seen to be central, and both narrative and character are "internally dialogised" around it. Again Gibbon's Quair may be seen to be a particularly good example of this. The simplest consequence of this conflict is the omission of what it is not polite to say, as I have already noted. This is also a feature of women's texts. But perhaps the most complex consequences are to be found in the portrayals of character as internally divided and unstable. Judith Kegan Gardiner has said that "women writers never felt the unified self

14. Bakhtin, M.M., (1981), p.viii

to be a female self"[15] and this may also be applied to working-class texts. The critic needs to be alert to the contradictions and ruptures rather than the unifying themes.

One of the most obvious contradictions is the gap between what is and what should be, as the writer presents it, or, as Regenia Gagnier describes it, the "cost of bourgeois ideology for people who could not live bourgeois lives "[16]. The gap between ideology and lived experience leads, as Gagnier suggests, to various forms of self hatred and to a disintegration of both narrative structures and images of self. In the autobiographies, for instance, working-class writers attempt to adopt middle class narratives of self, moulded on the classic realist autobiographies, which tend towards progressive, developmental narratives of self, moving from childhood and family life through education to a profession and marriage. Gagnier points out that in working-class narratives the concepts of childhood and family are problematic if the child was born in a workhouse and began work at eight, yet no real alternative narrative strategies are readily available. There is only the profound awareness of inadequacy or lack, the tendency to apologise or to over-compensate by explanation which creates awkward ruptures in the narrative. Our language contains few words which imply that society is

15. Gardiner, J.K., "Mind Mother, Psychoanalysis and Feminism", in eds. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., (1985), p.115

16. Gagnier, R., (1989), p.46

responsible for the development of the individual, thus the gap between the social ideal and working-class experience is translated through language into a sense of personal rather than social guilt, inadequacy or despair. This is evident in both the autobiographies and the fiction. Political discourse therefore, although so many critics have labelled it as awkward or intrusive, becomes a means of linguistic resistance, translating the personal into a social context. Typically, in both novels and autobiographies, there is a movement between representations of working-class and middle class dialects and political discourse and the exact ways in which a writer combines these elements is an interesting subject for critical study. They may all be shown to be in conflict, for instance, as in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists in which the result is a radically destabilised, conflicting narrative.

There has never been any fixed or generally accepted way of representing working-class language, dialects and the idiolects of labour, and historically the question of representation is a fraught one. As P.J.Keating has noted, there have been major problems with the phonetic representation of working-class speech.[17] There is a long tradition in literature of using it to comic effect and to denote inferior social status rather than accurate regional or class differences. This is just one of the major difficulties caused by the relationship of the

17. Keating, P.J., (1971), p.246

working-class novel to the traditional literary canon. The situation is most comparable, from a linguistic point of view, to the relationship between post-colonial literature and the 'great tradition'. It produces the same kind of alienation of vision and crisis in self-image as that noted by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in The Empire Writes Back[18].

According to these critics, the "gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it" generates a "particular kind of double vision not available to uncolonised indigenes[19] This vision is one in which "identity is constituted by difference, intimately bound up in love or hate or both with a metropolis which exercises its hegemony over the immediate cultural world of the post-colonial." [20] I suggest, however, that the relationship between working-class and bourgeois fiction generates parallel effects as far as the construction of images of place and self are concerned. The bourgeois tradition has imposed a kind of cultural imperialism on the working-class writer which is responsible for some of the major problems he/she faces when writing. Outstanding amongst these is the problem of the way in which working-class experience has been represented in bourgeois fiction. In The Working-classes

18. Ashcroft, B., Tiffin, H. and Griffiths, G., (1989), The Empire Writes Back, Routledge, p.9

19. Ibid., p.26

20. Ibid., p.26

in Victorian Fiction P.J.Keating lists the most common stereotypes of the working-classes found in nineteenth century fiction - the "rough diamond", the debased or criminal type, the drunkard, the intellectual and the respectable poor, each of which, he says, "approach caricature".[21] There is no attempt, he says, to present the workers as normal human beings, instead there is a "coterie of grotesques".[22] These types also appear regularly in working-class fiction, and it is an interesting critical question, whether they are used to undermine or subvert the stereotypes, or whether they are inevitably there because the worker writer cannot think himself outside the paradigm created for him by bourgeois literature. Fictional representations inevitably become bound up with the writer's own sense of identity and with what he feels he can represent in literature. They become part of the way he learns to see his own culture as well as that which he wishes to resist. This is one aspect of the "social and psychological double bind" noted by Graham Holderness[23] which complicates the writer's attempts to undermine or displace the commonly held precepts of bourgeois fiction - that drink causes poverty, for instance, or that the domestic realm and family feeling are sacred, however troubled, as the fundamental unit on which society is founded, or that charity is the ultimate good, or that the workers as a

