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UNINHABITABLE PARADOXES? EXISTENTIALISM AND GENDER
REPRESENTATION IN THE FICTION OF WILLIAM McILVANNEY

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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06/00

This thesis has been composed solely by myself, and all the work it embodies has been done by me and has not been included in another thesis.

PAUL GIBSON 31st October 1997

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"Why McIlvanney?" This is a question which has constantly recurred during the writing of this thesis. Of all the major contemporary Scottish novelists, McIlvanney is the one subjected to the least serious critical analysis: added to that, I can think of no other writer in the past thirty years who has maintained a dialogue with Marxism from his earliest work to the present day; who has reinvigorated the detective genre with genuine moral purpose; who has interrogated assumptions about gender and class representation throughout his work; and who has arguably been the most successful author in the past thirty years in making the Scottish novel a *genuinely* popular and vital part of contemporary Scottish culture.

I have resisted the temptation to restrict my criticism of McIlvanney's work to his local context: as Keith Dixon has cogently remarked McIlvanney and his generation lends "contemporary Scottish literature with a specificity within both the British and European contexts" (1). McIlvanney's generation revolted against the nascent Renaissance consensus in insisting upon a wider perspective: as Gifford rightly remarks "by the late fifties and early sixties Scottish writing and fiction in particular had decided to repudiate all connections with a mythopoetic culture dedicated to Scottish spiritual regeneration" (2). McIlvanney belongs to a generation who were keen to "insist that they were not operating within Scottish fictional or even historical parameters, but instead drew from international writing" (3).

In terms of employing contemporary literary theory, I have been sparing in applying this to McIlvanney's fiction: while Lacan's theory of the Gaze provides a much-needed correction to Sartre's discussion of the Look, feminist theory has little to offer McIlvanney in this context. The theories of Cixous and Kristeva are primarily concerned with the relationship with the mother, and the contestation of the division between Imaginary and Symbolic orders. McIlvanney's interests do not lie in this direction and so any confrontation between the labial discourse of these theorists and McIlvanney's empiricist writing would be like, to use McIlvanney's own phrase (*Docherty* 284) 'monologues

set in silence'. Consequently, I have discussed McIlvanney's representation of gender in an existentialist context, believing this to be a more productive approach.

The work of William McIlvanney can be examined in a variety of contexts: indeed, it is the fact that one can view him as a post-Renaissance writer or one working squarely within the high realist tradition that lies at the heart of much critical confusion regarding his work. In this thesis, rather than attempt to find a niche for McIlvanney within contemporary critical accounts of Scottish literature, I take McIlvanney at his own word and instead critically evaluate his work in the light of the literary and philosophical preoccupations which have characterised his career. Far from claiming that my evaluation of McIlvanney as a writer in the European existentialist tradition is in some sense a master code which trumps his various designations as Scottish, realist, post-war etc., I present this thesis as an addition to the critical corpus and, perhaps, as a provocation to those who have disregarded McIlvanney's work too easily.

McIlvanney, then, finds himself in a critical context which disregards the tradition with which he identifies himself: he will no doubt find comfort from the fact that Kierkegaard's work has been viewed in a similar light, as Kirmmse notes:

There can be no question, then, that SK saw 1848 as one of the major turning points of history. Only by neglecting social and historical elements has Kierkegaard scholarship missed the point that his entire authorship is informed and guided by his vision of politics and society and that the concluding, polemical phase of his authorship must be understood as an expression of the requirements of that vision in the post-1848 world. (4)

As a writer committed to exploring the changing context of working-class experience in Scotland this century, McIlvanney has similarly been a victim of a critical myopia which has refused to

interpret his narrative stance in terms of his political and moral commitments. This thesis aims to interrogate these commitments on his own territory.

I confess to a narrative disjunction between McIlvanney's work and this thesis's consideration of it: McIlvanney has suffered for too long from the fact he is regarded as a populist writer. The discussion of his work in the context of existentialist philosophy may be initially difficult to take on board, but I believe it allows us to look again at one of Scotland's most important postwar writers in a new and revealing light. Furthermore, I make no apology for the extensive quotation of his work I make in building my argument: in approaching these texts in such a manner I hope at least to ameliorate the narrative quentriiloquism which has characterised so much criticism. If the McIlvanney which emerges from this study disconcerts and disrupts conventional evaluations of his work, so much the better.

In his essay 'Metaphysics and the Novel', Merleau-Ponty states that 'the novelist's work always rests on two or three philosophical ideas . . . The function of the novelist is not to state these ideas thematically but to make them exist for us in the way that things exist' (5). The relationship between philosophy and the novel is integral to our understanding of post-war continental fiction—all the more so because many of the major writers were themselves philosophers. To take two examples: Camus, in his review of Sartre's *La Nausée*, insisted that 'a novel is never anything but a philosophy put into images' (6), while over forty years later Kundera defines the novel as 'the great prose form in which an author thoroughly explores, by means of experimental selves (characters), some great themes of existence' (7).

Such an overt concern with philosophy may appear, at first glance, to be alien to what have been traditionally considered to be the major themes of Scottish writing this century—working class representation, nationhood, and gender relations to name but a few. Yet I would argue that a concern with metaphysical themes has always been

inextricably linked with such issues, and that the work of such writers as Kierkegaard, Buber, Unamuno and Camus—which for the purpose of this thesis may be loosely described as existentialist¹ in content and style—has exerted a sustained and decisive influence upon Scottish literature this century. To cite a few brief examples: in *Lucky Poet* MacDiarmid paid tribute to the work of Kierkegaard and Buber (8), the playwright and novelist Tom Gallagher wrote a dissertation on Kierkegaard's writings, and Tom Leonard has evinced an interest in Buber's dialectic of I and Thou in *Between Man and Man* (9).

The purpose of this thesis is to explicate these central ideas of McIlvanney's fiction, arguing that McIlvanney's exploration of the negotiation between individual identity and freedom is one of the great achievements of contemporary Scottish fiction. The confusion which is a feature of critical comment on McIlvanney's work stems partly from a stereotyping of McIlvanney's development as a writer; for Glenda Norquay, for example, her McIlvanney is the writer of *Docherty*, whom she argues stands in opposition to the work of Kennaway, Sharp, Friel and Jenkins. Speaking of Sharp's John Moseby, she argues that the feeling of disaffection he epitomises

is clearly representative of a small group of novelists working within the 1950s and 1960s: the escape from circumstances is envisaged essentially in theological and philosophical terms. Four writers in particular share this obsession with the metaphysics of transcendence and liberation. James Kennaway, Alan Sharp, George Friel and Robin Jenkins, unlike contemporaries such as William McIlvanney and Archie Hind who are primarily concerned with the depiction of Scottish proletarian experience in their work, do not confine themselves to the social sphere of Scottish life; instead they explore what may be termed a cast of mind and the restrictions it creates

¹ I am well aware of the danger of categorizing writers who, by their own definitions, are unique in thought and expression, yet as the usage of 'existentialist' in this sense has proved useful and is widely accepted, the term is utilized throughout this thesis to describe certain metaphysical concerns and ways of thinking which are common to these writers.

when manifested in social morality'. (10)

Mcllvanney's work questions such uncritical definitions of 'working-class representation' and existential alienation as somehow mutually exclusive. To say that Mcllvanney is 'primarily concerned with the depiction of Scottish proletarian experience' overlooks the differences and style and emphasis that are to be found between *Docherty* and the Laidlaw novels. Furthermore, this too-easy categorization of Mcllvanney's work as confined to the 'social sphere of Scottish life' ignores the genuine convergence of Mcllvanney's concern with the labyrinthine complexities of human relationships we find in *A Gift From Nessus* and *Laidlaw* with the very similar interests of Kennaway in *The Bells of Shoreditch*. What I will argue in this thesis is that Mcllvanney, as much as any of the writers cited above, is 'obsessed with the metaphysics of transcendence', and that this interest manifests itself in a dialogue with the major themes of existential thought.

While Alan Bold recognizes the close relationship between Sharp, Hind and Mcllvanney, his designation of 'proletarian romanticism' remains too vague to be of use as an analytical concept:

The genre of proletarian romanticism has been one of the strongest influences on Scottish fiction for the last two decades. A typical novel in the genre usually threatens the reader with a realistic prelude then dissolves into vast stretches of affirmative lyricism and egotistical philosophising before ending on a note of heroic resignation. . . In three novels in particular, however, the genre rises above its inbuilt limitations and begins to come close to major areas of achievement. The novels are Alan Sharp's *A Green Tree in Gedde* (1965), Archie Hind's *The Dear Green Place* (1966) and William Mcllvanney's *Docherty* (1975). (11)

Without attempting to construct a possible relationship between existentialism and the Puritan imagination, it would be presumptuous

to narrowly define this concern with existential themes to be purely Scottish in character. David Storey, three years older than McIlvanney and, like him, a miner's son, pursues a variety of concerns in his fiction and dramatic works which directly parallel those of McIlvanney: the question of working-class representation, the individual's relation to transcendence and the problematic nature of social morality not being the least of these. I would argue that the influence of existentialism can be regarded to a large extent as a generational phenomenon: Storey, Sharp and McIlvanney published their first novels in the 1960s at a time when existentialism enjoyed a great vogue in Britain.

Whether one accepts Robert Crawford's judgment that compared to Kelman's work 'William McIlvanney's earlier west-of-Scotland writing seems embarrassingly purplish' (12) or shares Christopher Harvie's view that McIlvanney

was criticised for an over-allusive literary style, yet somehow this was true to the Scottish working-class predicament, what MacDiarmid had called 'a dream o' beauty dernin' yet/ Ahint its ugsome state'. In the 1980s MacIlvanney [sic] seemed to find his true voice as a documentarist of the human tragedies caused by Smithian market economics divorced from Smithian 'sympathy', and as a political writer and speaker of great moral power (13)

the fact remains that McIlvanney's contribution to the development of Scottish fiction has yet to be fully recognised, and I hope in this work to encourage the reassessment of one of Scotland's foremost contemporary writers.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I shall examine the major existentialist concerns of McIlvanney's fiction, and ground these within the context of major texts in the existentialist tradition. In chapter two I will develop the argument to examine the social context of

authenticity, which includes the problem of intersubjectivity and the search for moral legitimacy in the social sphere. The third chapter pursues these themes with reference to the complex negotiations of gender representation that are to be found in his work. In the fourth chapter I examine various character configurations to examine the criticism that McIlvanney's work is irredeemably patriarchal. While fully realizing the dangers implicit in any categorization of McIlvanney's fiction (categorization being the existentialist's *bête noire*), I shall argue in my final chapter that McIlvanney's work can be fruitfully considered in three groups.

The novels of tragic alienation (*Remedy Is None* and *A Gift From Nessus*) comprise McIlvanney's two earliest works which view the conflict between the individual and the social pessimistically. To some extent, they may be regarded as apprentice works, as McIlvanney attempts to find a distinctive voice to articulate his moral concerns. However, we must not disregard the genuine continuity exhibited between these early novels and his later work.

The novels of heroic realism (*Docherty* and *The Big Man*) consider forms of working-class rebellion at two critically important historical junctures. *Docherty* attempts to redeem from official history the struggles of a mining community crystallized in the story of a family in turn of the century Ayrshire. *The Big Man* returns to a community denuded of moral purpose by the brutal deindustrialization of the 1980s, and resolves the argument in *Docherty* between Mick's desire for revolution and Conn's humanist faith decisively in favour of humanism. Rejecting Marxism's interpretation of class struggle, McIlvanney instead builds on Camusian rebellion, centring moral authority firmly in the authentic individual.

The novels of irony (*Laidlaw*, *The Papers of Tony Veitch* and *Strange Loyalties*) take in the Laidlaw series. These novels synthesize the first group's concern with individual

alienation (Laidlaw as inner self) and the second group's focus on social legitimacy (Laidlaw as *polis*). The dominant trope of irony defers the texts' dissolution into heroism or tragedy, and can be classed as McIlvanney's most sustained achievement.

An academic work on such writers as Kierkegaard and Unamuno strikes one as an impertinence—and the same holds for the present thesis on McIlvanney. McIlvanney's disdain for pedantry and the letter that kills the spirit has not endeared him to those who earn a living by them. It is with fear and trembling, therefore, that I embark on this enterprise realizing, in Unamuno's words, that 'to go in search of philosophy in an author, pen in hand and copy paper before one's eyes, is not a loyal thing to do, not even half loyal' (14).

INTRODUCTION NOTES

- (1) Keith Dixon, ' "No fairies. No monsters. Just people" Resituating the work of William McIlvanney' in Susanne Hagermann (ed.) *Studies in Scottish Fiction 1945 to the Present*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996 p187.
- (2) Douglas Gifford, 'Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction' in Susanne Hagermann (ed.) *Studies in Scottish Fiction 1945 to the Present.*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 24.
- (3) *Ibid.* 24.
- (4) Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 410.
- (5) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Metaphysics and the Novel,' *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (New York: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 26.
- (6) Albert Camus, 'Review of *La Nausée*,' *Lyrical and Critical*, trans. Philip Thody, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967) 145.
- (7) Milan Kundera, 'Sixty-three Words,' *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher, (London: Faber, 1988) 142.
- (8) Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, (London: Jonathon Cape, 1972) 160 et seq.
- (9) Tom Leonard, 'On the Making of *Radical Renfrew*,' University of Glasgow, 27 Apr. 1992.
- (10) Glenda Norquay, 'Four Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s,' *The*

History of Scottish Literature Volume 4: Twentieth Century, ed. Cairns Craig (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1989) 259.

(11) Alan Bold, *Modern Scottish Literature*, (London: Longman, 1983) 233-4.

(12) Robert Crawford, 'Northern Exposure,' *Sunday Times* 17 Apr. 1994.

(13) Christopher Harvie, *Scotland & Nationalism. Scottish Society and Politics 1707-1994*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge 1994) 157-8.

(14) Miguel de Unamuno, *Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno* Volume III, *Our Lord Don Quixote: The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho with Related Essays*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967) 368.

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CHAPTER ONE

From *Remedy Is None* onwards, one of McIlvanney's recurring themes has been the exaltation of youth. In his work, youth is the lived embodiment of freedom: in being relatively free from past determination (specifically the determinations of employment and marriage) the young come closest to the existentialist ideal of self-production. In McIlvanney's first novel, ironically this realization arrives only when the protagonist has been put in prison. Charlie reflects on the potentiality of youth:

They weren't the finite, logical ambitions of maturity which, being founded on reason, can therefore be rationally disposed of when their impossibility has been acknowledged. They were the infinite ambitions of youth, those dim vistas of the future which the young see shining before them with ineffable hope and which cannot be called mirage until they have been travelled, those inarticulate arterial promises that have to be lived into discredit. . . There was a resurgence in him of that sharp sense of unlimited potential that surrounds the young like a miasma. So many things seemed to have waited for him to fulfil himself in them. . . He was to have watched so much grow and deepen around him, to learn living. . . to abide the gradual fulfilment of himself. The future was to have been the slow amassing of himself from many places, the formation in him of some great unknown identity from mysterious fragments. (*R*, 203-4)

It is significant that the middle-aged protagonists of such works as *A Gift From Nessus*, *Laidlaw* and *The Big Man* have an idealised view of youth as an Edenic glimpse of authenticity, much in the manner of Benjamin's *Gedachtnis*. Eddie Cameron felt that it 'must be nice to be like that, to be nobody in particular yet, with all your mistakes to make. That was what trapped you, made you what you were, narrowed the

permutations of your potential—your mistakes. Cameron felt his own mistakes like jailers beside him' (*GFN*, 13). The youthful counter-image to these reflections upon missed opportunity is provided by Harkness in *Laidlaw*, yet even here there is an atmosphere of nostalgia for times past:

He was twenty-six. That wasn't ninety. He rejected his father's sense of him as somebody who had made a final choice. He thought of the atmosphere of assumptions that had oppressed him in Mary's house yesterday. He wasn't ready to be defined. He remembered the months he had spent in Spain and France when he was twenty. . .It had been a good time, a seemingly endless ante-room to an infinite future. Standing in St. Andrew's Square, he got back the feeling he had had then. Everything was still possible for him. Meanwhile, he would hold his commitment to what he was doing lightly. (*L*, 68)

The form of individualism described in the above passage exists in tension with the essentialism of many of McIlvanney's characters, expressed in terms of a 'sense-of-themselves'. In *A Gift From Nessus* any notion of fixed identity is balanced against an even stronger horror of anonymity and objectification. The subject's fear of its determination by past empirical experience with its consequent idealization of undifferentiated youth is a theme which recurs throughout McIlvanney's fiction.

The existentialist ideology of individualism, relying as it does upon the supposition that only that which is uncreated is free, relies upon an erasure of individual history to secure that realm of freedom: the individual is posited as being born into the world entirely unconditioned, purely potential. The history of the individual becomes the tragedy where society's demands mean the compromise of this potential, and History (both of the society and the individual) is seen as the progressive alienation of the subject from his 'true self'. The necessity of asserting a

fixed identity against the cosmos is the rational consequence of positing the human as unconditioned being, as Laidlaw realizes:

My life was one terrible mess. Miguel de Unamuno had written something that applied to me, if I could think what it was. I read quite a lot of philosophy in a slightly frenetic way, like a man looking for the hacksaw that must be hidden somewhere, before the executioner comes. It was something about continuity. Unamuno says something like if a man loses his sense of his own continuity, he's had it. His bum's out the window. Sorry, Miguel, if I'm not quoting accurately. (SL, 9-10)

In his essay 'McIlvanney, masculinity, and Scottish literature', Jeremy Idle fundamentally misinterprets the significance of the intertextual nature of this passage, declaring 'there is something decidedly bogus about such defiant offhandedness' (1). This betrays a lack of understanding of the relation of this passage to its original source: in many ways, McIlvanney is the contemporary European writer closest in spirit to Unamuno. The passages alluded to in *The Tragic Sense of Life* reveal the direction of McIlvanney's interest:

That which determines a man, that which makes him one man, one and not another, the man he is and not the man he is not, is a principle of unity and a principle of continuity. (2)

Because for me the becoming other than I am, the breaking of the unity and continuity of my life, is to cease to be he who I am—that is to say, it is simply to cease to be. And that—no! Anything rather than that! (3)

Laidlaw is simply restating, in an immediate and personal context strongly evocative of Unamuno's text, the tragic opposition between the individual and the world he is alienated from. The stark choice is

between the dissolution of the subject in immediate experience, or reification of personality from potential to actuality, characterized by the mechanist trope so beloved of writers from Zola to Lawrence. Within the context of the novel, it is characteristic of Laidlaw that he should shield the reader from the intensity of this realization with some self-deprecating humour—in many ways typical of McIlvanney's own wariness of intellectual abstraction.

So prevalent is McIlvanney's sense of the tragic transmutation of potentiality into fact, that it defines and controls a number of key areas in his fiction, including the political significations of his work and his construction of gender relations. On the individual level, it locates the attrition of potentiality with age. Laidlaw feels this in his hunt for Tony Veitch; Veitch becomes a cipher for the lost potentiality of youth:

He stood among the complex and incompatible idealisms of youth and remembered having been there. Remembering that, he had the grace to be aware that he was alien. Middle-age was foreign country here. This was a shrine to youth, where compromise was like a profanation. (*PTV*, 102)

Laidlaw remembered his own discovery that his mind was there and knew the poignancy of possibilities felt in this kind of book-lined womb before career or circumstances yank you out. (*PTV*, 195)

It comes as no surprise to find a similar sentiment in Kierkegaard's *Journals*:

Our first youth is like a flower at dawn with a beautiful drop of dew in its cup which reflects all the surroundings in harmonious and melancholy terms. But soon the sun rises above the horizon and the dew-drop evaporates; with it vanishes life's dreams, and the

question then is whether man is able (to take another illustration from flowers)—with his own strength, like a nerium—to distil a drop which can subsist as the fruit of all his labours. (4)

The existentialist cannot help but regret the sacrifice of autonomy and potential society demands, and while the existentialist would refuse to recognize determinism in any ontological sense, they would be liable to attribute this seemingly inevitable attrition of potential to the effects of socialization. McIlvanney certainly seems to share this view:

In everyone it dies, this sense of their vast and mysterious significance. But then it is a gradual process. Time administers to us gradually increasing doses of the commonplace, purging us of our fancies, until at last we are immune to all but our more practical ambitions and desires. Our lives become practical and self-contained only by starts. Reality contains us intermittently, for slowly increasing spells, so that by the time we are finally interred in it, we have become conditioned to its narrowness and hardly notice the transition. Vague grandiose intentions co-exist for a time with more mundane necessities, and then are ousted by them. The wild improbable hopes that are entertained in youth are replaced by more immediate ambitions, the absence of one only being achieved by the presence of the other, so that change presupposes adjustment to it. (*R*, 204)

This contrast of the pathos of age's knowledge with youth's potential is to be found in almost all of McIlvanney's fiction. The general relation it serves to articulate is that the socially prescribed standards of success (measured in material form) are in no way commensurate with the genuine value of human existence. Youth stands as a reproach to the bad faith and compromise of ideals that in McIlvanney's fictive world inevitably accompany maturity. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the contrast between world-weary factory boss Bert Watson and idealistic

youth Duncan MacFarlane:

He stared at Duncan and envied him his eyes. He wondered where they were going, what they would see. He looked past Duncan wistfully, as if straining to hear something, perhaps an echo of that strange internal music of the young that promises so much. The moment passed and he was left feeling like the boy with the limp the Pied Piper left behind. In place of that lost elation all he had was self-awareness. He understood afresh how the responsibility of status could cripple your enjoyment. He was reminded of the price he paid for career and respectability, a constant drain on his spontaneity he hardly noticed any more, like the tax on tobacco. He saw himself as someone waving to life as it passed by. (*WW*, 19)

It cannot be overemphasized that this construction of the relationship between youth and age is specifically existentialist in character. Alongside the extolment of youth's potential there is a deep pathos for the past that is unique to the existentialist perspective. In a passage McIlvanney is undoubtedly familiar with, Kierkegaard explicates the parallel illusions of youth and age:

But what is ignored is the fact that there are essentially two forms of illusion: that of hope and that of recollection. The adolescent's illusion is that of hope, that of the adult recollection. But precisely because the adult suffers from this illusion, his conception of illusion itself is also the quite one-sided one that the only illusion is the illusion of hope. And that is understandable. What afflicts the adult is not so much the illusion of hope as, no doubt among other things, the grotesque illusion of looking down from some supposedly higher vantage-point, free from illusion, upon the illusions of the young. The young person is illuded: he hopes for the extraordinary both from life and from himself. While as far as

adult illusion is concerned, on the other hand, this is often found in the adult's recollection of youth. An older woman, who has supposedly left all illusion behind is often found to be fantastically illuded, as much as any young girl, in her own recollections of herself as a young girl. This *fuimus*, which we so often hear from older people, is just as great an illusion as the younger person's illusions of the future; they lie or invent, both of them. (5)

We return to Kierkegaard's definition of the inevitable guilt young and old alike face with respect to their actions:

The youth despairs over the future, as a *praesens in futuro*; there is something in the future he is not willing to take for his own, which means that he does not want to be himself. The adult despairs over the past as a *praesens in praeterito* which refuses to recede further into the past, for he is not so much in despair as to have succeeded in forgetting it completely. (6)

Kierkegaard correctly diagnoses the element of wish-fulfillment which colours all our images of the past and future: standing at the back of the existentialist interpretation is the constant awareness of human mortality, most fully thematicized in Heidegger's concept of *Sein-zum-Tode*: Being-towards-death. Such a consciousness is the product of what we may term existentialism's negative teleology. Within life, the subject is free, yet the awareness of death is the necessary precondition of authentic action—acting towards that authentic self which can never quite be grasped, completed. Death is both the promise of annihilation and the perspective from which we can authentically evaluate our lives. Such a consciousness finds its philosophical ancestry, of course, in Nietzsche: 'Die at the right time: thus Zarathustra teaches. . . .I commend to you my sort of death, voluntary death that comes to me because / wish it' (7).

This is the source likewise of Heidegger's Being-towards-death and

Camus' 'superior suicide': the latter doctrine providing a model for Scoular's authentic actions at the end of *The Big Man*. The consequent pathos for the lost Eden of full potential also functions as a direct correlation of the authenticity of Scoular's actions in *The Big Man*. Early in the novel, Scoular has fallen into bad faith by acknowledging the immutability of his environment: 'Whoever hasn't dreamt of uniqueness must have achieved it by that. Dan Scoular, when he was younger, had had his share of ridiculous dreams, those adolescent imaginings that thrive on impossibility till they overdose on it. But he had come quickly to understand how few his real choices were' (*TBM*, 65).

It is this sense of tragedy which makes Scoular accept the fight with Cutty Dawson. However, after Scoular makes his *acte gratuit*, he returns to the woods (reminiscent of Conn's relationship with the Bringan in *Docherty*) near his home and a confluence between youthful idealism, lack of definition and authentic being is suggested:

A lot of days of his boyhood had been spent in this place. It was as if he were back there. The place was liquid with darkness. Sounds happened with infinite suggestiveness around him. He sensed his way forward. Every step was a mystery. But he welcomed the strangeness, defined himself in relation to it. It was like rediscovering the excitement of boyhood. The strangeness of the place became the strangeness of himself. The unexplored possibilities around him became the unexplored possibilities within himself. (*TBM*, 246)

In *Strange Loyalties*, McIlvanney extends this intuition concerning the individual into a consideration of society and history. David Ewart reflects upon his visit to Scott Laidlaw's student flat in the Seventies: 'It's the feeling of beginnings. Beginnings are beautiful. Aren't they? It's the feeling that everything is possible. That night I felt the terrifying energy of a new generation. And I knew that I was part of it. I knew that everything

was possible' (SL, 115). This echoes Kierkegaard's observation that 'there is something seductive about all beginnings, because the subject is still free' (8). The destruction of the flat is symptomatic of the decay of potential and its consequent idealistic attitude on a number of levels: not only does this represent an event in the life of an individual, but is seen as indicative of a historical and existential degeneration:

'I wandered around there. I couldn't believe it. It was like finding the corpse of youth. It had committed suicide. Why? The obscenity of destructiveness like that appalled me. I think denying the past is maiming the future. I thought I was looking at a terrible desecration. The murder of promise' . . .

'So now I do my job. It has a purpose. It's all right. But I had intended to do more. Don't get me wrong. I'm not blaming that disillusionment for what I am. I made my own smallness. I house-trained my own dreams. But that experience back there. You know what I think it did? It gave me an easy way out. All the bad times. When I felt I was selling out, I had my escape clause handy. I remembered that wastage and I thought, "Yes. That's what we're like. That's the way it always goes. Let's not pretend we're more than we are" '. He was picking dry clay from his fingers. He held up a piece between forefinger and thumb and his eyes lit with an idea. . . 'You know what I mean? Circumstances are the real potter. We're just the clay. We can take any shape they tell us'. (SL, 117)

Here we are presented with the individual's bad faith in surrendering his potential and exploiting a cynical determinism. Such bad faith is reduplicated on the historical level as the idealism of Ewart's generation is destroyed by the antisocial individuation fostered by eighties capitalism:

'What happened? I mean, I remember that time. That's just sixteen

years ago. Maybe the Yellow Submarine had sunk. But we still had dreams we shared that were worth dreaming. Dreams that made you worthy of being human. Now if you want to dream them still, you dream alone. The communal dreams? You buy them in a fucking supermarket.'

The swearword was shocking in his gentle mouth.

'I hate these times,' he said. 'The shallowness of them. Some of the noblest dreams the species ever had are being drowned in puddles.' (*SL*, 115-6)

In many ways, *The Big Man* can be read as the record of Dan Scoular's moral growth away from Ewart's position: Scoular initially accepts the defeatist attitude engendered by the community's brutal deindustrialization, but comes to recognize the bad faith this entails:

He believed he had choice. He remembered his realisation, when he was training with Tommy Brogan, that you could split a second into options. No matter what the conditions, no matter what you discovered your nature to be, you still had choice. You couldn't choose what happened to you but you could choose what you did with it. You couldn't choose who you were but you could choose how to use who you were. (*TBM*, 218)

I think now we can discern three separate (but interpenetrating) levels by which the existentialist doctrine of decay of human potentiality is employed in McIlvanney's fiction. Individually, his characters experience alienation from their 'true selves' as they are increasingly defined by their personal past. Socially, their society is alienated by its cynical materialism. Mytho-historically, Being itself is subject to this law of decay and existential entropy. The fundamental paradox of existentialism (maintaining that the individual is unconditioned, while the environment is supremely conditioning) gives rise to an anthropology familiar from some varieties of Judeo-Christian thought: the subject, though endowed

with free will and is to that extent unconditioned, is destined to fail in his project to achieve transcendence.

It would be wrong, however, to identify these two theories, and claim that existentialism is somehow a 'secularization' of Christian belief: Protestantism maintains that the human is destined to fail to achieve transcendence by itself through biological necessity (all humans are mortal) and by hereditary disposition (Adam's fall and the doctrine of original sin). Existentialism rejects the notion of original sin, arguing that the only 'sin' the subject can commit is to betray his authentic self in all its potential (which is inevitable, inasmuch as the demands of society require we sacrifice that potential in the service of others), and that that 'sin' is chosen by the subject as his nature.

Furthermore, non-theistic varieties of existentialism deny the possibility of an external agent such as God intervening to 'rescue' the subject and assure him/her of its longed-for transcendence over the world of change and decay. I believe that this accounts for the marked similarity in representation of Being by these ideologies, and their reliance upon a creative mythology to account for their pessimistic depiction of human nature, which is simultaneously free and in thrall to its own failure. Jaspers' work typifies the interpenetration of these ideas:

In all past history there was a self-evident bond between man and man, in stable communities, in institutions, and in universal ideas. Even the isolated individual was in a sense sustained in his isolation. The most visible sign of today's disintegration is that more and more men do not understand one another, that they meet and scatter, that they are indifferent to one another, that there is no longer any reliable community or loyalty. (9)

It is noticeable that all this is bald assertion—Jaspers presents no historical or sociological data for his contention. Yet it would be a mistake

to look for such verification—this lies in the realm of 'science', which Jaspers explicitly contrasts with 'philosophy'. Rather, we should look to the theological and apologetic dimensions of Jaspers thought for the source of this sense of loss. Certainly there must be a historical dimension in this text, written in 1951, but the theological interest predominates for Jaspers. The true context of this passage lies in Genesis 11:1-9, the mytho-historical event of the building of the Tower of Babel. This is the archetype of all later falling-away from unity and plenitude of meaning (Derridean 'full-presence') and is itself foreshadowed by the Fall and expulsion from Eden—Buber phrases it thus:

The humanity which was none because it sought union *against* God is 'scattered' into nations; the one earth is broken up into countries, and the one language ('lip') into languages ('tongues'). The most explicit symbol of the new situation is that now no one understands the other. And in the midst of the transformed human world, the world of nations, there stands the unfinished, unfinishable city, Babel, city of 'confusion'. (10)

In the existentialist paradigm then, there exists a radical discontinuity in temporal modes of existence: the past assumes a fetishized appearance of wholeness, while the present is interpenetrated with consciousness of its fallenness from this state. Waterhouse has detected this theme in Heidegger's thought, arguing that there is 'underlying Heidegger's analysis, an implicit historical account which his terminology of "fallenness", "thrownness" etc. indicated—namely of a historically primitive state of innocence, a golden age when relations between people, as of people to things, were genuine and whole' (11).

In articulating this metaphysical opposition between pure potentiality and the facticity of lived experience, McIlvanney's characters are trapped in a tragic dualism: to remain authentic they must either be loyal to that

potential by refusing to accept any definition of their selves, or they must adopt an irreducible 'self-of-themselves' as a moral and existential postulate and use this as the foundation of their moral code. The first stratagem, in seeking to avoid a reductive objectification, denies the possibility of articulating a coherent personality at all: 'It's only when you get older you find out who you are. I was a different person every day when I was young. Never came in the same person I went out' (*GFN*, 148). The latter demands rigid adherence to an accepted definition in order to avoid the 'breaking of the unity and continuity of . . . life' which Unamuno feared, as does Laidlaw:

I refused to pigeonhole my nature into separate social identities. I was the same person whatever room I entered. I would make adjustments out of consideration and politeness, like trying not to swear in front of someone I knew it would offend or not using a big word to someone I thought wouldn't understand it. But there would be no pretence of being who I wasn't. (*SL*, 220)

There is a fundamental ambiguity in the existentialist account of personality. The gradual subordination of desire to necessity is experienced by Cameron in *A Gift From Nessus*:

He had a quiet moment of panic wondering if it was scientifically true that each night dedicated to being nobody in particular meant that there was less of you to be realised in the future.

He felt an urge to make some grand gesture of purification. Instead, he rose and emptied the ashtray into the fire. There were no large actions available to him, he reflected. Necessity lay on him like handcuffs, curtailing every sweeping movement to a tic. He was the servant to his own life. (*GFN*, 48)

Notice how the lack of definition celebrated in youth is regarded with horror in the mature individual. Such linear accumulation of experience

can, however, be interrupted by the self's encounter with the *Grenzsituation*. In the light of these seminal events, the essential self reveals itself:

Dan was left to the discomfort of his own thoughts, the need to decide what he believed.

As always, he didn't know. He had never deliberately formulated his thoughts or his beliefs into a system, always having sensed that to do that would be false. He had never imposed a coherent shape upon his life but instead had allowed his life to elicit its changing shape from events as they happened.

What was happening now would be proof of what he believed, not what his mind told him he believed. All he could do was abide the outcome of this event of which he was a part. He couldn't preempt the moment's force with any foreknowledge of how things ought to be. No moral precept surfaced in him to find firm footing where there was no solid ground and calm the doubts in him. You didn't define happenings, they defined you. (*TBM*, 234-5)

The central paradox of McIlvanney's thought is the coexistence of these states of existence in radical opposition. Possibility is prized in the young, the more so because it is doomed to extinction. Yet concurrently, the existentialist has an urgent need to be anchored to a fixed personality in order to resist the generalizing objectification of the socialization process. The tragic irony is that this definition becomes itself a form of alienation, narrowing the horizons of subjective freedom. The dualism at the heart of existentialist ontology always posits a gulf between being and becoming. While redemption may be glimpsed through the agency of art, any reconciliation is unachievable in empirical reality.

Inevitably, any reconciliation of Being with Becoming could only occur on the level of transcendence over lived reality. The tragedy for existentialism is that, realizing their contingency and inability to attain

transcendence, the subject must fail, must fall into bad faith—hence the predominant mood of guilt that characterizes much existentialist fiction.

In the existentialist paradigm, risk is a necessary precondition of individual freedom: for Kierkegaard the individual must risk despair if he is to achieve faith. The existentialist nature of McIlvanney's interpretation of risk can be clearly seen with reference to Kierkegaard, who recorded in his *Journals* that 'Danger is my very element' (12):

Without risk there is no faith and the greater the risk the greater the faith; the more objective security the less inwardness (for inwardness is precisely subjectivity), and the less objective security the more profound the possible inwardness. (13)

For McIlvanney this is doubly important, as alongside the grounding of risk as an element of authenticity this construction serves to subvert capitalist social values which argue that an individual's 'worth' can be quantified in monetary terms. Kierkegaard's own source of this concept is to be found in Hegel:

It is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the *immediate* form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure *being-for-itself*. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognised as a *person*, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness. (14)

In *The Big Man* the narrative presents us with two opposing interpretations of Dan's training: 'In the hardening body and quickening reflexes of Dan Scoular, they each saw different things. Tommy Brogan

saw a machine being programmed. Dan felt a widening area of choice, a physical precision that could split a second into options' (*TBM*, 118).

Here we have the familiar use of the mechanistic trope to signify the inauthentic apprehension of human-being: Brogan, entirely subsumed under the functionalist logic of Matt Mason's attitude, reduces Scoular to a utilitarian value, he exists for him only as much as Scoular is involved in the coming fight. For Dan however, the training towards some definite end shakes him out of the moral and physical lethargy which unemployment has caused. McIlvanney is as keen on articulating the moral deprivation unemployment and poverty causes, as much as any material disempowerment: in 'Mick's Day' the narrator remarks of an unemployed man

the more time that passes like this, the less capable Mick is likely to become of ever getting out of his present helpless condition. Time never merely passes. It defines us as it goes until we run out of potential to contradict what it tells us. Mick's situation is like a prison sentence without any crime committed. It is an indeterminate sentence. So far he has served four years. (*WW*, 100)

For Dan Scoular, the fight means far more than earning some money and improving his material conditions, it is a chance to rediscover some purpose to his life, and the dilemma he faces in fighting Cutty prompts an ethical reinvention of himself. From finding himself defined by his material circumstances, he discovers freedom for himself both physically and in the ethical sphere.

The emphasis on the burden upon the individual of his/her freedom to create themselves is found to be a strong component of the existentialist analysis of subjectivity, as Sartre explains:

What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing—as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. (15)

Laidlaw's position (particularly with regard to *mauvais foi*) is in accordance with this analysis:

'Well, I suppose, we try to make ourselves parodies of everybody else' he said. 'Because it's safer. Owning up's a terrible chance to take. That way you don't know who you are until you happen. And then you're lumbered with it'. (L, 164-5)

This accounts for the centrality in McIlvanney's work of the concept of risk. Risk is the negation of one's past determinations in the flight toward the future project. Just as the act is seen as a tragic negation of potential in the existentialist paradigm, so risk becomes the standard by which we measure our commitment to exploring the potentials of our lives. It is a central signification which primarily categorizes action as authentic or inauthentic: Scouler finds that the 'awareness of his own danger gave everything around him a sharper edge, the way the threat of losing something intensifies your sense of its worth' (*TBM*, 261); this finds support from Kierkegaard's observation that 'The thought of death condenses and concentrates life' (16). For Laidlaw risk also functions as a way of measuring the deficiencies and limitations of Capital's *ethos*:

Why do the best of us go to waste while the worst of us flourish? Maybe I had found a clue. I could think of one reason why people as potentially rich in life as Alice and Scott seemed to fare less well and be apparently less successful than Martin and Anna. Those who love life take risks, those who don't take insurance. But that was all right, I decided. Life repays its lovers by letting them spend themselves on it. Those who fail to love it, it cunningly allows very carefully to accrue their own hoarded emptiness. In living, you won by losing big, you lost by winning small. (SL, 105)

Importantly, this principle is used to deny the bourgeois equation of financial success with authenticity and to assert independent existentialist values, and indeed much energy is expended by McIlvanney's protagonists in trying to escape the commodity identification fostered by capitalism: Tam Docherty may have been a miner, but he was a legend in his own right; Laidlaw is presented (by contrasting him with Milligan) as anything but a standard policeman. The process continues with Dan Scoular who is no longer identified with his trade but is accorded the title 'The Big Man' on the strength of his physical appearance.

In attempting to subvert the values of bourgeois society, McIlvanney's discourse attacks the central tenet of capitalism: the quantification and evaluation of the human in non-human terms. In doing so, McIlvanney is keen to articulate the existentialist principle that the true value of human being resides in its freedom, regardless of material conditions. In the *Walking Wounded* story 'Performance' Frankie White epitomizes the existentialist principle of the making of self:

Fast Frankie White didn't go into a bar. He entered. He felt his name precede him like a fanfare he had to live up to. As with a lot of small criminals, he had no house of his own, no money in the bank, no deposit account of social status to draw on. He had no

fixed place in the scheme of things that could feed back a clear sense of himself, be a mirror. His only collateral was his reputation, a whiff of mild scandal that clung round him like eau-de-Cologne. (WW, 23)

Frankie White has little social signification: on a material level he is rendered invisible by the logic of capitalist society and, by that very fact, is unencumbered by responsibility to the possessions capitalism judges the individual subject by. It is his freedom to determine himself which McIlvanney insists upon here; as one of the 'walking wounded' living in the cracks of a decaying society, we may well have expected McIlvanney to elicit sympathy for him. What McIlvanney is articulating through White is that authenticity is not commensurate with material possessions, as capitalist society declares. We are all burdened with the freedom to make ourselves, and the only true crime is to refuse that challenge:

Well, he was different. If the system was trying to screw him, he would screw it. He had his own heroes and they weren't kings of industry. He thought of McQueen. He wondered how long before McQueen got back out. McQueen, there was a man. He was more free in the nick than most men were outside it.