21. Keating, P.J., (1971), p.7

22. Ibid., p.45

23. Holderness, G., "Miners and the Novel: From Bourgeois to Proletarian Fiction", in ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p.26

mass force are threatening. The attempt to repudiate such notions leads to some of the bitterest polemic in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists, but in fact it is possible that without polemic what is written by the worker writer would be consistently misconstrued, because of the interpretative paradigm created by bourgeois fiction and the bourgeois readership. A worker who drinks might always be seen as self-indulgent rather than oppressed, for instance. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have noted:-

In the slum the bourgeois spectator surveyed and classified his own antithesis; improvident, not domestic, indifferent to marriage, irreligious, uncleanly and marginal to the forces of production.[24]

They point out how the representation of filth, in particular, slides between "social, moral and psychic domains"[25] cleanliness being equated with Christian values and all forms of rebellion with moral depravity, which has its roots in a physical avidity for sensual gratification. In general the working-classes were thought to be characterised by a greater development of the animal over the intellectual or moral nature of man. Stallybrass and White argue that, although in bourgeois fiction about the working-class "the bourgeois subject is positioned as the neutral observer of self-willed degradation"[26] in fact observations produced by this

24. Stallybrass, P. and White, A., (1986), The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, Methuen, p.128

25. Ibid., p.130

26. Ibid., p.133

kind of surveillance or one-way gaze are very much conditioned by the "symbolic discourse of the bourgeoisie" which links such concepts as disease, poverty, sexuality and blasphemy.[27] "Control of the boundaries of the body", they suggest, "secured an identity which was constantly played out in terms of class difference"[28] lack of control being ascribed to the working class. This ideology of control has other consequences in literature in that the bourgeois identity is achieved "over and against all others" - particularly at the expense of the collective.

The implications of this for working-class literature have hardly as yet been examined. And the question of how the worker writer is to construct an alternative "symbolic discourse" which will liberate his text from the prevailing paradigm, whilst working with a language which inscribes bourgeois ideology into such concepts as childhood, home, family, etc, has been virtually ignored. How, for instance, is it possible to create images of the powerless self that will not be interpreted as weakness or self-indulgence in the represented character when working with a language in which notions of autonomy, independence and control are so deeply embedded that in sentence structure the personal pronoun is always followed by the verb or verb phrase? Inevitably the worker writer sees himself and

27. Ibid., p.167

28. Ibid., p.187

his community with a double focus, imposed by both traditional literature and by the values embedded within language itself. Catherine Mackinnon has said of women's' writing that "woman must continually watch herself; men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at,"[29]. This is a fair summary of the situation of the worker writer, who must always observe himself and his experience through a bourgeois lens. As in post-colonial literature this "double vision" ensures that monolithic perceptions are less likely.[30] Also as Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths have pointed out, a "species of allegory arises from the language/place disjunction".[31] The origin of allegory in working-class literature may well be the disjuncture between different linguistic modes of representation available and images of self.

A full exploration of the implications of this would require a fully materialist theory of language - one which takes into account Marx's contention that the binary divisions in language (later noted by such theorists as Saussure and Derrida) have their origin in the alienation of labour[32] as well as the theories of Foucault, who believed that all discourse is a means to

29. Mackinnon, C., in de Lauretis, T., "Eccentric Subjects, Women and Historical Consciousness", in Feminist Studies, Vol.16 no.1, (1990), p.119

30. Ashcroft, B., Tiffin, H. and Griffiths, G., (1989), p.37

31. Ibid, p.28

32. Marx - Early Writings, the economic and philosophical manuscripts, (1974), Penguin, p.357

power, and that discourse is the central human activity.[33] Discourses pre-exist the subjective reality of the individual and are produced from a power struggle in which madness, criminality and perversity are defined in relation to sanity, or control. And, as Althusser has said, all discursive formations are materially linked to state apparatuses, religious, legal, educational etc.[34] so that there is a fundamental link between language, and the superstructure, and the material relations of production. This link needs to be explored further before the relationship between the working-class subject and the images he constructs of identity and place etc. can be fully understood.