That was what you had to do: defy your circumstances. You were what you declared yourself to be. (WW, 26)

The apotheosis of the existentialist's defiant creed is to be found in the person of McQueen in the story 'The Prisoner'. Despite his physical confinement, McQueen affirms his freedom through a grotesque and absurd act: causing a riot because of the metaphysical question of 'what constitutes a turkey' (WW, 63). The narrator leaves us in no doubt of the 'real' situation between McQueen and the governor, no matter what the objective situation is:

He [McQueen] looked off into the distance that lay outside the

window and the governor was aware again of the opaque quality of McQueen's eyes. They were the eyes—the governor had to admit it—of a visionary. A private, bizarre, non-conformist visionary. You could never be quite sure what was going on in McQueen's head but you could always be sure it was something. If only he could keep it in there, whatever it was, the governor thought. McQueen looked back at the governor and the governor briefly felt their roles reversed. (*WW*, 59)

Note the importance of the look to McIlvanney's discourse; this time McQueen has successfully resisted the governor's objectifying stare (McQueen's eyes were opaque, signifying the unknowable nature of McQueen's self)—the roles are reversed: McQueen has created a situation where he has the full knowledge of the event, and therefore has a certain power over the governor. He has achieved this by shifting the site of knowledge (and therefore power) from the objective sphere which is open to scrutiny by the System alone, to the subjective sphere of McQueen's own volition, accessible only to himself.

The governor however, as an interchangeable element in the System, is knowable. For the governor the 'afternoon was exactly scheduled' (*WW*, 66) and this schemata is shown to extend throughout the totality of his life. The roles are truly reversed here: the governor as an individual remains unknown, unknowable (even by himself)—we do not know his name, while, importantly, McQueen is known as McQueen, and not referred to by his prison number.

It is interesting to note that the terms of 'governor' and 'prisoner' have been subverted in much the same way by Sillitoe's Smith in 'The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner':

I'm a human being and I've got thoughts and secrets and bloody life inside me that he doesn't know is there, and he'll never know

what's there because he's stupid. I suppose you'll laugh at this, me saying the governor's a stupid bastard when I know hardly how to write and he can read and write and add-up like a professor. But what I say is true right enough. He's stupid, and I'm not, because I can see farther into the likes of him than he can see into the likes of me. Admitted, we're both cunning, but I'm more cunning and I'll win in the end even if I die in gaol at eighty-two, because I'll have more fun and fire out of my life than he'll ever get out of his. . . . I know when he talks to me and I look into his army mug that I'm alive and he's dead. (17)

The governor is the prisoner in both these stories, the prisoner of habit and convention, while McQueen has demonstrated his ability to transcend his material confinement, expressed in unmistakably existentialist terms:

The precision was where the governor had never been, the precision of passion, the risk of choosing the moment when you try to express utterly what you feel. McQueen, the governor understood with a dismay that would quickly bury the understanding in disbelief like dead leaves, was capable of something of which the governor was not. McQueen was capable of freedom. (*WW*, 66)

And so, in this story at least, McIlvanney's narrator comes out unambiguously in favour of the existentialist interpretation of the situation—will triumphs over matter. Yet is this in fact the case? Was the initial problem not McQueen's ideas but rather the fact that they wouldn't keep in his head? The shadow of praxis falls over the existentialist interpretation: in order to bring about the confrontation with the System (in the person of the governor) McQueen had to constitute himself as a problem for it. He may well have considered the metaphysical definition of a turkey, but so long as McQueen did not act, the System would not

have acknowledged him as problematic. The fact that he rioted initially alerted the System to his existence as an individual.

Thus we are confronted with two problems. Firstly, the initial optimistic existentialist interpretation that authenticity could be grasped without regard to material circumstance has been somewhat (though not entirely) compromised. If McQueen had not used praxis to draw attention to himself and constitute himself in opposition to the System, he may well have gained authenticity, but only in a solipsistic sense. The intention of the agent is not sufficient to deserve the title of authenticity: his outer actions do matter. McQueen must be materially in a position to physically problematize his relationship with the System (by rioting) before he is in a position to existentially put it into question.

Secondly, the story presupposes that there is a fundamental ambiguity in the governor's function. He is subjectivity, inasmuch as he is human like the rest of us, yet he is objectivity when considered as a function of the system. The narrator is eager to represent his objective nature, in order to exalt the superior position of McQueen, yet relies upon his subjectivity as the precondition of this valorization. Let us consider the event from the perspective of pure objectivity. A prisoner riots: this is an administrative matter. Has he damaged anything? Has he hurt anyone? How should he be restrained? These are all questions which can be tackled on a purely functional level. If he were handled along the purely objective criteria of the System, he would not be given a chance to demonstrate his authenticity at all. From the point of view of pure objectivity, the exteriority of McQueen's actions are all that exist; whether he riots because the turkey is round, or because he wanted chicken instead is immaterial to the System. He is a series of actions to be countered, not a problem to be solved.

There exists in the existentialist self-understanding of the text a radical dualism between subject and object which does not stand up to

analysis. The either/or structure of bad faith/authenticity (based upon human characterizations as flight from self to *en-soi* or flight to self in *pour-soi*) cannot take account of the infinitely subtle mediations between subject and object which structure the world. For the existentialist there is subjectivity versus objectivity: *tertium non datur*.

The narrator may deprive the governor of his name, the governor may himself fly from the possibilities inherent in him and try to dissolve himself in the objectivity of the System: for all that, he is still human. And however much McQueen may constitute himself freely in his own mind as Hector of Troy, St Anthony or Schopenhauer, he still remains in the objective sphere as McQueen, prisoner no. x, inmate of y jail.

It must be further understood that the socialist constitution of the human as a being of need does not define him solely as such; while we may agree with Charlie Grant that 'People need more than food and drink and a bed. They need more than material success. Everybody has to have a chance just to be a person' (*R*, 225) it is, for socialists, a question of priorities: unlike the existentialist claim that we exist, before we exist as something, socialism recognizes that before we can form a project, let alone actualize it, we must attend to the biological necessities of our existence. In any case, we are always-already inserted into a social structure which must fulfil these basic requirements of life if human being is to continue.

McIlvanney's concern for the individual subject is well worth investigating, for it reveals a disjunction between McIlvanney's explicit political beliefs and the epistemic model of human relations implicit in his fiction. In *A Gift From Nessus* Eddie Cameron is the image-bearer of idealism:

This crummy car. It had taken him so many places, and they had all led nowhere. It even cramped his dreams. These days, his

wilder dreams took the shape of landing an especially big order for the firm. What had happened to the ambitions he used to have? He was ashamed to think of them, not because they had been so exaggerated, but because they had become so small. (*GFN*, 11)

Nothing more reveals the subject's inability to achieve transcendence over his reified world than the constant erosion the ambitions of McIlvanney's protagonists undergo. The reification trope is one McIlvanney unerringly recognises as an important feature of the society he portrays, yet often his analysis is not equal to his original insight. In the above quote, we see that McIlvanney has identified Cameron's alienation through his labour in quite precise terms. The conditions of his labour (involving the car) present their reified aspect; rather than be an instrument that Cameron uses to attain his chosen ends, the car perversely takes the active role (it takes him places; it cramps his dreams) and assigns Cameron the passive role of object. It is a general feature of McIlvanney's narrative that the passive tense is used whenever such a situation is described.

Similarly, Jack Laidlaw is first presented to the reader as alienated from his work and meaningful relationships with others: 'Laidlaw sat at his desk, feeling a bleakness that wasn't unfamiliar to him. Intermittently, he found himself doing penance for being him. When the mood seeped into him, nothing mattered. He could think of no imaginable success, no way of life, no dream of wishes fulfilled that would satisfy' (*L*, 8). Again notice the proliferation of passive tenses: he finds himself reflecting; the mood seeps into him; he cannot think. The passive linguistic position assigned to McIlvanney's protagonists indicates that the character generally experiences an alienation from the objective social sphere. This thesis will argue that such an alienation is experienced as a given topographical feature of McIlvanney's narrative world, rather than a relative situation produced by social interaction.

Returning to *A Gift From Nessus*, it is apparent that Cameron is unable to fulfil the conditions that would guarantee the integrity of his essential self, precisely because the self he wishes to validate is predicated upon an epistemology of failure, a rejection of any kind of certainty:

[Cameron's] own somnolent sense of identity had wakened to find itself paralysed with compromise, bound by minor commitments like a million threads, trapped in an accidental context that fitted as close as a coffin . . . Every time he moved towards a decision, he was baulked by another question. Was it escape from himself he was looking for in Margaret? Was it better for Alice and Helen to live in a covertly rotten marriage or grow up through an overtly broken one? Was it humanity or cowardice that paralysed him? The convolutions of such questions compounded themselves with others until no values seemed extricable from this complexity. Concepts like 'love' and 'identity' and 'right' and 'decision' became enfeebled in the face of his recalcitrant situation, were meaningless simplifications, paper principles, incapable of shearing through the toughness of reality, crumbling on contact. (GFN, 76)

Such fatalist surrender nullifies any possible good intentions of the moral agent, and when the agent decides to act (as in *The Big Man*) that action will ground itself in the entirely arbitrary volition of the agent. As Macquarrie says existentialist 'action is not to be identified with the outer act, nor is it to be measured in terms of the "success" of such an act' (18). Within the existentialist tradition, alienation manifests itself in the character's intuition of absurdity: Cameron

could see no meaning, nothing that fixed a significant pattern on his problem. There were only the accidental fragments of his life, marriage to Allison, meetings with Margaret, a job to do, Alice and

Helen to care for, a gnawing discontent, rattling together in a cosmic void, colliding but never connecting. The only unifying force was time, imposing a kind of order with fragile arbitrary rivets that shut out chaos. (*GFN*, 76)

Again Laidlaw exemplifies the same model:

His marriage was a maze nobody had ever mapped, an infinity of habit and hurt and betrayal down which Ena and he wandered separately, meeting occasionally in the children. He was a policeman, a Detective Inspector, and more and more he wondered how that happened. And he was nearly forty. (*L*, 9)

This can be related to Mathieu's alienation in Sartre's *L'Age de raison*:

He got up. An official got up, an official who was worried about money and was going to visit the sister of one of his old pupils. And he thought: 'Are the stakes all set? Am I now just an official and nothing more?' he had waited so long: his latter years had been no more than a stand-to. Oppressed with countless little daily cares, he had waited: of course he had run after girls all the time, he had travelled, and naturally he had to earn his living. But through all that, his sole care had been to hold himself in readiness. For an act. A free, considered act; that should pledge his whole life, and stand at the beginning of a new existence. He had never been able to engage himself completely in any love-affair, or any pleasure, he had never been really unhappy: he always felt as though he were somewhere else, that he was not yet wholly born. He waited. And during all that time, gently, stealthily, the years had come, they had grasped him from behind: thirty-four of them. He ought to have taken his decision at twenty-five. Like Brunet. Yes, but at that age one doesn't decide with proper motivation. One is liable to be fooled: and he didn't want to

act in that way. He thought of going to Russia, of dropping his studies, of learning a manual trade. But what had restrained him each time on the brink of such a violent break, was that he had no *reasons* for acting thus. Without reasons, such acts would have been mere impulses. And so he continued to wait. (2)

The psychological model such an existentialist position entails will be examined later; here let us point out that the essentialism of McIlvanney's later protagonists is a reflexive response to this ability of the Other to conceive of their selves as objects. This essentialism, conceived in McIlvanney's discourse as a 'sense of oneself', is given priority over the objectification of our-selves the Other's look induces. Cameron's masochist psychology actually invites the objectification he so fears; degraded into an object, he is deprived of all responsibility and so is beyond all moral judgment, for it is only his objectification as an object-of-judgment-for-others that threatens him, not objectification *per se*. What is at stake for McIlvanney's protagonists is their 'sense-of-themselves'. This is the source of all value, it legitimises the character's existence and without it the character would not experience his self as a subjective being.

In the following sections we shall examine two phenomena of central importance to any account of McIlvanney's work—the existentialist look and the significations of voice. Of course, we are not arguing in this thesis that McIlvanney's deployment of these narrative resources is in itself unique, rather that they function in a specific way within the context of an existentialist-oriented discourse.

The phenomenon of "the look" as a paradigm of human objectification is a familiar one from Scottish fiction—from Gourlay's retort in Douglas Brown's *The House With The Green Shutters* (1901) 'for damned little I would kill ye wi' a glower!' (19) to Sammy's experience of 'a look that's more than a look' in Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994):

What did it matter but what did it matter; cunts looking at ye. Who gives a fuck. Just sometimes they bore their way in, some of them do anyway; they seem able to give ye a look that's more than a look: it's like when ye're a wean at school and there's this auld woman teacher who takes it serious even when you and the wee muckers are having a laugh and cracking jokes behind her back and suddenly she looks straight at ye and ye can tell she knows the score, she knows it's happening. Exactly. And it's only you. The rest dont notice. You see her and she sees you. Naybody else. Probably it's their turn next week. The now it's you she's copped. You. The jokes dont sound funny any longer. The auld bastard, she's fucked ye man. With one look. That's how easy you are. And ye see the truth then about yerself. Ye see how ye're fixed forever. (20)

However, in this section I wish to argue that Mcllvaney's use of 'the look' as a narrative device can best be explored in the context of the Sartrean model. As might be expected in a writer influenced by the existentialist tradition, Mcllvaney's work is deeply concerned with the individual's alienation. In *A Gift From Nessus*, Cameron is unable to create any sphere of authenticity which would provide an objective validation for his 'sense of himself'. Instead, he is everywhere threatened with objectification by others: 'He despised the picture of himself he had seen in that garage mechanic's eyes, especially since it was probably accurate. He felt trapped by it. Everywhere he looked it was there. In Morton's eyes. In the eyes of the businessmen he dealt with. Even in Allison's eyes' (*GFN*, 14-5). This objectification which poses such a threat to Cameron's self-definition is a phenomenon closely related to Sartre's concept of '*Le regard d'autrui*' –in *L'Être et le Neant* Sartre argues that: 'The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously effecting'

(21).

The implications for Sartre's Cartesian subject are clear: it must engage in mortal combat with the Other, after the manner of the *Herr und Knecht* dialectic in Hegel's *Phanomenologie des Geistes*. Such universality of objectification, of being perceived as an object of judgment for others, is in certain respects closely related to the Calvinist doctrines of damnation and election. Sartre uses terminology familiar from Calvinism in his analysis of 'the look':

My original fall is the existence of the Other. Shame—like pride—is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such. Strictly speaking, it is not that I perceive myself losing my freedom in order to become a thing, but my nature is—over there, outside my lived freedom—as a given attribute of this being which I am for the Other. (22)

This analysis of objectification by the Other is demonstrated in concrete terms by Cameron's own experience:

Cameron felt his stomach keel. It wasn't the threat. It was the knowledge others had of him. It was the thought that he existed in the minds of people he didn't know. It was a primal dread, a sudden sickening sense that he could be destroyed in effigy by other people. (*GFN*, 16)

This existential dread, familiar to us from Kierkegaard, causes a decompression of self. If we think that the relationship between the look of the Other and Divine Judgment has been pushed too far, we must remember that the look is not merely a physical occurrence, as Sartre has noted:

Far from disappearing with my first alarm, the Other is present

everywhere, below me, above me, in the neighbouring rooms, and I continue to feel profoundly my being-for-others. It is even possible that my shame may not disappear . . . I do not cease to experience my being-for-others; my possibilities do not cease to 'die', nor do the distances cease to unfold toward me in terms of the stairway where somebody 'could' be, in terms of this dark corner where a human presence 'could' hide. Better yet, if I tremble at the slightest noise, if each creak announces to me a look, this is because I am already in the state of being-looked-at. What then is it which falsely appeared and which was self-destructive when I discovered the false alarm? It is not the Other-as-subject, nor is it his presence to me. It is the other's facticity; that is, the contingent connection between the Other and an object-being in my world. Thus what is doubtful is not the Other himself. It is the Other's being-there, i.e., that concrete, historical event which we can express by the words, 'There is someone in this room'.

These observations may enable us to proceed further. The Other's presence in the world can not be derived analytically from the presence of the Other-as-subject to me, for this original presence is transcendent—i.e., beyond-the-world. (23)

The consciousness of the Other thus engendered permeates the Bible; Psalm 139 'O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me' can be considered as the divine totalization of the existential look. Nietzsche's aphorism well apprehends the nature of 'the look' as a presence which constitutes subjective self-consciousness:

The feeling 'I am the mid-point of the world!' arises very strongly if one is suddenly overcome with shame; one then stands there as though confused in the midst of a surging sea and feels dazzled as though by a great eye which gazes upon us and through us from all sides. (24)

'The look' is actualized in concrete social situations between individuals and supra-individual collectives which have important repercussions for McIlvanney's conception of society. The *locus classicus* for this in *A Gift From Nessus* is the experience of attending a doctor's surgery, and the analysis of the situation McIlvanney provides is in accord with the model of objectification posited by the early Sartre. The difference of the subject in the face of the Other is conceived of as the source of the subject's fundamental vulnerability in society. There are actually two species of objectification in evidence here. The one discussed in the text is the persecution of the subject in society when that subject realizes itself as individual, and therefore alienated from others. McIlvanney also points out the specifically reifying effects of social institutions:

[The surgery dispensed] instant anonymity from its distempered walls. From behind the closed door of the doctor's surgery came murmured voices, pain or worry, perhaps incipient death, reduced to a decorous incomprehensibility while the others waited their turn, patient as cattle, having divested individuality at the door. (GFN, 77)

Such a view may be taken to be the humanist correlative of Foucault's analysis in *Birth of the Clinic* (1963), with specific reference to the reifying consequences of pathological anatomy giving physicians a pathological outlook upon their patients. This is confirmed by Cameron's experience of his doctor:

There was a frightening neutrality about the eyes as if they inhabited a place where all facts were of equal stature and could be reacted to on the same standard issue terms. It was as if the layman's rabble of uncertain responses to sickness—fear, pity, desperation, awe—had been replaced by a bureaucracy of competence—diagnosis, reassurance, prognosis—that would

broadcast its instructions from his brain in the same relentless tone of mechanical sanity regardless of the circumstances. (*GFN*, 78)

Something happened to you when you observed people too long from a professional standpoint. The persistence of your gaze dehumanized them until their individualities froze into generalizations, which were easier to cope with. (*GFN*, 80)

It must be emphasized that while this nominalist strategy of McIlvanney's seeks to recuperate the humanist construction of what human nature actually is, the poststructuralist project explicitly denies the existence of any such nature. Therefore, though Foucault and McIlvanney recognize the same phenomena, each has a radically different perspective on interpreting those phenomena. Even so, McIlvanney does agree with Foucault in his proposition that the institutions which society depends upon sacrifice the individual they supposedly serve: as early as *Remedy Is None* McIlvanney evinced a nihilistic consideration of such societal structures as the legal system as Charlie saw 'the intricate machinery of justice that was grinding into motion around him' (*R*, 206):

But Charlie saw it as only another stage in refining what he had done to fit their own requirements, another part of the process his action was submitted to in this factory for the distortion of facts to fit society. He saw truth tethered and hobbled, lying ready for emasculation. 'Counsel' was just another name for one of those who were holding it ready for the knife. (*R*, 215)

Notice the grotesque parallel with the abattoir—a mechanist metaphor pursued in *Laidlaw* when the narrative argues that the legal and medical professions do have a pathological outlook on the individual:

This is the police mortuary, the tradesman's entrance to the court, as it were. Here are delivered the raw materials of justice, corpses

that are precipitates of strange experience, alloys of fear and hate and anger and love and viciousness and bewilderment, that the Court will take and refine into comprehension. Through the double glass doors come those with a grief to collect. They take away the offal of a death, its privateness, the irrelevant uniqueness of the person, the parts that no one has any further use for. The Court will keep only what matters, the way in which the person became an event.

To come in here is to be reminded that the first law is real estate, and people are its property. It was a reminder that always sickened Laidlaw. They stood in the entrance hall with its polished floor. A man was here to look at his dead daughter and they must ring a bell, request an audience. Laidlaw's finger on the brass button jarred himself. It summoned him to make a fruitless choice; indulge in grief by proxy or imitate a stone. The shirt-sleeved, waistcoated man who came recognised him, unlocked the second set of glass doors and ushered Bud Lawson into calamity and Laidlaw into his own small dilemma. (L, 35-6)

The existentialist version of intersubjectivity as described by Kierkegaard explains the nature of Laidlaw's dilemma:

just as wishing is the most paltry of all solo performances, so being sympathetic in the sense in which the word is usually used is the most paltry of all social virtuosities and aptitudes. Sympathy, so far from being a good to the sufferer, is rather a means of protecting one's own egotism. Not daring in the deeper sense to think about such things, one saves oneself by sympathy. Only when the sympathetic person in his compassion relates himself to the sufferer in such a way that he in the strictest sense understands that it is his own case that is in question, only when he knows how to identify himself with the sufferer in such a way that when he fights for an explanation he is fighting for himself, renouncing all

thoughtlessness, softness, and cowardice—only then does it perhaps find a meaning, because the sympathetic person is different from the sufferer in that he suffers under a higher form. (25)

Such an intuition has its fictive parallel in Camus' *La Peste*:

Besides the comforts sent by air or overland, compassionate or admiring comments were lavished on the henceforth isolated town, by way of newspaper articles or broadcast talks. And invariably their epical or prize-speech verbiage jarred on the doctor. Needless to say, he knew the sympathy was genuine enough. But it could be expressed only in the conventional language with which men try to express what unites them with mankind in general; a vocabulary quite unsuited, for example, to Grand's small daily effort, and incapable of describing what Grand stood for under plague conditions.

Sometimes at midnight, in the great silence of the sleepbound town, the doctor turned on his wireless before going to bed for the few hours' sleep he allowed himself. And from the ends of the earth, across thousands of miles of land and sea, kindly, well-meaning speakers tried to voice their fellow-feeling, and indeed did so, but at the same time proved the utter incapacity of every man truly to share in suffering which he cannot see. 'Oran! Oran!' In vain the call rang over oceans, in vain Rieux listened hopefully; always the tide of eloquence began to flow, bringing home still more the unbridgeable gulf that lay between Grand and the speaker. 'Oran, we're with you!' they called emotionally. But not, the doctor told himself, to love or to die together—that's the only way. They're too remote. (26)

Having problematized sympathy in an existentialist sense, the narrative in *Laidlaw* shifts its focus to the dead girl. The reifying process

plays upon the ambivalent nature of the corpse, a thing which was once a person: 'No part of the person it had been was visible. It was already a parcel for the law-courts' (*L*, 37). In continuing Kierkegaard's project of confounding the absolute logic of Hegelian philosophy, McIlvanney always points out the contradictions of lived experience, the contingencies of present reality which cannot be reconciled with an all-encompassing logical system. By counterpointing the horror of the situation with its irreducibly human element, Laidlaw fosters these paradoxes: 'The man was very deft, had an obvious expertise in washing dead bodies. Laidlaw remembered that his name was Alec and he liked bowling' (*L*, 36).

The first sentence recapitulates the objective content of Laidlaw's knowledge; the second emphasizes the 'irrelevant uniqueness of the person'. This ironic reduction of objective knowledge is developed in *Docherty* by the juxtaposition of the objective historical data concerning the fictional date of the novel's beginning, and the bathetic piece of information about Miss Gilfillan's insomnia (*D*, 13).

The narrative description of the mortuary work in *Laidlaw* is modelled after an industrial process; the corpses are 'raw materials', 'precipitates' and 'alloys'. The judicial system 'refines' these to produce, objectively, a legal decision, and, subjectively, waste 'offal'. This extremely disturbing imagery powerfully conveys McIlvanney's vision of human reality processed and deformed into instrumental necessity. It is in such scenes that McIlvanney reveals himself to be at the forefront of Scottish fiction, in his imaginative ability to penetrate through the superficial event to its essential significance.

McIlvanney's work here finds itself in the mainstream of the Twentieth Century critique of instrumental rationality; Chekhov's 'Ward Number Six' similarly looks forward to Weber's disenchantment and Kafka's nightmare bureaucracy:

People with a bureaucratic, official relationship to others' woes—judges, policemen and doctors, for instance—eventually grow so callous through force of habit that they can react to their clients only on a formal level, much as they would like to do otherwise . . . Having this formal, heartless attitude to the individual, a judge needs only one thing to deprive an innocent man of all his citizen's rights and sentence him to hard labour: enough time. Only give the judge time enough to carry out certain formalities, for which he is paid a salary, and that is the end of the matter. A fat hope, then, of finding justice and protection in this filthy little town a hundred and twenty miles from the railway! And how absurd to think of justice, anyway, in a society which welcomes every kind of brutality as a rational and functional necessity, while every merciful act—the acquittal of an accused person, for instance—provokes a great howl of indignation and vindictiveness! (27)

Clearly, the existentialist reaction to capitalism's growing functionalism must be seen as part of a wider movement, originating in the Nineteenth Century *Lebensphilosophie's*¹ reinterpretation of Romanticism in an era of growing industrialization. In the above passage, Chekhov ably recapitulates the Janus-faced nature of industrial progress: his character laments on the backwardness and provincialism of his town (measured not in chronological time but rather in distance from the railway, which represents the 'now' of St Petersburg and the West), yet there is the implicit realization in the story that modernity will only make the provincial disease an international malaise: Solzhenitsyn's Gulag is Ward Six taken to its rational limit. The nightmare of the Twentieth Century has evolved from the seedy streets of Dickensian London and Dostoyevsky's St Petersburg to the dystopias of Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's

¹ A style of philosophising which opposes intuition and lived experience against rigid categorisation and dogma which finds expression through Dilthey and Bergson's popularisation of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Nineteen Eighty-Four.

The conceptual conjunction of reification (articulated via the deployment of the mechanist trope) and the negative objectification embodied by the look is a recurrent feature of McIlvanney's fiction in general, and the Laidlaw novels in particular:

Laidlaw himself had a simple shock-absorber he used to enable him to cope with some of the things he had to look at. He remembered Glaister's *Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology*—a quiet name for the most harrowing books he had ever looked through. Talking reasonably about horrifyingly exotic deaths, reproducing good photographs of decapitation, strangulation, genital mutilation, its depiction of accidental and compelled brutality made the Marquis de Sade look like the tourist he was. Once you knew that's where we live, you had to accept the need to face what you would rather not see.

(*PTV*, 21)

Again the key point of interest for the existentialist is the way in which subjectivity is rendered void through its own definition—death is the necessary correlative of human existence and so this limit-situation serves to shape and define the human condition as wholly contingent and without ultimate meaning. The double-edged nature of Glasgow as the 'city of the stare' is explored in Mickey Ballater's reflection that Glasgow was:

about proximity not anonymity, a place that in spite of its wide vistas and areas of dereliction often seemed as spacious as a rush-hour bus. He understood again the expectancy that overtook him every time he arrived. You never knew where the next invasion of your privateness was coming from. (*PTV*, 5)

This is the source of tragedy in McIlvanney's world-view: Glasgow is celebrated here as democratic in its disregard for the personal space associated with social distinction. Yet this is precisely what the existentialist most fears: the dissolution of identity under the pressure of the city's stare. At once this image of Glasgow embodies the contradictions inherent in any attempt at a rapprochement between existentialism and socialism.

Within McIlvanney's discourse, there is a basic conflict between its existentialist presuppositions and those dimensions of human existence existentialism cannot properly account for. This disjunction is evident in the conflict between his discourse's self-understanding of objectification by the Other in terms of the Sartrean Look, and the wider perspective represented by Lacan's consideration of the Gaze. The dialogue between the Sartrean and Lacanian accounts of objectification is discussed in Chapter Four.

The passage illustrating the Gaze in *Remedy Is None* (analyzed in Chapter Two) may be fruitfully compared with an analogue in *Docherty*:

Along High Street other families had brought out chairs and were chatting in the mellow sunshine. A well-to-do family—husband, wife and two daughters—were strolling towards where Tam and the others stood. That was a common enough occurrence. Quite a few families from better districts made such a walk a Saturday evening event in summer. It could be very interesting.

On this occasion the man was pointing things out to his wife as they went past. A phrase of his talk drifted towards them—'people actually living there'. The girls looked mostly at the ground, blinkered with apprehension. The man's hand patted Conn's head lightly as he passed. Looking up, Conn felt his father's hand fit tightly, like a helmet, over his head.

And his father's voice cleft the calmness of his play like a lightning-flash.

'Why don't ye bring fuckin' cookies wi' ye? An' then ye could throw them tae us!'

Conn's mother hissed, 'Tam!'

Immediately Conn had a feeling he would forget but would experience again. It was a completely familiar and secure happening transformed instantly into something foreign and frightening. He saw and heard but couldn't understand.

The man stopped without looking round.

'Aye, sur', Tam Docherty was saying very quietly. 'Come oan back, then'.

'Please, Tam. Please', Jenny was whispering.

The woman's linked arm took her husband on. Jenny's face was flushed.

'Is somethin' wrang, Tam?' Dougie asked and felt himself contract in the look Tam Docherty gave him.

'Ye mean tae say ye hivny noticed? Whaur the hell dae you leeve, Dougie?'

Some of the dust of that brief, explosive moment settled on Conn for good. (*D*, 30-1)

There are a number of complex significations to take into account here: the visit to High Street by the 'well-to-do' is resented because it insists upon inscribing the inhabitants as spectacle. Unlike Jane Whitmore in *Remedy Is None*, Tam Docherty resists the tourist Gaze. The question of power at issue here is not of gender, but of class: Jenny pleads for Tam to stop and Dougie cannot understand what moves Tam to this action. The right of the 'well-to-do' to walk through High Street and objectify the inhabitants is evidently taken for granted: Tam upsets the established order of things by calling into question this right. The tourist is evidently confused: it is an impudence that such a man as Docherty address him in such terms, being of such different material circumstances, yet along with

the assumed class differential there exists the physical reality of Docherty's threatening presence, which negates the power of the tourist and drives him away.

CHAPTER ONE NOTES

- (1) Jeremy Idle, 'McIlvanney, Masculinity, and Scottish Literature,' *Scottish Affairs* no. 2 (Winter 1993) 51.
- (2) Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. J.E. Crawford Fitch (New York: Dover, 1954) 8.
- (3) Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense* 11.
- (4) Soren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard A Selection*, ed. and trans. by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1938) 5.
- (5) Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. A. Hannay, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989) 89.
- (6) Kierkegaard, *Sickness* 90.
- (7) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) 97.
- (8) Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, ed. and trans. H.V. and E.H. Hong (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989) 253.
- (9) Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom*, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960) 25.
- (10) Martin Buber, 'Abraham the Seer,' *On the Bible*, ed. N.N. Glazier (New York: Schocken Books, New York, 1968) 27-8.
- (11) Roger Waterhouse, *A Heidegger Critique*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981) 174.

- (12) Kierkegaard, *Journals* 165.
- (13) Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968) 188.
- (14) G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Millar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 114.
- (15) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. P. Mairet (London: Methuen, 1948) 28.
- (16) Kierkegaard, *Journals* 390.
- (17) Alan Sillitoe, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. (London: W.H. Allen, 1975) 12-13.
- (18) John Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, (London: Hutchinson, 1972) 137.
- (19) Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Age of Reason*, trans. Eric Sutton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961) 51.
- (20) George Douglas Brown, *The House with the Green Shutters*, (London: Cassell, 1967) 23.
- (21) James Kelman, *How Late It Was, How Late*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994) 12.
- (22) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (London: Routledge, 1958) 255.
- (23) Sartre *Being and Nothingness* 263.
- (24) Sartre *Being and Nothingness* 277.

(25) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 166.

(26) Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and trans. R. Thomte (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) 119-20.

(27) Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. S. Gilbert (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1960) 115-6.

(28) Anton Chekhov, *Ward Six and Other Stories*, ed. and trans. R. Hingley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 27-8.

Chapter Two

However much it may be suggested that his characters' malaise is a purely personal alienation in the face of an absurd social world, the language McIlvanney uses to articulate the experiences of his characters often betrays the social origin of reification. Just as 'the look' relates to the dichotomized relation between the outer act rendered in appearance and the inner essence ('our secret selves'), so it is a noteworthy feature of McIlvanney's work that he uses his characters' voice to denote the conflict between authentic modes of existence (signified by 'natural' voice) and inauthentic modes (signified by 'mechanical' voice). Such a consideration of voice as reflective of the reifying power of mass society is prefigured in Adorno's consideration that we 'can expect to encounter disguised administrative categories even in . . . the most finely-nuanced emotions of the individual, in his voice and gestures' (1).

The use of mechanistic metaphor to denote alienated human relationships is at least as old as fiction depicting the physical and moral trauma caused by industrialization: Dickens' great novel *Hard Times* (1854) can be considered the archetype of such representations. As Williams noted in *The Country and The City*, the interactions between Dickens' characters are 'the real and inevitable relationships and connections, the necessary recognitions and avowals of any human society. But they are of a kind that are obscured, complicated, mystified, by the sheer rush and noise and miscellaneity of this new and complex social order' (2). Alongside changes in technology were new forms of social relations which are articulated in terms of new structures of feeling by contemporary authors.

As the pace of technological and social change advanced through the Nineteenth Century, so writers became critical of the new systems of production, and targeted mechanization as a process directly opposed to

humanist values and aims. In Gissing's 1891 novel *New Grub Street* for example, Gissing describes his protagonist's voice explicitly in terms of the alienating labour he is forced to endure: "Reardon was talking like an automaton. It seemed to him that he turned screws and pressed levers for the utterance of his next word" (3). This technique of using mechanistic metaphor as a marker of an alienated condition then became widespread by the turn of the century: in Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900) Marlow remarks that the French view of the *Patna* affair was 'uttered in passionless and definite phraseology a machine would use, if machines could speak' (4).

From its inception, then, the authorial use of mechanistic metaphor has assumed a critical stance towards modern technocratic society: this insistence on an irreducible opposition between the technology of modern production and humanist values has made the technique ripe for exploitation by existentialist writers. At the end of *L'Étranger*, Meursault considers the 'brutal certitude' of his situation:

Now I had to admit it seemed a very simple process, getting guillotined; the machine is on the same level as the man, and he walks towards it as one steps forward to meet somebody one knows. In a sense, that, too, was disappointing. The business of climbing a scaffold, leaving the world below one, so to speak, gave something for a man's imagination to get hold of. But, as it was, the machine dominated everything; they killed you discreetly, with a hint of shame and much efficiency. (5)

Here the guillotine functions as the visible embodiment of a similarly inhuman, impersonal judicial process in which the relationship between the individual and the machinery of social relationships is inverted. McIlvanney's work has very strong affinities with the existentialist appropriation of this technique, and the reification of language assumes a correspondingly large role in his fiction. *Strange Loyalties* offers a

number of examples of this appropriation: here Laidlaw considers that Michael Preston 'seemed sincere and his voice had the rhythm of natural speech—not the way voices sometimes sound on the box, as if they had been punctuated by computer. His public voice had the tone of integrity' (*SL*, 205). The reification of linguistic codes articulated in voice in McIlvanney's work points to an irreconcilable opposition of authentic being and bad faith, articulated in the metaphoric opposition of organicist and mechanical tropes—Preston appears authentic because of his 'natural' speech, explicitly contrasted with the reified expression of existence represented by the computer.

Voice is seen here as an unfalsifiable expression of the self, as can be seen with reference to Laidlaw's apprehension of Jan: 'I was aware of her body relaxing sensuously. But the voice came out cold and precise, a computer in a boudoir' (*SL*, 230). This passage is important as it points to a conflict between the language of rationality and the language of the body which is central to McIlvanney's discourse about the feminine. In *Strange Loyalties* this opposition is clearly seen in the person of Ellie Mabon:

The voice was brusque but with interesting undertones, like a sensuous body in a business-suit . . . Then I sensed her realise that she was showing too much of herself too soon. Her voice, when she spoke again, was like a woman who has readjusted her dress. (*SL*, 57-58)

Similar images are used to describe Laidlaw's perception of his sister-in-law: 'her eyes registered and erased, swift as a well programmed computer' (*SL*, 122), '[Anna's] normal social discourse seemed to me to have all the authenticity of an air-hostess's smile' (*SL*, 42) and 'I had phoned her a couple of times soon after the funeral and had been talking to a freezer. Each answer had come back small and cold as an ice-cube' (*SL*, 20). Here, linguistic frigidity is in direct opposition to the natural

warmth of authentic characters' speech.

Such a technique relies upon a supposition of presence which can ultimately guarantee the authenticity of the utterance, and McIlvanney's discourse is quick to exploit the absence of this signifying reality to condemn his inauthentic characters. In the story 'On the Sidelines', Katherine's words are only contentless shadow, lacking the 'substance' attributed to authentic utterance: 'Her conversation had always been rich in glib phrases and rhetorical questions that, on examination, frequently denied any search for substance. But they sounded good at the time' (*WW*, 50). In 'Hullo Again' the narrative undermines the authority of a character's speech in order to attack the superficiality of bourgeois attitudes in the person of Eddie's pompous client. Yet most often in McIlvanney's discourse, the opposition between authentic and inauthentic speech is figured in terms of organicist and mechanistic tropes.

This technique originates in McIlvanney's first novel: after Charlie is in prison, it becomes impossible to communicate his experience to his brother: 'The words were not communication, but the rejection of it. They clicked mechanically into place like bolts going home' (*R*, 239). Another interesting example is to be found in *Strange Loyalties*: 'Rendered metallic by the recording equipment, Matt Mason's voice was low and harsh. Abstracted from gesture or facial expression or social context, it emerged without concealment, just itself. It cut into the silence of the car like a serrated knife' (*SL*, 241). Paradoxically, the alienation of Mason's character through the machine does not in any way deform his essential self. Rather, being by nature duplicitous and inauthentic, the mechanical medium of the equipment is perfectly suited to represent Mason's character. Similarly, Cam Colvin 'had a name for acting with brutal exactitude, like a paranoid computer' (*PTV*, 32). The deployment of the mechanistic trope to describe such hard men as Mason and Colvin surely demonstrates McIlvanney's active antipathy towards their actions,

rather than naively celebrating their violence. Such unlikely bedfellows as Irvine Welsh (6) and Allan Massie (7) have implicated McIlvanney's work in presenting violence as 'sentimental', and in doing so they perform a reading of McIlvanney's texts shorn of any understanding of the serious moral purpose at work here.

It is at this juncture that we come to an important consideration of two of McIlvanney's concerns; existentialism and socialism. The dialectic of voice and appearance in McIlvanney's work has strong affinities with Kierkegaard's account. In *Either/Or* Kierkegaard (in his guise as Victor Eremita) investigates the relationship between the publicly accessible appearance and his apprehension of voice as expressive of the authentic substance of its possessor:

Gradually the sense of hearing came to be my favourite sense; for just as the voice is the revelation of an inwardness incommensurable with the outer, so the ear is the instrument by which this inwardness is apprehended, hearing the sense by which it is appropriated. Whenever, then, I found a contradiction between what I saw and what I heard, then I found my doubt confirmed, and my enthusiasm for the investigation stimulated. In the confessional the priest is separated from the penitent by a screen; he does not see, he only hears. Gradually as he listens, he constructs an outward appearance which corresponds to the voice he hears. Consequently, he experiences no contradiction. It is otherwise, however, when you hear and see at the same time, and yet perceive a screen between yourself and the speaker. (8)

It is important to here recognise the priority of the existentialist formulation of alienation in McIlvanney's work; although he uses many accounts of situations that seem compatible with a Marxist interpretation, it is vital to see that McIlvanney regards alienation to be a denial of 'inwardness' in the Kierkegaardian sense and so (if susceptible to

remedy at all) only to be overcome as a result of individual will. Both Kierkegaard and Marx were certain that bourgeois social configurations were anathema to the complete and free working out of human potentialities, but Marx insisted that society should be made truly social while Kierkegaard claimed that the key to salvation rests with the cultivation of inwardness. Any writer then who seeks to embody the opposing poles of existentialism and socialism must indeed be adept at 'inhabiting the paradoxes'.