Various critics have highlighted different problems as being the major challenge faced by the working-class writer. Alan Sillitoe, for instance, has noted that "emotions have to be delineated in the minds of people who are not usually prone to describing them"[35] whilst Peter Miles focusses on the problem of integrating the discourse of persuasion into a text[36] and Graham Holderness mentions the difficulty of differentiating between the "real world" and the experience of the unemployed, suggesting that it is the writer's task to

33. Selden, R., (1985), p. 100

34. Ibid., p.76

35. ed. Hawthorn, J., (1984), p.ix

36. Miles, P., "The Painter's Bible and the British Workman: Robert Tressell's Literary Activism", in Ibid., p.6

convey not only poverty but extreme alienation.[37] Many critics have highlighted the problem of finding an appropriate language or narrative voice, and also the problem of writing without benefit of a tradition or knowledge of previous writers (see e.g. Eagleton, M. and Pierce, D. (1979) Attitudes to Class in the English Novel London: Thames and Hudson p.81) so that the main referent is always the bourgeois tradition and the bourgeois reader. Whereas the middle class writer relies to some extent upon the shared values of the reader, the working-class writer cannot do this. There is the problem I have already touched upon, that of resisting and subverting the existing stereotypes of the working class in fiction and creating new images, and the more nebulous issue of what Klaus has called the "reproduction of a proletarian mode of consciousness".[38] Other critics such as Bakhtin or Hawthorn, have emphasised the problem of portraying the collectivity, and Martha Vicinus questions whether it is possible to write revolutionary fiction in the traditional form of the novel.[39]

In "Tolstoy and the development of Realism" George Lukács notes that realist literature normally reflects human beings in action, but the working-class writer has the problem of portraying character in a state of

37. Holderness, G., "Miners and the Novel: From Bourgeois to Proletarian Fiction", Ibid., p.26

38. Klaus, H.G., "Socialist Fiction in the 1930's", in ed. Lucas J., (1978), p.14

39. Vicinus, M., "Chartism and the Development of a Class Based Literature", in Klaus, H.G., (1982), p.22

powerlessness.[40] And historically of course, there have been all the problems associated with patronage.

More problems than these have been noted, in fact the list is apparently endless. But it seems to me that they all fall within the two poles of the same paradigm, summed up in the following two quotations:

History seen from above and history seen from below are irreconcilably different, and consequently impose radically different perspectives.[41]

and

A bourgeois hegemony is secured not via the obliteration of working class culture, but via its articulation to bourgeois culture and ideology so that, in being associated with and expressed in the forms of the latter, its political affiliations are altered in the process.[42]

Strung between these two poles, working-class literature would seem to be caught in an unalterable "social and psychological 'double bind'[43] its writers experiencing a different vision of life which they cannot communicate without altering it in the process. Seen in this way, it would seem as though the whole of working-class literature is a kind of ellipsis in itself, and it

40. Lukács, G., in ed. Craig D., (1975), p.338

41. Stallybrass, P. and White, A., (1986), p.4

42. Bennett, T., "Introduction: popular culture and 'the turn to Gramsci'", in eds. Bennett, T., Mercer, C. and Wollacott, J., (1986), Popular Culture and Social Relations, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, pp. xiv-xv

43. Holderness, G., in ed. Hawthorn, J., 1984, p.6

is hard to see any hope for it, which of course is the view traditionally endorsed by literary critics.

In order to develop a more constructive approach the critic must avoid the trap described by Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn in their article, "Feminist Scholarship":-

In their first efforts to incorporate women into history, historians concerned themselves with exceptional women. Gerda Lerner describes these initial stages as 'compensatory' and 'contributory' history - attempts to compensate for what has been missing and to note women's contributions. But both these stages defined achievement according to the standards of the male, public world, and, appending women to history as it has been defined, left unchallenged the existing paradigm.[44]

They also quote Showalter on the necessity of establishing "the continuity of the female tradition from decade to decade, rather than from Great Woman to Great Woman." [45]