The mechanist trope functions as a measure of individual authenticity in McIlvanney's discourse, as can be seen in the case of Laidlaw's superior, Commander Frederick: 'He spoke in spasms, like a teleprinter, and he seemed to be checking each statement as it came out of his mouth' (*L*, 45). Later in *Laidlaw*, a confrontation with Laidlaw reveals the Commander to be inauthentic:

Listening to Frederick's advice, he had thought again of how much he disliked that room, the deodorised furnishings, the uncluttered desk, the smiling photograph, the ashtray that was never used. It was like a shrine to a God he didn't believe in. It was the God of categories.

The way Frederick spoke was the key. His speech had a rhythm that had often puzzled Laidlaw. Now he understood. It was dictation. Everything was for the files. What didn't fit on paper was just a nuisance. He went by statistics and reports. He believed in categories. Laidlaw had never been able to do that. There wasn't one category that he could accept as being significantly self-contained, from 'Christian' to 'murderer'.

(*L*, 52)

Here we have the fictive recapitulation of Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel—a conceptual theme which runs through much of McIlvanney's work and marks him out as a writer in the existentialist tradition. Laidlaw

stands on the side of contingency, facticity, the irrational finitude of human existence against the panlogic certainty of Frederick's system. Throughout McIlvanney's fiction the mechanist trope defines inauthentic action either as thought abstracted from feeling (as when Laidlaw says to Gus Hawkins: 'It's like talking to a computer' (*PTV*, 197)) or action abstracted from thought—a key to Angus' future character is revealed early in *Docherty* when we are told: 'Playing with him was for Conn like trying to work a machine he didn't understand. Every so often his fist would come out like a piston, and Conn couldn't tell which lever he had pulled this time' (*D*, 37).

Once more in *Laidlaw* the institutional inhumanity of the legal system is represented through the reduction of Jennifer Lawson's death from an individual tragedy to a matter of statistics. This is shown in the contrast between the cries of the people who find her body and the measured tones of officialdom: 'The voices clustered and scattered like gulls . . . The hubbub rose and travelled beyond the park. The screams of panic and horror were translated into even, professional voices' (*L*, 25). As we may expect in McIlvanney's discourse, the brutality and indifference of bureaucracy finds its embodiment in the individual; the Procurator Fiscal's contempt for the world which Jennifer Lawson came from, and where Laidlaw hopes to find the killer, is strongly evident: 'The voice was sonorous with authority. Laidlaw turned and saw the Procurator Fiscal behind the customary barrier of cigar-smoke. It kept out the smell of the world. Today he was giving the park an audience' (*L*, 31). Typical of McIlvanney's ironic narrative stance in the *Laidlaw* novels, Laidlaw's prime antagonist in the first novel of the series is not a criminal, but another policeman, and the narrative signifies Milligan's inauthenticity by revealing that his 'voice was like an act of vandalism' (*L*, 53).

Perhaps most important in the examination of McIlvanney's exploration of voice is Heidegger's distinction between authentic speech (*Rede*) and inauthentic (*Gerede*). Throughout his work, McIlvanney

distinguishes inauthentic speech by linkage to a mechanistic trope, implying that the logical pattern of computer information is in no way connected to the authentic presentation of contingent human existence. While it would be foolish to deny that human beings are unlike computers in the sense that we are open to emotional response, it is not far of a leap to saying (as, in their own ways, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger often seem to) that rationality itself is external to what it means to be human. In opposing an organicist trope to the image of a computer as abstract rationality, McIlvanney comes dangerously close to setting up a *la* Heidegger a conceptual opposition between the inarticulable substance of human Being (*Dasein*) and the deployment of reason.

While McIlvanney is correct to say that the totality of human significations cannot be restricted to what is rational, neither must it be forgotten that humans are also rational, and that a computer, far from being an alien Being opposed to human essence, is itself a partial realization of human essence, at least to the extent that a computer is a product of human rationality. McIlvanney seems to err, like Heidegger, by arguing that in some way technology like the computer is inauthentic compared with the perceived relationship between human user, tool and nature in the craft-work model. In *Strange Loyalties* there is a passionate attack on bourgeois commodification of existence contrasted with the salutary counter-effects of authentic labour:

For I hadn't liked being there [the hotel]. Looking for the pottery, I found a phrase that helped me to understand why: urbane deprivation, the condition of being so sophisticated that you plumb the nature of most other people's experience out of your life like waste. Your attitudes are so glib and self-assured and automatic, you lose the necessary naivety that is living. That way, you eat everything and taste nothing.

The pottery shop offered shelter from that feeling. It was dimly lit and full of shelves on which glazed artefacts sat—pots and bowls

and ornaments and ashtrays. Whoever worked here was making a simple daily contract with his living. (SL, 109)

Note the explicit contrast between the reification of industrial setting of earlier works and the fulfilment offered by this labour; there is a discomfiting analogy with Heidegger's idealization of the craftsman as having an authentic relation to his labour. In many ways this opposition between organicist and mechanistic tropes is similar to Lawrence's usage. In *Women In Love*, the mine owner Gerald is described in terms of the fatal conjunction between mechanism and voice:

'Put the lights out, we shall see better', came his voice, sudden and mechanical and belonging to the world of man. (9)

'Take the launch in. It's no use keeping her there. Get lines for the dragging', came the decisive, instrumental voice, that was full of the sound of the world. (10)

Lawrence also shares McIlvanney's distrust of those who are all too ready to discuss and categorize people *en mass*, but who have no interest in the individual, as can be seen from his description of Palmer, 'a scientist with a passion for sociology':

But he was really impersonal, he had the fineness of an elegant piece of machinery. He was too cold, too destructive to care really for women, too great an egoist. He was polarized by the men. Individually he detested and despised them. In the mass they fascinated him, as machinery fascinated him. They were a new sort of machinery to him—but incalculable, incalculable. (11)

Yet, as we discuss later, there is a fundamental difference in the deployment of the tropes related to the class positioning of the respective narrators: Laidlaw makes a key distinction between 'tourists' and

'travellers':

There are tourists and travellers. Tourists spend their lives doing a Cook's Tour of their own reality. Ignoring their slums. Travellers take the journey more slowly, in greater detail. Mix with the natives. A lot of murderers are, among other things, travellers. They've become terrifyingly real for themselves. Their lives are no longer a hobby. Poor bastards. To come at them, you've got to become a traveller too . . . You've got to subject yourself to other people's prejudices. (L, 104)

McIlvanney would never describe the working-class community from the point of view of the 'tourist'—Laidlaw and Harkness's visit to the East End is conducted in the spirit of the 'traveller', while Connie's drive through Tevershall in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, or Ursula and Gudrun's walk through Beldover, is conducted in a spirit entirely alien to McIlvanney's discourse:

The two girls were soon walking swiftly down the main road of Beldover, a wide street, part shops, part dwelling-houses, utterly formless and sordid, without poverty. Gudrun, new from her life in Chelsea and Sussex, shrank cruelly from this amorphous ugliness of a small colliery town in the Midlands. Yet forward she went, through the whole sordid gamut of pettiness, the long amorphous, gritty street. She was exposed to every stare, she passed on through a stretch of torment. It was strange that she should have been chosen to come back and test the full effect of this shapeless, barren ugliness upon herself. Why had she wanted to submit herself to it, did she still want to submit herself to it, the insufferable torture of these ugly, meaningless people, this defaced countryside? (12)

While McIlvanney certainly does not shrink from the presentation of

poverty, his narrators do not contrast working-class life negatively with the inauthentic existence of the bourgeoisie: when Miss Gilfillan does make the contrast in *Docherty*, she is described in negative terms. In attempting to make contact with Conn, she is revealed to have the pejorative attitude of the missionary:

Her method had a Mary Slessor flavour to it. With the paralysing conviction of someone whose mind had closed a long time ago and in another place, wherever she looked she saw only the shapes of her own atrophied prejudice. High Street was to her just the dregs of humanity, riff-raff, scum. Even living among them, she had remained a tourist, clinging to her past like a passport. Now that she was trying to effect a rapprochement for the first time with one of them, the only role she could condescend to play was that of enlightener. She was going to do some missionary work in darkest High Street. Just as natives are lured with coloured beads, so Conn was to be enticed with sweets. (*D*, 81)

Throughout this discussion what will have been most apparent is the central paradox of existentialist thought: having ostensibly abolished any conception of human nature, existentialist discourse betrays a longing for presence. The speaking subject becomes the originary site of value and the doctrine of authenticity valorizes a unity of being (purpose articulated in and through the body) which looks to an absent subjectivity for confirmation. Faced with the dissolution of an originary *locus* of meaning entailed by existentialism, McIlvanney's characters are continually tempted by the vision of an essential self which could withstand the erasure of difference threatened by capitalist mass society. The eternal quest for McIlvanney's characters lies in the hope of a subjectivity which is never actually present, and therefore subject to the reifying claims of identity, but which can nevertheless avoid inscription in the symbolic order in terms other than its own unique presence. In order for Laidlaw to evade the social ascription of 'policeman' (with all its inauthentic

consequences) he is forced to produce a counter-reification of a 'Laidlaw' identity with which to orientate himself ethically in the wider social sphere.

The play of presence/absence of meaning evidently influences the wider ontological position outlined earlier. Here the discrepancy between the need for a moral basis (relative to society but absolute to the individual) and the question of its legitimacy (deriving from the individual who obeys that code) can only be resolved by reference to the *mythos* of origin. By positing an originary sphere of unselfconscious being untrammelled by a past the discourse of authenticity can ground itself in ontology (and Derrida's crucial insight is that ontology can only be expressed as myth). This then functions as an absolute, and youth's proximate identification with this arena of unselfconscious being has a strong attraction in McIlvanney's texts.

We are now not far from seeing the relations between this mythic ground of being and Heidegger's thought-as-remembering as the method of recovering this authentic being. Yet for McIlvanney the coincidence of actual self with this state is impossible to grasp as lived experience—the longed-for moment of Transcendence is nothing less than the attribution of an impossible innocence to the empirical individual. The godless theology of Heideggerian ontology is not an available system of signification for McIlvanney; however, McIlvanney circumvents this cul-de-sac in the search for Absolute presence by turning from the fallen world of human history to the exalted realm of aesthetics.

At this point I will examine the existentialist consideration of guilt, and its application in the critique of societal justice. As we have seen previously, in the existentialist paradigm alienation is understood as ontological rather than historical in nature. For the existentialist, the human is definitively alienated from transcendence as

- a) the individual is burdened by the fact of his/her own finitude in terms of their physicality (i.e. in common with inert being-in-itself, the individual is subject to the laws of the phenomenal realm);
- b) the ego finds itself circumscribed by the always-already presence of the Other.

As Freudian metapsychology recognized, the ego is impelled by contradictory drives to remedy its intolerable limitation: by the agency of Thanatos, the subject is driven towards the consummation of its biological destiny—in freely choosing the inevitable dissolution of self, the subject masters death; *via* the agency of Eros, the subject is driven to absorb the Other into our-self (and likewise dissolve our-self in the Other).

What, then, is the counter-image of alienated being? The transcendent realm of being most often accepted as a projection of the ego's repressed longing for wholeness is embodied in the image of deity. This is well comprehended in Gisors' argument with Ferral in Malraux's 1933 novel *La Condition humaine*:

men are probably not interested in power. What attracts them about that notion is not the actual power itself, but the idea of doing what they damn well please. The might of kings consists in governing, doesn't it? But man has no desire to govern: his wish, as you said yourself, is to shackle to constrain . . . He wants, in a world of men, to be more than a man. As I say, to escape mortals' lot. To be not powerful, but all-powerful—that's his yearning. All this illusory sickness of the brain whose intellectual manifestation is the will to power, is a thirst for divinity. Every man dreams of being God. (13)

We may then proceed from an awareness of human finitude, and

construct an image of unalienated transcendent being (Augustine, Pascal) or proceed from this image and deduce human finitude (Sartre). One may characterize the Christian variety of existentialism as an integrative calculus of experience, and the atheistic form as a differential calculus of experience. Sartre's early philosophy exemplifies the latter approach: 'when we speak of "abandonment"—a favourite word of Heidegger—we only mean to say that God does not exist, and that it is necessary to draw the consequences of his absence right to the end' (14). Shortly after, Sartre goes on to discuss these consequences:

The existentialist . . . finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There can no longer be any good *a priori*, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. It is nowhere written that 'the good' exists, that one must not be honest or must not lie, since we are now upon the plane where there are only men. Dostoevsky once wrote 'If God does not exist, everything would be permitted'; and that, for existentialism, is the starting point. (15)

As a result of this methodology, the existentialist judges and defines human finitude by the standard of an Absolute. The finitude of human being renders it guilty in that (in Scholastic terms) the actualization of one of the subject's potentialities results in the negation of an infinite plurality of other potentialities. Unlike the image of the deity, whose full potentiality is actualized and actualized through all time, the empirical individual must be in bad faith with respect to his potentiality—hence the nostalgia with which the existentialist imagination endows its vision of the Eden of pure potentiality, explored earlier. Nietzsche's critique of morality reveals the mechanism whereby this intuition of guilt is implanted retrospectively in the human psyche as a constitutive principle:

Man is conscious of certain actions which stand low in the

customary order of rank of actions; indeed, he discovers in himself a tendency to actions of this sort which seems to him almost as immutable as his whole nature. How much he would like to attempt that other species of actions which in the general estimation are accounted the highest, how much he would like to feel full of that good consciousness which is supposed to attend a selfless mode of thought! Unhappily, he gets no further than desiring this: his discontent at his insufficiency is added to all the other kinds of discontent which his lot in life in general or the consequences of those other actions called wicked have engendered in him; so that there arises a profound depression of spirits, together with a watching-out for a physician who might be able to alleviate this condition and all its causes.—This condition would not be felt so bitterly if man compared himself only with other men: for then he would have no reason to be especially discontented with himself, since he would see he was only bearing the general burden of human dissatisfaction and imperfection. But he compares himself with a being which alone is capable of those actions called unegoistic and lives continually in the consciousness of a selfless mode of thought, with God; it is because he looks into this brilliant mirror that his own nature seems to him so dismal, so uncommonly distorted. Then again, the thought of this same being makes him fearful insofar as it appears to his imagination as chastising justice. (16)

In this aspect McIlvanney's dilemma is never more acutely realized than in his decision to make Laidlaw—his anguished existential hero in the streets of Glasgow—none other than a policeman, much given to reflecting on the nature of society's "justice" and the guilt of himself and others. It must be emphasized that in *Strange Loyalties* Laidlaw himself is alive to the reactionary potentials of the anthropology of guilt he has cultivated:

I have been long enough wandering through the shadows of other people's lives—the violence, the betrayals and the hurt—to be aware of the power of guilt. It is often a malignant power, for it is those desirous of the good who feel it most and, when they do, it can intimidate them into conformity with natures smaller than their own. It can make them so ashamed of themselves that they condone the shameful acts of others. Self-contempt leaves you ill-equipped to challenge the immorality of anyone else. (*SL*, 157)

Yet the task of steering between the Scylla of bourgeois complacency and Charybdis of moral impotence is left entirely to the intuition and integrity of the individual; Laidlaw's recognition that guilt can be used to illegitimately suspend judgment is ultimately fruitless because of his fear of systematizing experience stops him from developing any rational (as opposed to intuitive) criteria for differentiating between guilt as honest recognition of finitude, moral compromise and so on, and guilt as a source of masochistic gratification and flight from the recognition of true responsibility (by deceiving oneself into believing one has accepted that responsibility). This new consideration of guilt in *Strange Loyalties* is therefore not so much an advance as a cul-de-sac: without the means to negotiate self-deception the earlier model of universal guilt comes into play almost by default:

There was the guilt of being tempted to use Jan to soothe him now when he gave her so little of his life. There was the guilt of betraying Ena. The compromise of his own life, so hurting to others, appalled him. (*PTV*, 38)

Such a position in McIlvanney's fiction is not restricted to Laidlaw; Scoular also commits himself to this stance: 'Assumption of your own innocence was guilt. He felt himself come into his patiently accrued experience as something earned' (*TBM*, 218). Again, we find ourselves in the absurd position of trying to square the hermeneutic circle: if there is

any moral difference between Milligan and Laidlaw or Mason and Scoular, then we must go beyond the banal existentialist verity that no-one is innocent and find a common ground for moral judgment.

Yet this common ground is rejected by the denial of any human nature for the existentialist: just as history can only exist for God in the existentialist paradigm, so morality is the preserve of Divinity, the supreme irony being that in McIlvanney's fictive world, God is dead, or at least hidden. McIlvanney's humanist existentialism, eschewing the transcendent validation of Deity, leaves Laidlaw stranded in a sea of bad faith—the society he supports through his work is twisted and inauthentic in its refusal to recognise itself in its products, and his own position, beset by doubt, constantly undermines his attempt to achieve authenticity. Alongside Docherty and Scoular, we are perhaps invited to admire the grandeur of Laidlaw's failure.

Throughout *Laidlaw* McIlvanney investigates the gulf which separates legalistic conceptions of crime and punishment from their existentialist counterparts. Bud Lawson's 'crime', in the paradigm of existentialist ethics, lies in his refusal to acknowledge the paradoxical nature of human existence:

. . . Bud Lawson was still following the relentless parade of his own thoughts, like an Orange March nobody dare cut across . . . now even Laidlaw had become irrelevant to whatever reactions were amassing in Bud Lawson. He was going somewhere alone. (*L*, 37)

As with Margaret Sutton's father in *A Gift From Nessus*, Lawson's insistence on the conformity of his family with his family with his monologic vision results in the daughter's reification:

He stared down at his daughter. Nothing happened in his eyes. To Laidlaw watching, having seen so many reactions to the same fact

in this same cold place, this was the strangest, because it was no reaction. It was like corpse confronting corpse. Bud Lawson stared at his dead daughter, looked steadily across at Alec and nodded once. And that was that.

(L, 37)

Lawson's ethic is represented as one of unassailable logic, which cannot be refuted on its own terms. Such a way of being cannot admit of doubt, contrasting strongly with Laidlaw's continual readiness to embrace it. Lawson's refusal to consider the possibility of his own guilt constitutes his bad faith:

Looking at him, Laidlaw saw one of life's vigilantes, a retribution-monger. For everything that happened there was somebody else to blame, and he was the very man to deal with them. Laidlaw was sure his anger did not stop at people. He could imagine him shredding ties that wouldn't knot properly, stamping burst tubes of toothpaste into the floor. His face looked like an argument you couldn't win. (L, 11)

There is a qualitative difference articulated in McIlvanney's discourse between the guilt which is an inescapable fact of our existence and goes unacknowledged (the source of Milligan and Lawson's bad faith) and Laidlaw's open admission of culpability. Laidlaw is careful not to omit himself from his assessment of guilt: 'We're all experts in concealment, hailing one another's disguises as if they were old friends' (SL, 61).

From McIlvanney's earliest work until the present day, we find a contempt for the easy distinction society draws between good and evil. The judicial system in particular is seen as the methodical cultivation of bad faith and its impersonality is considered as a source of alienation in *Strange Loyalties*; for Laidlaw the judges 'lived as close to the real world as the Dalai Lama. Never mind having little understanding of the human

heart, they often didn't have much grasp of the daily machinery of the lives they were presuming to judge' (SL, 5). *Remedy Is None* illustrates a similar concern, the following scene closely paralleling that in Camus' *L'Étranger* where the magistrate encourages Meursault to deny the true significance of his crime:

It did not matter what they [the lawyers] happened to believe personally, or if they believed anything personally. Nobody made any pretence of being involved in the reality of the thing. It was all just make-believe.

Charlie could not bring himself to participate in their charade. He felt somehow as if he had played into their hands. When he had felt the injustice his father had suffered, they had offered him no means to express his feeling. They had ignored it, pretended that the injustice he felt did not exist. And when he had proven its existence by an action they could not ignore, they isolated the action in himself, pretended that the injustice was his, existed only in the manifestation he had given it. It was as if they had let him trap himself in their own evil, and then attributed the evil to him. His action had been an attempt to pass some sort of judgment on them, and now they were using it to pass judgment on him. They made his actions a means of vindicating themselves. They did not relate his action in any way to themselves. They made it all so impersonal by reducing it to this mock conflict in which they both took sides. By their skilful ambivalence, they exonerated themselves whatever happened. And they did it all with earnestness and humanity.

(R, 214)

In the early novels, the critique of social legitimacy is unfocused: the narrative allows the protagonist's pathos to overwhelm the social context it is trying to evoke. Though McIlvanney was never to lose his suspicious stance towards the legal process, by ironically situating Laidlaw as

simultaneously participant and critic of that process, he is able to ground his argument without recourse to a rhetoric which sees the social contestation of meaning disappear over the horizon, as it so clearly does here:

The solicitor strove determinedly to make Charlie's action as insignificant as he could. As the time for trial drew near, he promised Charlie that his 'counsel' would be coming to see him. He said it as if it was very important, a significant gesture made towards Charlie, justice sending her official representative to his aid.

But Charlie saw it as only another stage in refining what he had done to fit their own requirements, another part of the process his action was submitted to in this factory for the distortion of facts to fit society. He saw truth tethered and hobbled, lying ready for emasculation. 'Counsel' was just another name for one of those who were holding it ready for the knife. (*R*, 214-5)

This rejection of social legitimacy finds a strong antecedent in Nietzsche: in a passage strongly redolent of Kierkegaard's repudiation of civil society's 'demonic' arrogation of a transcendent understanding, Nietzsche points to the inherent contradiction of a merely secular justice:

Secular justice.— It is possible to lift secular justice off its hinges—with the doctrine that everyone is wholly unaccountable and innocent: and an attempt has already been made to do something of the sort, though on the basis of the antithetical doctrine that everyone is wholly accountable and culpable. It was the founder of Christianity who wanted to abolish secular justice and remove judging and punishing from the world. For he understood all guilt as 'sin', that is to say as an offence against *God* and *not* as an offence against the world; on the other hand, he regarded everyone as being in the greatest measure and in

almost every respect a sinner. The guilty, however, ought not to be the judges of their own kind: thus his sense of equity dictated. *All* judges of the realm of secular justice were thus in his eyes as guilty as those they condemned, and the air of innocence they assumed seemed to him hypocritical and pharisaical. He had eyes, moreover, only for the motives of an action and not for its consequences, and considered there was only one sole person sufficiently sharp-sighted to adjudicate on motives: he himself (or, as he himself put it, God). (17)

We can disregard the many contingencies (Jane's desire to see her family just when Charlie comes home drunk from his father's grave) which lead to the tragic action. Yet, as the following passage describing Charlie's arrest illustrates, there is a fundamental confusion about the nature of that action:

The room was overflowing with people. Charlie couldn't see the connection between all this and what he had felt when he hit Mr Whitmore. The terrible dark thing that had taken place in him denied meaning. And now these men were methodically reducing it to conformity. That moment of vast freedom was being manacled with measurements and jotted notes and assessing looks. A trivial chain of reason was being forged link by link around him. (*R*, 195)

Can we really say that Charlie's attack on Mr Whitmore was truly a 'moment of vast freedom', relying as it does on a host of accidents (the Whitmores' appearance, Charlie leaving the party drunk and so on)? No doubt McIlvanney anticipates such a charge and parodies it in the chapter where the journalist Ron Evans illustrates how little the observer can actually understand from the external apprehension of the action. Such a pessimism about the possibility of true communication further darkens the novel and increases the atmosphere of tragedy. Regardless of its generic designation, *Remedy Is None* clearly establishes a

conceptual opposition between legality and justice which was to become an enduring theme of the later fiction.

In his work as a whole, and in the Laidlaw novels in particular, McIlvanney uses the opposition of ethical authenticity and social legality to articulate a critique of capitalism. Ironically, Laidlaw refuses to agree that social justice and legality can ever be reconciled, exploiting the non-identity of appearance and reality:

There are as many variations of criminality as there are of social conformity. Just as the apparent openness of rectitude will have its hidden places where foul things may moulder in the dark so, in the shadowed lives of those outside the law, may sometimes be found concealed honesty and naive ideals. We may think of good and evil as separate states but they have no fixed borders. Anyone of us may pass between them without declaring anything. We are all born to parents with passports entitling us to travel freely in both. (SL, 191)

In *Strange Loyalties* McIlvanney problematises recognition of such chimerical states as good or evil; the doctrine of universal guilt explicated in *Laidlaw* is given new force and McIlvanney attempts to give a wider social context to his depiction of existentialist ethical judgment. In this passage, Laidlaw watches Matt Mason's house:

. . . a place where violence dressed nice, injustice wore legal robes, venom smiled sweetly, unnecessary suffering was ignored and hypocrisy was honoured. I thought of many of the people I had met this week. They lived here, too. And like polite house-guests, they wouldn't break the rules. Their continued residency depended on that conformity. To break the rules was to put yourself at hazard.

I realised that nobody I had met had been quite prepared to do

that. They might have whispered the odd secret to me but they wouldn't stand up and risk themselves to challenge the lies of others. (SL, 243-4)

Note the existentialist concerns: conformity, the refusal of risk, social appearance erasing personal reality. Here we come once more to the fundamental ambiguity in McIlvanney's thinking, between existentialist authenticity and socialist morality. Matt Mason functions in the Laidlaw novels as embodying a peculiar kind of corruption: what is remarkable about Mason is not his violence, or even his calculating attitude towards that violence; McIlvanney is careful to stress throughout the Laidlaw works that Mason's violence (contrasted with, for example, the murderer's action in *Laidlaw*) is in perfect accord with his society. Mason embodies the business-end of the capitalist ethic: his violence is deliberate, instrumental, calculating, it is not expended unnecessarily or to gratify emotion. This violence is inherently *rational* and Mason attains his ends through the deliberate exercise of that violence.

And what are Mason's objectives? 'Convention, Conformity, Connivance' (R,162) the bourgeois virtues *par excellence* in McIlvanney's fiction. In Chapter Two we discuss the ways in which Mason comes to represent the inauthenticity of bourgeois desire, its fixation with objectification and need to relate to the Other as an object. Mason is counted as particularly vicious because of the fact that he has knowledge of his actions: the other 'house-guests' are equally brutal (though their violence is mediated through social structure, and thus lacks the qualities of directness and clarity imparted to Mason's violence) yet such is the level of social mystification caused by an order where 'injustice wore legal robes' that they themselves may be unaware of the reality of their violence. Yet Mason is doubly sinister in that he deliberately chooses to turn his back upon his working-class community (unlike John Rhodes) and join the ranks of the respected and powerful. The contrast between Rhodes and this calculating ethic is presented in

unmistakably commercial terms:

Like a traditional family firm overtaken by pushy corporations, John Rhodes retained one quality which had so far guaranteed his survival—100% proof violence. When he had to go, it would be to the death, preferably other people's. (*PTV*, 69)

It is precisely Rhodes' willingness to risk himself that differentiates him from Mason: in *Laidlaw* he acts against his own interest to find the killer, while Mason is purely concerned with keeping clear of the police. Laidlaw acknowledges that Rhodes 'does have certain rules. He's not fair but he has a kind of justice. He could've been a much bigger crook. Only he won't do certain things. So he's settled for a level of crookery that still allows him the luxury of a morality' (*L*, 93).

Laidlaw is in a unique position to challenge social assumptions about individual existence, and while being sceptical about the ability of society's agencies to achieve some measure of freedom and social justice he is involved in his work in an immediately personal way:

I don't know what you feel about this job. But it fits me as comfortably as a hair-shirt. All right, I do it. Because sometimes I get to feel it matters very much. But not if I'm just a glorified street-sweeper. Filling up Barlinnie like a dustbin. There have to be some times when you don't just collect the social taxes. You arrange a rebate. If all I'm doing is holding the establishment's lid on for it, them stuff it. I resign. But I think there can be more to it. One of the things I'm in this job to do is to learn. Not just how to catch criminals but who they really are, and maybe why. I'm not some guard-dog. Trained to answer whistles. Chase whoever I'm sent after. I'm not just suspicious of the people I'm chasing. I'm suspicious of the people I'm chasing them *for*. I mean to stay that way. (*PTV*, 59)

Laidlaw's methodology is a direct illustration of the inadequacy of moral conviction alone (the conviction possessed by, for example, Bud Lawson in *Laidlaw*) and a vindication of the existentialist need to doubt:

If I had belief in the fact, without proof of the fact, what could I do? I couldn't plant the evidence that would establish the proof, as some of my less scrupulous colleagues might have been prepared to do. That isn't what I do. It isn't what I do because it leads to madness. To pretend that subjective conviction is objective truth, without testing it against the constant daily witness of experience, is to abdicate from living seriously. The mind becomes self-governing and the world is left to chaos. That way, you don't discover truth, you invent it. The invention of truth, no matter how desperately you wish it to be or how sincerely you believe in the benefits it will bring, is the denial of our nature, the first rule of which is the inevitability of doubt. We must doubt not only others but ourselves.

So I would doubt my own conviction for the moment. But I would find a way to test it. It is not enough to think the truth is there. It needs the breath of our acknowledgement to live. I had to find out how to give it the kiss of life. (*SL*, 163)

This evinces a far more optimistic epistemology than *Remedy Is None*. There we were assured that true *Verstehen*, understanding, was impossible and throughout his fiction McIlvanney vacillates between the radical doubt of Augustine and Pascal and this more optimistic view. Knowledge of the Other is a major problem for the existentialist. In insisting upon the individual subject's uniqueness, existentialism deprives itself of the logical tools of inference and deduction, favouring instead an intuitive approach. Laidlaw's method is deliberately anti-systematic (see, for example, his derogatory remarks about Milligan and his 'soldier ants') and rejects the analytic nature of police work, insisting

upon an identification with the murderer rather than just of the murderer.

Laidlaw's doubt is explored in the confrontation between Milligan's categorical definition of professionalism and Laidlaw's contingent definition: Milligan asserts that

A professional *knows* what he is. I've got nothing in common with thieves and con-men and pimps and murderers. Nothing! They're another species. And we're at war with them. It's about survival. What would happen in a war if we didn't wear different uniforms? We wouldn't know who was who. That's Laidlaw. He's running about in no man's land with a German helmet and a Black Watch jacket . . . He's never faced up to what this job's about. It's about catching the baddies. And doing whatever you have to do to catch them. You have to batter down whatever's in your road. Doors or faces makes no odds. (L, 52)

Under Laidlaw's influence, Harkness later realises the ethical implications of Milligan's view of professionalism:

There's the professionalism that does something well enough to earn a living from it. And there's the professionalism that creates a commitment so intense that the earning of a living happens by the way. Its dynamic isn't wages but the determination to do something as well as it can be done.

Laidlaw was the second kind of professional. Harkness realised it was a very uncomfortable thing to be because, in their work, 'well' involved not just results but the morality by which you arrived at them. He thought of Laidlaw's capacity to bring constant doubt to what he was doing and still try to do it. The pressure must be severe. (L, 143)

In the story 'Deathwatch Beetle' McIlvanney explores the relationship

between crime and environment and criticizes the glib way society considers its relation to the individual:

'The nick's not a suspension of life', Rafferty had said. 'It's a logical extension of it. The way sewers are with plumbing. And the only way out is through. You have to find your own way through. I hate the way some people talk about the nick. You know? Like, paying your debt to society. Most of society've got no idea what they're charging you. They think they're removing you from society? They're shoving you right up its arse. They're showing you what society's really like. Because the nick's not a removal from society. It *is* society. Without the etiquette'. (*WW*, 160)

The story receives social contextualization from McIlvanney's illustration of the way society shapes the experience of its members: Rafferty is presented as having been unquestionably alienated by his experience of jail (and, importantly, his experience of contemporary society). When his wife leaves him Rafferty says 'It's all in the black box'¹:

It was only now, his mind sharpened by fear, that Morrison understood what he meant. The black box was the part that survived the aircraft crash intact. It was the machine that went to the extremities of experience and came back with the answer to what had happened. On the basis of its findings, understanding could be achieved and blame apportioned. And action taken. (*WW*, 160-1)

¹ In another context McIlvanney uses this metaphor to describe the writer's function:

Like the black box in an aeroplane crash, the writer's function is not just to discover the nature of experience but to bring back an expression of what it is like that is relevant to the experience of as many others as possible. (*TW*, 30)

Nietzsche recognizes the cruelty inherent in such alienation:

By and large, punishment hardens and freezes; it concentrates; it sharpens the sense of alienation; it strengthens resistance . . . it is precisely punishment that has most effectively retarded the development of guilt feeling, at any rate in the hearts of the victims of punitive authority. For the criminal is prevented, by the very witnessing of the legal process, from regarding his deed as intrinsically evil. He sees the very same actions performed in the service of justice with perfectly clear conscience and general approbation: spying, setting traps, outsmarting, bribing, the whole tricky, cunning system which chiefs of police, prosecutors, and informers have developed among themselves; not to mention the cold-blooded legal practices of despoiling, insulting, torturing, murdering the victim. Obviously none of these practices is rejected and condemned *per se* by his judges, but only under certain conditions. (18)

The sinister image of the black box serves as a warning that only those who can dehumanize themselves will survive in the non-human environment of capitalist society: a point made explicit by Morrison's reflections:

Morrison in his dread imagined the count being taken up all over the country by men in dark places that weren't as dark as their hearts, the legions of the dispossessed, the terminally disenchanted, the keepers of accounts their society refused to honour . . .

I hope they get you, Morrison was saying to himself like a placative prayer that would fend off Rafferty. I hope they get you. I didn't cause this mess. I'm just a thief, an incompetent thief. It's you they're after, you in your big houses and your fancy cars, the ones who've forgotten how to care, the ones who think that

poverty is a personal choice and that exploitation is a birthright and that pain is a weakness. It's you they're after. (WW, 161)

This withering attack on the greed and contempt for humanity engendered by contemporary capitalism is as sustained a piece of socialist analysis as is to be found in McIlvanney's fiction. Yet here again we encounter the paradoxes which are so emblematic of his work. As we have seen, McIlvanney is part of an existentialist tradition which is suspicious of communal morality, whether embodied in formal social structures such as the Church or the Law, or in the more transitory groups such as the men at the funeral in *Laidlaw* or the people in the doctor's surgery in *A Gift From Nessus*. McIlvanney does want to accept a communitarian ethic, based on an ethic of mutual care, and seeks to differentiate this brand of morality from what we may term 'mob morality' by grounding it in the ethical integrity of the doubting individual. While McIlvanney's protagonists make undoubtedly strong claims for their moral convictions, McIlvanney is careful to counterpoise the sense of doubt these characters feel toward these beliefs with the absolute certainty that is so indicative of inauthenticity.

There is a scene in a waiting-room in *A Gift From Nessus* in which a 'fat woman' immediately signifies her otherness by her physical presence. She compounds this by choosing to break the taboo of anonymity demanded by the situation. The others in the room, in their need to remain anonymous and detached, are paradoxically welded into a group by common resentment:

Cameron could sense the conspiracy of distaste regrouping round the fat woman. They were all mutely linking prejudices against her untidy, obtrusive presence . . . Their tight-lipped unity was almost tangible, and as solid as a wall, one mortared out of mediocrity. That was the basis of their resentment. They had come to wait with one another in this room where the yellow light lay on them like

leprosy and they wished to remain anonymous, not to be impinged upon, not to have any share in anyone else. That was their right. They weren't here as themselves but merely as portmanteaux for their illnesses. (*GFN*, 75)

Their crime, according to McIlvanney, was their desire to remain in bad faith, their need to deny their innate connection with each other as humans. This episode functions as a paradigm of the relations between the authentic individual and society; the group, wishing to remain in the anonymity of being-in-itself, attacks those who demand a human response. The immediate result of this antithesis between the genuine substance of an individual and their reified social designation is that the individual is rendered unknowable (note the importance of Kierkegaard's concept of 'inwardness' here) and any attempt to identify their 'true' selves with their social significations (through their labour for example) is bound to fall into bad faith:

Four people close at hand were discussing the Royal Family in a very familiar way. How can people do that? Who knows who they are? Do *they* know how they are? It's the King Lear syndrome. As soon as people bow or curtsy to you, how can you work out what they think? The existential mirror that is other people's eyes becomes misted. (*SL*, 107)

This produces the curious situation of a socialist writer explicitly disavowing the utility and moral integrity of the group. While such an attitude is difficult to reconcile with a socialist analysis, it is readily explained with reference to existentialist concerns, as Macquarrie notes:

What the inauthentic collective kind of being-together cannot tolerate is the different, anything that departs from the accepted norm . . . It is the same existential attitude that underlies prejudice against the person of different colour or race. He is different, he is

'not one of the crowd', as we say in a particularly revealing colloquialism . . . Since the existentialist critique of the 'crowd' is usually considered in terms of levelling down the 'exceptional' persons who rise above the average, it is worth remembering that the collective drive towards uniformity has just as little use for those unfortunate people who fall below the average. (19)

Considering the logical consequence of this position gives McIlvanney a highly ambivalent attitude towards society; he recognises the need for community, yet sees the latent threat of the collective towards the individual, and ultimately the question arises whether a socialist existentialism is a viable political philosophy. This ambivalence finds expression in *Laidlaw* where the group is seen alternately as inauthentic and enlivening:

But they weren't the most bizarre thing about the scene. That was the crowd beyond the cordon. Laidlaw didn't like looking at them. They had the strange unity he had noticed in such groups, craning and communing with one another, a hydra talking to itself. A father carried a girl on his shoulders, her feet stirruped in his arm pits. A small boy sucked a lollipop. Laidlaw never understood them. It wasn't as if they could help. They were just voyeurs of disaster. (*L*, 29)

The workers were coming out of MacLaughlin's. They were jostling and laughing. Somebody dropped a piece-tin and a neat inter-passing movement developed along the pavement before the tin was recovered. Harkness looked at Laidlaw, who was smiling. (*L*, 125)

Note how McIlvanney registers the different tone of the groups through a marked contrast in style: the first group is 'bizarre' and 'strange', it refuses to give itself up to Laidlaw's comprehension and so resembles

the complex structure of a hydra. The second group, on the other hand, is presented purely in terms of action: there is no difficulty in interpreting the scene as it unfolds in short, simple sentences. The transparency of the action allows of no unfathomable motives; this is merely a spontaneous expression of unselfconscious camaraderie, leaving the reader in no doubt which is the authentic mode of being-together.

Yet the general perception of interpersonal relations for the existentialist is less optimistic; such authentic encounters as the one above, being the product of spontaneous action, become increasingly rare in this increasingly regimented world. More often, McIlvanney's view is in accordance with the early Sartre's view that 'conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others' and that the 'essence of the relations between consciousness is not the *Mitsein*, it is conflict' (20). The importance for Cameron is made clear:

the attitude these strangers took towards the fat woman was merely a lower form of the one that Margaret's brother and Sid Morton had adopted towards him. The latter was more sophisticated, represented a further stage of evolution, but both had their origins in the same primeval social slime, the noxiousness of which must have permeated the doings of the first men who came darkly and uncertainly together, underpinning them like the law of a bastard divinity: death to the different. Margaret's brother might convince himself that he was motivated by brotherly love or Christian morality; Morton might plead disinterested concern for Allison or the demands of business competence. But the malevolence that had burned in the eyes of both was the same fire, though the fuel might differ. (*GFN*, 75-6)

The existentialist approach to ethics sets itself explicitly against all socially normative codes of behaviour. In this passage, we see McIlvanney move within the Kierkegaardian critique of the 'crowd' and

vindication of the individual consciousness as the sole seat of moral integrity. This passage neatly illustrates Kierkegaard's point about sympathy; Cameron does not feel sympathy for the woman's plight in any abstract sense (i.e. that the group's attitude is 'unjust') but is offensive to the extent that the woman's situation is equivalent to Cameron's. However, we must be careful to note that such an attitude also bears close resemblance to the Nietzschean vilification of the 'herd' and the theory of 'ressentiment' which is absolutely inimical to socialist principles. Kierkegaard perhaps best illustrates the existentialist's antipathy to group praxis when he asserts that 'the crowd possesses no idealism, and hence no power of retaining impressions in spite of contrary impressions. It is always the victim of appearance' (21).