The history of working-class literature has hardly as yet been investigated by traditional criticism, but it is certainly true that critics have tended to single out one or two "exceptional" authors, who, like the 'Great Women' are taken out of their context and therefore burdened with something of the quality of freaks. Gibbon is one such author. He is one of the 'Great Proletarians' apparently springing from nowhere, from the

44. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., "Feminist Scholarship", in eds. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., (1985), p.13

45. Ibid., p. 24

anonymous mass. This mode of criticism is, I believe, based upon a fundamental misapprehension about the role of the critic of working-class literature, summed up in this second quotation from Popular Culture and Social Relations:

...many socialists rummaged through popular culture in search of the authentic voice of the working class, as if this could exist in some pure form, preserved and nurtured in a recess immune to the socially preponderant forms of cultural production in a capitalist society.[46]

This seems to me to be an accurate description of the 1930's project - hunting out the proletarian writer and the new proletarian realism; imposing ideas of what this should be like upon existing texts and singling out a few writers as embodying it in their work. Critics since then, disillusioned with attempts at finding this pure "essence of proletarianism" seem to have largely come to the conclusion that little in working-class literature is worth the attention of the literary critic - it is all a failed imitation of better writing already in the literary canon. The mistake is in the initial premise, that an essential working-class culture can be distilled out of the great bourgeois tradition. In this thesis I have attempted to consider working-class writing as the site of conflicting discourses, which is the way in which, I believe, culture in general works.

46. Bennett, T., in eds. Bennett, T., Mercer, C. and Woollacott, J., (1986), p.xii

It is quite true to say that, to some extent, working-class literature has unavoidably been "articulated" to bourgeois culture. The writers have not, in general, taken cultural inspiration from one another (with rare exceptions such as Walter Greenwood, who was evidently influenced by Tressell). Who of the later generation of working-class writers of the 1950's and 60's, for instance, could be said to follow on from Gibbon? In this sense, Gibbon's artistic innovations have been lost.

These later writers, Sillitoe, Storey, Hines, Braine etc., all seem to participate in the general post-war reaction against experimental writing, though particularly in A Kestrel for a Knave there are echoes of symbolist and expressionist modes of representation. Gibbon, however, seems to have been as influenced by stream of consciousness writing as by the social realism of the 1930's, and his innovation was to give it a collective voice. James Hanley's work has been described as expressionist[47] and earlier writers were influenced by utopian literature and romantic melodrama, as I have noted. In Dockers and Detectives Ken Worpole explores the idea that the 'gap' in working-class writing which occurred between the 1930's and 1950's (I use the term gap loosely since there undoubtedly were worker writers writing at the time, if not publishing) may be filled by the American detective novel with its tough vernacular

47. Worpole, K., (1983), p.23

style and setting in the underworld of American society. He suggests that the writers of the 1950's were more influenced by this genre than by any British precursors. It might be said, in fact, that whilst none of the major trends in literature have been initiated by working-class writers, because of their cultural and economic marginalisation, they have participated in all of them. This, of course, is another reason why the term 'realism' as applied to working-class writing is both narrow and misleading.

One of the major factors in cultural marginalisation is of course the politics and economics of publishing, now as ever a field in which bourgeois hegemony is powerfully secured. The relationship between the worker writer and the world of publishing is a fascinating area of study in itself; the alternating periods of rejection and patronage, the influence of publishers on work both before and after it is submitted for publication, the kinds of editing made before publication, and what happens to both writing and writers in the periods when publishers do not want to know - arguably the most effective kind of silencing of all. In the current period, for instance, whilst one or two larger firms have shown an interest in the occasional novel based around working-class life, most working-class writing is printed in the small press and goes on in the groups and workshops organised by the National Federation of Worker Writers. Some of these groups have collected and

published their own material, notably Commonword in Manchester and Centerprise in London, but none of them is profit-making, and whilst attempts have been made towards joint ventures with larger firms such as Pandora or Virago, in order to secure a wider audience for writers, negotiations have repeatedly fallen through. Whilst, then, it is probably true to say that there has never been so much working-class writing available, the gap between the written work and the dominant means of production and distribution remains as wide as ever. Major developments in working-class writing are unlikely to be recognised or to have any influence whilst the main publishing houses are so resistant to the whole idea of working-class literature. Historically, with rare exceptions, the worker writer has had to bide his time (sometimes until after death) until there is a phase of receptivity in the market, or to publish privately; and the situation remains unchanged today. In a recent edition of City Life, for instance, there is this review:-