It will be clear by now that there are two strains of McIlvanney's thought in open conflict here; the existentialist strain and the humanist strain. As we have seen, the existentialist has no fixed conception of human nature; the individual makes himself in his actions. The humanist, on the other hand, does posit an idea of human nature, and seeks to preserve it in the face of dehumanizing situations. The passages quoted above illustrate that the existentialist's prioritization of his/her own consciousness above all else makes sympathy, in any abstract way, impossible; the existentialist must live the Other's situation to sympathize with them. The humanist's belief in a common human nature, however, automatically enables him/her to sympathize with the Other, as the Other's situation is already to some extent their own. Throughout McIlvanney's work, there is a sustained dialogue between these two conceptions of human existence which makes his work so hostile to simple categorization. Simultaneously, McIlvanney is a socialist believer in Humanity, who defends individualism as the true mode of existence; and a humanist believer in a common right to the world, who insists that each individual lives in his own world. Proust expresses the paradox thus; 'The universe is real for us all and dissimilar to each one of us' (22).

The above argument, in rejecting the socially normative codes of behaviour in favour of allegiance to one's 'project' means the distinction between legal and illegal action are abolished. This, of course, was one of the great themes of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. In many ways, McIlvanney's *Laidlaw* covers the same existential territory of the One and the Many, society's rights over the individual, and the meaning of justice. In a situation which parallels the waiting-room scene in *A Gift From Nessus*, the men gather at Bud Lawson's house after his daughter's body has been identified:

Slowly the whisky had played upon their grouped moods until their anger found expression. It happened at first in isolated moments.

Somebody said, 'Folk like that shouldny be allowed tae live'.

There were noddings. The silence was a fearsome unanimity.

'Whit harm did that wee lassie ever dae anybody?'

No harm at all, the silence said.

'Even if they get 'im, some doactor'll likely see tae it he jist gets jiled'.

Their righteousness was total. These were rough men. Several of them lived with violence as part of their way of life. One of them might like to talk of the time he'd met a safe-blower or had a drink with a well-known criminal. But there were crimes and crimes. And if you committed certain of them—like interfering with a child or raping a girl—they emasculated you in their minds. They made you a thing.

The kitchen became a place sterile of pity. Gradually they talked themselves out of being men. They were all vigilantes. (L, 42)

Notice the grotesque irony of this 'dialogue' with silence. In this scene (a perverse variant of the group identity at the end of *Docherty* where the corner boys gather to eulogise Tam) the fear of 'being destroyed in effigy' by others is consummated; the killer of the girl is literally reified ('they

made you a thing') and in doing so, the men themselves are dehumanized.

There is a certain ambiguity in the use of the second person in this passage. In West Central Scots, (roughly the dialect McIlvanney uses in direct speech in *Laidlaw*), the second person is used where Standard English would use 'one' as a pronoun denoting 'any person'. However, in *Laidlaw*, McIlvanney's narrator in a very real sense does address the killer; the opening chapter of the novel is quite explicitly directed to the killer in his flight from the scene of the crime. This collapse of narrative distance between the killer and the reader is shocking, and it functions as a way of preventing the reader repeating the men's reification of the killer.

In McIlvanney's model, society is often constituted by a mutual fear of otherness. This presupposes that human nature is given and fixed (hence the belief that humanity always necessarily corrupts its ideals, precisely because we are human and therefore fallible) and argues for a fatalism with regard to supra-individual relations concomitant with the doctrine of Original Sin. This attitude cannot help but be hostile to any social, normative code of ethics; in much of McIlvanney's work Christianity is largely conceived of as bigoted persecution of non-Christian action. Such a stance towards humanity (which, following Camus, can only recognise solidarity as metaphysical) engenders a quietism which articulates its own virtuous malice: 'Jim's situation seemed to nullify any help he could give him. It was like giving Sisyphus a hoist up with his stone. But what could you do except help each other to fulfil your mutual loneliness? The rest was private business. Cameron had his own to bother about' (*GFN*, 96). This inability to penetrate the sphere of the Other, whilst being perpetually in fear of the Other's objectification of the Subject, is, incidentally, a central pillar of the psychology Calvinism engenders and leads to resignation on the part of the elect/authentic with respect to the fallen condition of the

damned/inauthentic.

McIlvanney collapses the objective supra-individual causes of reification into a definition of the individual subject's experience of alienation. For McIlvanney, the agency of societal reification, as mediated through the family, labour and culture, is nothing more than the sum of the individual consciousnesses alienated. His notion of alienation balloons to metaphysical proportions to account for the prevalence of reifying forces. The alienated consciousness of Cameron in *A Gift From Nessus* perceives 'Life monotonised into existence, self anonymised into species, love banalized into sex' (*GFN*, 76).

McIlvanney's analysis of the reified trinity of being sets the monadic individual as the central term and its preservation in its fictitious isolation is a paramount concern in his work. Yet reification's strategy of relegating human solidarity (which surely must have a materialist basis—the discovery of self and Other takes place at the mother's breast) to a purely metaphysical sphere effectively processes 'life' into 'existence'. The central term of the trinity is false. Love can only authentically occur with the partial surrender of self, whether in the context of the I-Thou relationship or the individual's love of family, clan, country and so on. Individualism fundamentally misrepresents the societal origins of reification and reinterprets it as alienation within its own horizons.

The existentialist nature of the attempt to comprehend reifying social structures purely in terms of individual alienation has been well documented:

For the existentialist, alienation is understood chiefly in inward terms. It is the existent's alienation from his own deepest being. He is not himself but simply a cipher in the mass-existence of the crowd or a cog in the industrial system or whatever it may be. (23)

At this point we must consider an important point of intersection between the concerns of gender and existentialism in McIlvanney's works. In Chapter Five of the thesis we discuss Laidlaw's characterization as ironist. In inhabiting the tension between the Real and the Ideal, Laidlaw deploys irony as a weapon against the 'unearned certainties' of the other characters. As a precondition of this Socratic reduction of social convention to existential reality is Laidlaw's relentless honesty. As we shall see, this 'will to truth' (as Nietzsche characterizes it) is just as unsparing of the practitioner as of the object of inquiry: '. . . "will to truth" does not mean "I will not let myself be deceived" but—there is no choice—"I will not deceive, not even myself": and with this we are on the grounds of morality' (24). For Unamuno too, 'it's not enough not to lie, as the eighth commandment of God's law orders us, but it is also necessary to speak the truth, which is not entirely the same thing'. (25)

Certainly this is an existentialist article of faith which McIlvanney's protagonists subscribe to; in *A Gift From Nessus* Cameron attacks dishonest forms of communication fostered by the principle of social expediency:

Deception and pretence were so prolific. Let them grow in one small area and they overran you. How could they nurture any honesty between them when they had so many strangling conventions that they fed with themselves? Things that they could tell to some people and not to others. Deliberate silences. Careful deceptions. Reciprocal lies. Parasites that killed the truth they lived off . . . They lived by evasions, bound to the maintenance of a delicate fabric of lies. (*GFN*,120)

And he concludes that 'You became honest with the world or died' (*GFN*, 217), an attitude which was to be later endorsed by Laidlaw: 'The only healthy climate is the truth' (*PTV*, 59). Yet there are important exceptions to this would-be Categorical Imperative: in *Strange Loyalties* Laidlaw lies

to Frankie White's dying mother, and rationalizes it thus:

'I've only two rules about lying, Frankie,' I said. 'Never tell them to yourself, if you can help it. Never tell them to anybody else unless they're benign. I've known lies that were gifts. A dying woman wants to believe she looks the way she looked when she was eighteen. You going to tell her she's wrong? Of course, you're not. You're going to ask her for a date, aren't you?' (SL, 151)

An analogous situation confronts Kierkegaard:

Christ concealed something from his disciples because they could not bear it. That was loving of him, but was it moral? That is one of the most difficult moral doubts; if by concealing something I can save another man from suffering, have I the right to do so, or do I not interfere in his human existence? At that point lies the paradox of my life, before God I am always in the wrong, but is it a crime against mankind? (26)

Of course one immediately thinks of The Grand Inquisitor episode in *The Brothers Karamazov* and Unamuno's short story 'Saint Emmanuel The Good, Martyr'—as Emmanuel says 'The truth? The truth, Lazarus, is perhaps something so unbearable, so terrible, something so deadly, that simple people could not live with it' (27). Alongside a love of humanity, there is a real contempt concealed in the parallel actions of Laidlaw, Don Emmanuel and the Grand Inquisitor. By depriving people of the truth, they are depriving them of moral choice—the ground of freedom. In arrogating to themselves the right to determine what a 'benign lie' is, they erode the basic substance of truthfulness and elevate themselves into a superior position, becoming aristocrats of despair².

² The confrontation between Galileo and The little Monk in Scene 8 of Brecht's *The Life of Galileo* can be considered as a refutation of this variety of pious fraud.

The only way to find out if an untruth would have been 'benign' is to tell the truth, and retrospectively consider the situation. Certainly on a pragmatic level there is nothing very objectionable in Laidlaw's action, but from an existentialist point of view this pragmatism destroys the entire basis of existentialist ethics—the differentiation between the authentic (elect) and the inauthentic crowd. As Dostoyevsky admits, the Grand Inquisitor himself is moved to act the way he does through his compassion for the weak sinful mass, yet ultimately the happiness he hopes to secure for the masses is bought at the price of their moral freedom. In existentialist terms, that moral freedom is the difference between living conscious Being-for-Itself and inert Being-in-itself.

Once Laidlaw admits the pragmatic utilitarian standard to questions of truthfulness, the whole conception of authenticity, doubt (after all Laidlaw must be certain that the lie is benign) and freedom is compromised. McIlvanney's commitment to socialism is also open to question, as the pragmatic question of truthfulness inevitably leads to inequalities of knowledge and therefore of power (all governments decide to tell the populace 'what they need to know'): Laidlaw arrogates to himself the right to decide what is good for Mrs. White. After all, in sustaining her illusions about her son, isn't Laidlaw in more bad faith than Mary's illuded family, who are judged so harshly by Harkness in *Laidlaw*?

Perhaps Laidlaw could counter that the lie must be 'benign' as the old woman will soon be dead. This is sophistical in two ways. Firstly, in the existentialist paradigm, we are all equally subject to the restrictions of the *Grenzsituation*. Mrs White will probably die before Laidlaw, but she is not of a different species because of that fact. Secondly, there is always the possibility, however remote, that Mrs White will not die immediately, and so the family will continue to live in bad faith. Laidlaw, in his quest to find the truth of his brother's death, arrogates to himself the right of judgment (which he identifies with the urge to be 'God's relative') in deciding to humour a dying woman. Kierkegaard would argue that truthfulness is

essential to human being precisely because we are mortal, and that questions of expediency (which he blames the bourgeoisie and socialists alike for elevating into a principle) should not be considered where the truth of human life is at question, all the less so in the light of our mortality.

Laidlaw errs by selecting the easy road; by lying to Mrs White, he eases the burden of knowledge on her, he allows Frankie White's lies to her to go unchallenged, allowing him to absolutely evade confrontation of his true situation in the 'existential mirror' of his mother's eyes (he finds the judgment of his community, the law etc. easy to live with, but asks Laidlaw to relieve him of the burden of realizing what he is to his mother)—thus depriving him of any reason to change his inauthentic life.

This is entirely against the whole tenor of Laidlaw's quest for meaning. The only justification Laidlaw has for causing the great grief provoked by his questioning of the moral certainties of others (here we think of his breaking of Sarah Stanley, and analogous confrontation of Bud Lawson in *Laidlaw*) is that the existential truth of these characters' lives, on some ultimate level, has greater priority than their pragmatic decision to remain in bad faith. However, uniquely in the case of the 'martyrs of decency' character configuration explored in Chapter Four, Laidlaw decides to put the external 'sympathy' Kierkegaard was so critical of before the pursuit of truth. This pragmatic suspension of the moral dimension is similarly evident in Mick Docherty's decision to protect Mary Hawkins from the terrible truth of her son's death in the trenches during the war:

Mick let the others feed Mary's sadness till it glugged and then he started to talk about Danny, as he had done to her often enough before. His description of their friendship in the army with some of the things Danny had said had normalised his death for her to some extent. It was Mick's betrayal of his own experience,

something in which he was already practised, something that would help to define him as he grew older. Faced with someone like Mary Hawkins, all you could do was protect her from the truth. Like most returning soldiers, for the rest of his life he would be fighting a rearguard action against admitting the truth of what he had experienced into their private lives. (*D*, 235)

Yet once pragmatic concerns are allowed to override the truth, the whole fabric of authentic being is undermined: as Schopenhauer shrewdly observed, every lie is a form of concealed domination, no matter how it is rationalized: 'every *lie*, like every act of violence, is as such *wrong*, since it has, as such, the purpose of extending the authority of my will over other individuals, of affirming my will by denying theirs, just as violence has' (28). Nietzsche has also noted that 'for the sake of love we are inveterate transgressors against the truth and habitual thieves and receivers' (29). In his discussion of Meursault, Camus argues that it is his truthfulness which sets him apart from the inauthenticity of society:

Lying is not only saying what is not true. It is also and especially saying more than is true and, as far as the human heart is concerned, saying more than one feels. This is what we all do every day to simplify life. Meursault, despite appearances, does not wish to simplify life. He says what is true. (30)

Although Conor Cruise O'Brien has convincingly shown that this image of Meursault is highly questionable, it still emphasizes the centrality of truthfulness to existentialist discourse. Interestingly, Camus also succumbs to this form of filial piety in exempting his mother from the searching critique of morality which is central to his thought. As he memorably said, 'I believe in justice but I will defend my mother before justice' (31). The peculiar power of this maternal figure in McIlvanney's work will be explored in Chapter Four of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO NOTES

- (1) Theodor Adorno, 'Culture and Administration,' *Telos* 37, 1978 104.
- (2) Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973) 155.
- (3) George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) 181.
- (4) Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949) 123.
- (5) Albert Camus, *The Outsider*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961) 110-1.
- (6) Irvine Welsh, cited in Elizabeth Young 'Blood on the tracks' *Guardian* 14/8/93 p.33. He argues that in 'traditional Scottish fiction there's been this kind of reverence for working-class culture. There's a lot of glossing over of sectarian and domestic violence—it's all portrayed in this creepy, sentimental way'.
- (7) Allan Massie *The Novel Today* (Longman, London, 1990) p.26. He states, with particular reference to *Docherty*, that McIlvanney's work is 'marred by a relish of violence which borders on the sentimental in that it is admired without thought of its consequences'.
- (8) Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*. 2 vols. trans. D.F. and L.M. Swenson (New York: Doubleday, 1959) I, 4-5.
- (9) D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960) 203.
- (10) Lawrence *Women in Love* 204.
- (11) Lawrence *Women in Love* 131.

(12) Lawrence *Women in Love* 11.

(13) André Malraux, *Man's Estate*, trans. Alastair MacDonald (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961) 215.

(14) Sartre *Existentialism and Humanism* 32-3.

(15) Sartre *Existentialism and Humanism* 33.

(16) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 70-1.

(17) Nietzsche *Human, All Too Human* 330.

(18) Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956) 214-5.

(19) Macquarrie 121-2.

(20) Sartre *Being and Nothingness* 364 and 429.

(21) Kierkegaard cited in Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, (New York: New American Library, 1975) 90.

(22) Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, 3 vols., trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) III, 189.

(23) Macquarrie 137.

(24) Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science*. Book V, 344. Cited in Walter Kaufmann *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974) 358.

- (25) Miguel de Unamuno, *Perplexities and Paradoxes*, trans. Stuart Gross (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945) 67.
- (26) Kierkegaard *Journals* 114.
- (27) F.R. Karl and L. Hamalian eds. *The Existential Imagination*, (London: Picador, 1978) 87.
- (28) Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*. 2 vols. trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969) I iv, 62: 338.
- (29) Nietzsche *Daybreak* 197.
- (30) Camus cited in Conor Cruise O'Brien *Camus*, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1970) 20.
- (31) Camus cited in Conor Cruise O'Brien *Camus*, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1970) 75.

CHAPTER THREE

In McIlvanney's work there is a wide range of attitudes towards the family: from the positive presentation of John Grant's family in *Remedy Is None* and Tam Docherty's in *Docherty*, to the far more sinister aspects of family life outlined in the Laidlaw novels. For the existentialist, the family presents a unique problem: how can the individual relate his/herself to an ordinary totality and still claim to possess a freedom unconditioned by past relation to that totality? In other words, where does the family end and the individual begin? This also relates to the wider question at stake in existentialism of whether, in Adorno's phrase, the individual 'is chained to the rock of his past' (1). In this section I will examine the ways in which the family mediates gender roles and how it can sometimes embody, for McIlvanney's protagonists, the reifying abstractness of society itself.

In many ways it almost seems as if the social convention of marriage itself is in some way to blame for inauthentic gender relations. Marriage, a legal formality which is part of the system Laidlaw so detests, is a way of formalising a relationship and giving it a social context. The existentialist would argue that such a process denies the intrinsic value of such a relationship; its privateness, its uniqueness, and (with the significant exception of Tam and Jenny Docherty) marriage is largely shown to be fraudulent in McIlvanney's fiction. With specific reference to *The Big Man*, McIlvanney has discussed the thematic importance of marriage as a paradigm of human relations:

I'm not writing about marriage *per se*. I just think that marriage is a good place to examine human relationships—it's the definitive human relationship. It's outwith family, not super-imposed on you. It's a choice and once you've made it there's a kind of moral imperative to try and sustain it . . . Even in apparently successful

relationships all the time there are small withdrawals, small withholdings taking place. (2)

In McIlvanney's fiction there is a constant dialogue between this conception of marriage and the social signification of marriage which has as its organizing principle not the irrational demands of sexual desire, but the calculating, material concerns of bourgeois domestic 'respectability', which seem to mock the very thing they ostensibly sanctify. *The Big Man* in particular emphasises the disjunction between social signification and subjective experience:

In retrospect, the brocade wedding-dress and veil seemed somehow preposterous, a grotesquely ornamental, weird costume for a part nobody knew how to play. They gave you a few lines of ritual dialogue that came from God knows what lexicon of antiquated male prejudice and the rest of your life was endless improvisation, entirely up to the two of you.
(*TBM*, 25)

Betty Scoular felt that 'somehow the daily proximity of marriage had eventually compromised their original feeling' (*TBM*, 36). This is a pattern repeated even in *Docherty*, where the solidity of Tam and Jenny's marriage is in stark contrast to those of other characters. Jack and Kathleen's marriage is described through her reflection that 'She wondered if she had no tears left. People had to connect with you before they moved you. Their marriage was monologues set in silence' (*D*, 284). The existentialist conflation of social practice and the alienation of human potentiality through time is confirmed even in the marriage of Mairtin and Jean: 'It was a complicated ritual by two people who would never surprise each other again but found pleasure in the repeated patterns of the past—a conversational dance of death, perfected, nicely timed, delicate as a minuet' (*D*, 73).

I would argue that the unique power of *Docherty* lies in its ability to mediate between the competing claims of social morality and personal authenticity—this lays the groundwork for the battle between Tam and Angus over whether Angus should marry a girl he got pregnant. As so often in his work, McIlvanney at this point problematizes the relationship between individual desire and class values, a feature which prevents the easy identification of McIlvanney as a writer in the 'social realist' tradition which has plagued him throughout his career. By locating this conflict at the very heart of family and community in *Docherty*, McIlvanney tackles one of the most difficult areas of representation in modern Scottish fiction.