"Vanity publishing" is a cruel phrase, vanity being a sin and all. Is it a sin to publish your own book? Well if you are taking control of the means of production, distribution and exchange, no: if because your book is rubbish and no one else will print it, arguably. Michael Rowe, a casemaker in Newton Heath, has set up Bubbling Over Books to publish his novel Canals and Meaning after two years of rejection from publishing houses. The gist of the rejection slips was: 'Interesting and well written, but there's no market for proletarian fiction these days.' They were being kind: Canals and Meaning displays all the faults of the first time novelist who can't write. It is too autobiographical, it is badly written, lacks style, plot direction and is utterly

tedious...He's printed a thousand copies: I hope he has a lot of friends.{48]

For various reasons then, both cultural and economic, the worker writer has absorbed prevailing cultural trends, and articulated himself to them to some extent, and this in itself is an important contributory factor to the process of silencing. Without a strong economic and cultural identity of his own, the worker writer has taken on and reconstructed different types of generic identity in text, and there may be ways in which the generic forms available are not appropriate; which presuppose the construction of identity in certain constraining ways, for example, or which allow certain aspects of identity expression whilst silencing others. An example of this is the model of the respectable heroine of nineteenth-century fiction, which evidently influenced the women writing their life stories in Life As We Have Known It. In this sense, therefore, the process of articulation to bourgeois culture has been both necessitated by and productive of silencing, and the critic must be aware of this when assessing any working-class text. Otherwise his or her assessment is bound to be both negative and reductive, perpetuating the kind of destructive effect described by Greene and Kahn in "Feminist Scholarship":

Feminist writers find that the critical tradition reinforces...images of character and behaviour that encourage women to accept their subordination, either ignoring or degrading

women, or praising them for such virtues as obedience, meekness and humility.[49]

The parallel is obvious. Those critics who reject the political discourse represented in working-class fiction, or its use of types, for instance, are failing to acknowledge the effects of silencing as a cultural phenomenon, and are therefore still thinking within the paradigm of bourgeois ideology, which has the effect of negating the work of the worker writer. Characters who are more cynical than political, and most prone to existential despair, receive praise for being more fully individualised. And in these ways, therefore, it might be said that along with the publisher the critic has had a large role to play in the silencing of the worker writer.

In this thesis I have tried to assess the reasons why working-class writing has been evaluated "out of the game" and my conclusion is that this is because it is largely untheorised. I have tried to provide a theoretical framework for the critical appreciation of working-class texts, using primarily Lewis Grassic Gibbon's A Scots Quair as a basis for the exploration of my theories which are drawn from the critical precedents of feminist, post-colonial and Marxist literary theories. Ultimately I have tended to focus less on the historical circumstances from which a text is produced than on its

49. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., "Feminist Scholarship", in eds. Greene, G. and Kahn, C., (1985), p.22

historical relationship to different cultural trends and on the modes of silencing this entails. I do, however, consider silencing to be a major part of the process of economic marginalisation, which has its roots in the material forces and conflicts of society as described by Marx. The working-class writer has much to offer the literary critic in the way of illuminating these forces and conflicts, as Ken Worpole has said:

Working-class writing in all its forms offers an invaluable range of understanding of the dominant forms of oppression and division, and is an integral part of an active and participatory working-class politics.[50]

Or, in the words of Teresa de Lauretis:

only the point of view of the oppressed class can reveal the true social relations and lead to change.[51]

It may be that this 'point of view' can only be made available when considerations of silencing are taken into account and when there is a much more fully worked out theoretical approach to the texts; one which considers not merely the ways in which they have been articulated to bourgeois culture, but what this entails in terms of its effects on the text; the silencing and ellipsis produced by the process of articulation which ultimately means that the texts cannot be mere reflections of bourgeois literature, but must remain forever tangential to the dominant cultural forms, or, to paraphrase Regenia

50. Worpole, K., (1983), p.23

51. de Lauretis, T., "Eccentric Subjects, Women and Historical Consciousness", Feminist Studies Vol. 16 no.1, (1990), p.120

Gagnier, they function as strategic and participatory articulations in the bourgeois power game.[52]

52. Gagnier, R., "The Literary Standard - Working-class Lifewriting and Gender", in Textual Practice Vol 3 no.1, (1989), p.40

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