Cairns Craig has argued that

. . . community, in the major modern Scottish novels, is presented as achievable only at the cost of individuality, by the restriction and repression of individual choice and identity. The community exists in a constant fear of all individual potential, and, as a result, the only kind of individuality that can survive is one involving a terrifying extension of self, an all-encompassing aggrandisement of the ego. (3)

Although writers such as Christopher Harvie have criticized *Docherty* for having 'emblematised the endurance of a sort of "Iron John" figure from Scottish mining life' (4) it is important to recognise that in this novel McIlvanney sought to escape Craig's dialectic of fear. McIlvanney's first two novels certainly do acknowledge a ineradicable opposition between individuality authenticity and idealism, and an alienating social structure controlled by medical, legal and sexual discourses which devalue and erase individual subjectivity. It is also worthy of note that the protagonist's rebellion is in both cases doomed to failure, endorsing Craig's model of a circularity between 'fearful self-hood and fearful community' (5). *Docherty* is a determined effort by McIlvanney to inhabit the paradoxes of

community and selfhood, and explore the tensions between family history and class history.

That McIlvanney is to a certain extent successful in doing this is due to his use of narrative perspectivism in the novel, a feature which has received little comment from critics. In Chapter 5 of Book III, Angus refuses to marry the girl he got pregnant, but instead of opposing individual desire to social convention McIlvanney instead refracts the event through the differing reactions of the characters: from Jenny's empathy for the girl, to Mick's reasoned pragmatism, to Angus' refusal to be pressured morally or physically. Even Tam's stirring statement of moral principle cannot be reduced to Craig's dialectic of fearfulness, but instead shows how central ethical concerns are to community survival. McIlvanney exploits the narrative oscillation between the representation of Docherty the individual and Docherty the family, and in several key moments of the novel he historicizes the alienation that is a constant component of his characters' lives. In contrast to the typical *Bildungsroman* structure of much Scottish fiction, Conn's sentimental education does not result in an escape from his class or family, but rather in a continuing debate with his brothers over the meaning of their father's legacy.

McIlvanney's continuing interest in marriage as 'the definitive human relationship' builds upon the central paradox of intersubjectivity, namely, that individual alienation can be compounded in this relationship:

The resentments were at first just the ghosts of things not done that haunt our lives in a gentle, house-trained way, the half-heard sigh of chances missed, the memory of a relationship you allowed to starve to death through inattention, the place you might have been that stares reproachfully through the window of the place you are. But such resentments, born of the slow experience of how each choice must bury more potential than it fulfils, were

always seeking incarnation. Then their tormentingness could be given shape, their slow corrosion be dynamic. In the shared closeness of a marriage, it was very easy to exorcise the growing awareness of the inevitable failures of the self to live near to its dreams into the nature of the other, to let the lost parts of yourself find malignant form in unearned antipathy to the other one's behaviour. (*TBM*, 36)

This above instance can be linked to the reification of linguistic codes as explored in Chapter One: in *The Big Man* Betty 'felt beginning one of those exchanges of small utterances that mean so much, phrases packed with years, expressions of the microchip technology of married speech' (*TBM*, 41).

In the *Walking Wounded* collection, marriage is largely seen in terms of an attrition of individual potential, as in 'Getting Along', for example, in which Margaret and John Hislop suffer the stasis so often associated with the married situation in McIlvanney's work:

Margaret and John Hislop had one of those marriages where there wasn't room to swing an ego. All was mutual justice and consideration and fairness . . . Both watched television programmes which were neither's favourite. They didn't have arguments, they had discussions. It was a marriage made by a committee and each day passed like a stifled yawn. It was as if the family crypt had been ordered early and they were living in it. (*WW*, 93)

Unable to accept the limitations upon desire this arrangement presupposes, John Hislop has an affair, and though they had 'half-hearted discussions' the marriage was over: 'Something was dead in her'. In direct contrast to John Hannah in 'On the Sidelines', whose alienation is laid squarely at the feet of his ex-wife and his new girlfriend,

Margaret Hislop's situation is an inversion of this. While Hannah is 'paid off', for Margaret Hislop 'the settlement was fine. She was able to buy a nice apartment and she had the furniture. She still had her job and she had money in the bank. She went out occasionally with other men for a while' (*WW*, 93).

Therefore, in a sense this position is roughly analogous with that of Hannah. There seems to be the possibility of making some kind of new start in a fresh relationship, and a renewal of emotional equilibrium. However, 'she could not forgive them. She could not forgive the world and the world did not mind. It passed her window indifferently in sports cars and couples with prams and buses full of preoccupied faces' (*WW*, 93-4). It seems as if Margaret has deliberately cut herself off from that world, inasmuch as she used the time she had invested in her marriage to protect her from the innate risk that genuine relationships entail. Interestingly, what is for Hannah a tragic liaison with a gender which cannot appreciate his idealistic nature, becomes for Margaret Hislop a willed flight from the possibility of change. Having lived in a marriage that was described as being like a 'crypt', she cannot forgive the world's insistence that she risk her feelings to find fulfilment. As a result, she must look forward to the same fate as the heroine of 'Death of a Spinster'; having rejected association with men and the world (and, by implication, the animating power she is unable to generate herself) she must be reconciled to her fate:

The apartment became the only significant terrain of her life. She had rubber plants and tiger plants and potted flowers. She took up painting by numbers. She read a lot, mainly improbable romances. She prepared for years of working around her house like a woman patiently sitting down to sew her own shroud. (*WW*, 94)

Notice here how the creative potentialities of her labour are ignored

by the narrator—her job is presented merely as satisfaction of feminine materiality (alongside the apartment, the furniture and the money in the bank). Her own activities are parodic of genuinely creative ones: painting-by-numbers and the improbable romances she reads seem to be indicative of a feminine inability to creatively conceptualize the abstract. This is clearly demonstrated in the way Jenny Docherty hides from the reality of strikes and war behind her domestic labour and the deliberate, materialistic anti-intellectualism of Jean McPhater.

Certainly Tam and Jenny's marriage in *Docherty* is not subject to this negative assessment—but then again the narrative consciousness is predominantly associated with the growing Conn which perhaps explains Dickson's observation that Jenny 'is seen more as a mother than as a wife' (6). However, Anderson's contention in her thesis that 'Jenny Docherty is a sympathetic figure, but has something of the same "earth mother" quality as other fictional Scottish mothers, notwithstanding the novel's "social realism"' (7) fails to take account of McIlvanney's attempts to surmount the difficulties inherent in writing a realist narrative of a resolutely patriarchal society. McIlvanney must at least be given credit for his insight into the narrowness of Jenny Docherty's life:

. . . she wondered how she had become the woman she was. Memories almost came to her, like wind-gagged cries. She felt revulsion from her own body, which seemed to her an amalgam of heavy breasts, distended stomach, legs ruinous with veins, a violated promise from her past, used by husband, mouthed by children, caricatured maliciously by work. Dead hopes lay heaped in her like a mass-grave. (*D*, 175)

McIlvanney's discourse does contain a number of phallogocentric assumptions which undermine the continuity of his existentialist argument, and there are certainly grounds for Carol Craig's contention that, in his early work at least, 'McIlvanney is the creator of modern myth

and his heroes are used to celebrate a traditional ideal of manhood' (8). However, even before his revisionist appraisal of gender representation in *The Big Man*, McIlvanney's female characters are often treated with great sympathy when they are detached from the negative associations of 'materialism', in a way which parallels the pathos usually reserved for undifferentiated male youth.

While the young male characters' futures are comprehended in the tension of paradox (Laidlaw), act of tragic freedom (Scouler) or the pathos of alienation and defeat (Cameron in *A Gift From Nessus*), female characters either suffer the tragic negation of their lives at the hands of patriarchal family relations (Margaret Sutton in *A Gift From Nessus*, Jennifer Lawson in *Laidlaw*) collaborate with capitalist social relations in realizing their essentially materialistic natures (discussed later) or opt for a materially disempowering, though morally authentic, relationship with their environment. The main difference between the sclerosis of human potential in male and female youth is that the youth can choose the form of his inevitable defeat, while the absence of phallic signification attached to the female youth means that her 'dreams' are always compromised by patriarchal values articulated through the family structure (which in *A Gift From Nessus* is linked with the existentialist horror of organized religion) and their definitive powerlessness in male society.

There is an unobserved phallocratic economy at work in McIlvanney's discourse which relates the powerlessness of the young female characters with the materialism of their older counterparts. The feminine materialist is not a *sui generis* phenomenon: she is the girl who has absorbed the values of patriarchy, and while she cannot fully live those values by herself (her gender is seen to exclude her from this domain of male power) she can obtain the power to do so by appropriating the power (moral and material) from male characters. As we shall see, 'Death of a Spinster' almost perversely attempts to articulate a full

version of tragic freedom *a la* Dan Scoular for the heroine. However, the objective correlative of her rebellion takes the form of underwear: to say the least an ambiguous statement compared to the clear and active articulation of his principles granted to Dan Scoular.

Thus we have to account for a phenomenon which seems to elude many of McIlvanney's critics: a discourse which, while denying patriarchal assumptions, colludes in the discursive association of 'feminine' and 'materialist' signifiers. Though this certainly points to unexamined phallogocratic assumptions at work, it would be wrong to deduce from this that McIlvanney's presentation of gender relations is fundamentally patriarchal. That McIlvanney's discourse is opposed to patriarchal power distribution can be shown by contrast with its affirmation in one of the great texts of Nineteenth Century realism, Balzac's *La Rabouilleuse*.

In his dedication to Charles Nodier, Balzac explicitly affirms the conservative direction of the novel's didactic intent:

Here, my dear Nodier, is a work full of those circumstances which domestic secrecy hides from the law's reach; facts in which the finger of God, so often entitled Chance, compensates for the shortcomings of human justice, and where the moral code is no less instructive and impressive for being voiced with a mocking laugh. I believe that important lessons result from these facts, both for the Family and Motherhood. Perhaps when it is too late, we shall realize the consequences of this erosion of paternal authority, an authority which in bygone times did not cease until the father's death and which was the one human tribunal before which domestic crimes could be judged; on great occasions, Royalty was ready to put its decisions into effect. However affectionate and kind the Mother is, she can no more replace this patriarchal royalty than a Woman can replace a King upon the

throne; wherever such an exception occurs, some monstrous being results. Never more visibly than here, perhaps, have I shown how necessary an indissoluble state of marriage is to European society, how great are the misfortunes resulting from feminine weakness and what dangers are inherent in unbridled personal interest. Any society based solely on the power of money should tremble at the prospect of the law's inability to curb the machinations of a system which aspires after success by permitting all possible means to be used in order to attain it. (9)

The insistence upon recourse to authority and the retention of the traditional values of Family, Church and Crown can find no parallel in McIlvanney's discourse, yet Balzac is fundamentally correct in regarding their ideological conjunction as a synthetic unity in conservative discourse—if the principle of authority *per se* is undermined there can be little support for the ideological beneficiaries of that authority. Any notion of authority in McIlvanney's work emanates from the subject explicitly against the structure of society, whether inscribed in the significations of the Law, the Church or the Father, which for McIlvanney all indicate a desire for unity unattainable in fallen existence.

Furthermore, Balzac refuses to differentiate between the various experiences of women, positing a naturalized conception of femininity according to patriarchal assumptions:

Perhaps my readers will accuse me of painting too crude a picture; perhaps they will say that Flore's outbursts are so close to the truth of human nature that the painter should leave them in the shadow? Well, this scene, which has been rehearsed a hundred times with the most terrifying variations, is typical—in its crude form and horrible truthfulness—of the scenes played by all women, at whatever point in the social scale they happen to be, when some self-interest or other has turned them away from the path of

obedience and they have seized power into their own hands. Like great politicians, they consider that the end justifies the means. Between Flore Brazier and a duchess, between a duchess and the wealthiest middle-class woman and between the middle-class housewife and the most brilliant of kept women the only differences that can be discerned are those which are attributable to their education and differing environments. Instead of Flore's violent outbursts, we have the sulky moods of aristocratic women. At every point in the social scale, bitter jokes, witty ridicule, cold disdain, hypocritical complaints and trumped-up quarrels obtain the same success as the plebeian words of this scheming housekeeper. (10)

Here the biologicistic determination of gender roles overrides environmental factors: women, unless subject to the complex of religious, legal and patriarchal authority, will revert to an underlying, materialist, utilitarian nature. The function of this narrative intervention is clear: in attempting to restrict the libidinal economy along lines regulated by patriarchal authority, Balzac's narrative suffers from a textual amnesia which allows the interest invested in the maintenance of patriarchy to occlude already articulated principles:

Without wishing to offend philanthropists and writers of idylls, it must be said that country people have the haziest conception of some virtues. Their scruples arise from self-interest, not from any feeling of what is good or beautiful. The prospect of a life of poverty, unremitting work and destitution causes them to regard as legitimate anything that can release them from their hellish round of hunger and ceaseless toil, especially if the law has nothing to say against it. There are few exceptions to this generalization. From the social point of view, virtue is an adjunct of prosperity and is rooted in education. (11)

This is a point reiterated in *Cousin Bette*: 'Lack of education is the mother of all crime. A crime is due, primarily, to an inability to reason' (12). In these passages Balzac sets himself against a current of Nineteenth Century optimism of which strains can be found both in capitalist philanthropism and reformist socialism. Against the later romanticization of human nature found in Dostoyevsky, Balzac here concedes the importance of environment in the realm of ethics. This realistically undercuts both the monadic isolation of the individual in bourgeois society and the romanticization of the poor which finds expression in various Utopian socialisms.

Yet in the determination of feminine signification, these environmental determinants are suspended in order that patriarchy can go unchallenged: from the statement that social virtue is a function of environment we proceed to see that, for women 'the only differences that can be discerned are those which are attributable to their education and differing environments. Instead of Flore's violent outbursts, we have the sulky moods of aristocratic women' (13). From arguing that environment has a large determining influence on morality, Balzac here shifts to the biologicistic model which says that the 'only' differences between women can be attributed to environment. While there would seem to be a wide area of ethical difference between the peasant and the educated man which can be directly attributed to environment and education, there seems to be little difference between Flore and 'aristocratic women' as both are fundamentally defined by their gender.

McIlvanney's narrative rarely holds to the naturalized version of feminine identity articulated here. His existentialist background denies any fixed essence, but as we have seen, this is not enough in itself for McIlvanney's discourse to avoid recourse to such generalization. What we definitely can say is that McIlvanney does not suspend the existentialist credo of undetermined subjectivity in order to uphold patriarchy: rather, McIlvanney's text challenges the restriction of libidinal

exchange inherent in patriarchy, demanding a free market between men and women based upon the power attributable to the individual subject, as against the generalized structure which is the ground of patriarchal power.

Laidlaw states that 'I acquired with my first interest in girls a conviction that whatever good things happen between two people looking for love are their own sweet secret and nobody else's business' (*SL*, 142). This is surely implacably opposed to the restrictions of the Law of the Father. Where McIlvanney's narrative does admit collusion between femininity and materialism is in the case of the middle-class female characters. This is again contrary to patriarchy's generalized characterization of femininity which disregards the very influences of material factors which McIlvanney's text seizes upon as the ground for the attribution of materialism to femininity.

Despite the reservations feminist critics may have about the portrayal of Tam in *Docherty*, it would be an injustice to regard McIlvanney's presentation of the character as unambiguously patriarchal. Certainly he appears as a provider of physical protection and, for most of the novel, is regarded as the moral authority of the household, yet if we compare him with Lawrence's Godfrey Marshall in 'England My England' we see the conceptual distance between the two characters. For Lawrence, Marshall is a patriarch of true stature:

Here was a man who had kept alive the old red flame of fatherhood, fatherhood that had even the right to sacrifice the child to God, like Isaac. Fatherhood that had life-and-death authority over the children: a great natural power. And till his children could be brought under some other great authority as girls; or could arrive at manhood and become themselves centres of the same power, continuing the same male mystery as men; until such time, willy-nilly, Godfrey Marshall would keep his children. (14)

Mcllvanney's discourse generally resists the temptation to define characters according to gender. The one major exception to this rule appears to be in the short story 'On the Sidelines', discussed later, where there does seem to be an attributed 'natural essence' unconditioned by family or class considerations. On the whole, however, I would argue that a phallogentric economy dominates Mcllvanney's conception of libidinal relations even to the extent of challenging patriarchal dominance, as we have seen in our study of *Laidlaw*.

This dynamic subversion of the identification generated in his earlier work points to a further area of Mcllvanney's handling of gender often overlooked by his critics. While many of Mcllvanney's characterizations of the feminine are undoubtedly incompatible with what we have discerned to be his existentialist principles, it would be categorically incorrect to define Mcllvanney's attitude to be a patriarchal one. Indeed, Mcllvanney is severely critical of the patriarchal regime, in *A Gift From Nessus* and *Laidlaw* especially, locating it as a unique source of alienation for his young female characters.

While the withdrawal of Eddie Cameron's affection is the immediate cause of Margaret Sutton's suicide in *A Gift From Nessus*, it is the stultifying annihilation of her personality at the hands of her family which is seen as the determining ground of her vulnerability. Like so many clichés of Scottish domestic life from *The House with the Green Shutters* onward, Margaret's family come with the full complement of stock personality traits, including of course the dominant overbearing father who is a familiar character in Scottish fiction from Stevenson's Lord Hermiston to Kennaway's Jock Sinclair. After Cameron rejects her, Margaret comes to realise that she cannot possibly return to live under the sway of her father's rigid Presbyterian morality, the narrator informs us that he 'was a man who hugged his principles to him before all else' (*GFN*, 136), and, in despair, she takes her life.

Such a domestic situation prefigures that in which we find Jennifer Lawson, the murder victim in *Laidlaw*. McIlvanney's method of writing detective fiction can be considered a unique amalgam of existentialist uncertainty and socialist environmental analysis. McIlvanney is quick to dismiss the possibility that the murder is literally absurd, for if the precise motive for the killing cannot be clearly established in the relationship between the murderer and his victim, there are certain aspects of the case which involve society as a whole and (as the prime structure which mediates social reality to the young) the family in particular. Like Margaret Sutton's situation, McIlvanney is keen to problematize the apparently transparent social relations which precede her act of annihilation (again, Charlie's action in *Remedy Is None* can be considered an examination of the events leading to murder, from the murderer's perspective).

Like Margaret's family, the Lawson household is ruled by the monologic Law of the Father:

She knew the rules. Only once before had she tried to break them: the time she was going out with the Catholic. But he had put a stop to that. He hadn't forgotten and he never forgave. His nature ran on tramlines. It had only one route. If you weren't on it, you were no part of his life. (L, 16)

As the novel progresses, there develops an explicit tension between the crime which society recognizes (Tommy Bryson's murder of Jennifer Lawson) and the unrecognized, but no less culpable behaviour of Bud Lawson in circumscribing the freedom of his daughter. Lawson's masculine ethic is predicated upon a complete certainty; something which is considered an *a priori* case of bad faith in the existentialist view. Such certainty would be challenged by even the slightest degree of self-reflection, and this flight from consciousness becomes the dynamic for

Lawson's need to order his family's behaviour in accordance with his conception of the world. Such a process naturally demands that the mother and daughter suppress their selves and instead ascribe to a fictitious (masculine) family identity shaped by the need to preserve Lawson's certainty: here Mrs Lawson 'looked up at him the way she always did, slightly askance, as if he were so big he only left her the edges of any room to sidle in. Her very presence was an apology that irritated him' (L, 17).

In accordance with Hegel's dialectic of mastery and servitude, the indirect consequence of subjugating the Other is an unintended alienation from the real conditions of the master's existence. Laidlaw reflects on Lawson's relationship with his wife:

'I saw her yesterday. What's left of her after Bud Lawson's been mincing her ego for years. He's an amazing monolith, that big man. The kind of father who eats his young to protect them from the world. If anything was going on with his daughter, he'd be the last to know.' (L, 105)

This very apt image of Laidlaw's can be related to McIlvanney's reading of Freud: in his paper 'Mourning and Melancholia' Freud argues that:

identification is a primary stage of object-choice, that it is the first way—and one that is expressed in an ambivalent fashion—in which the ego picks out an object. The ego wants to incorporate this object into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it. (15)

Here the real nature of Jennifer's threat to Bud Lawson becomes apparent; in recognizing the validity of his daughter's claim to an independent selfhood, Lawson would be directly undermining the iron

certainty which is the very substance of his sense-of-himself:

'She *is* an adult person, Mr. Lawson.'

'Is she hell! She's eighteen. Ah'll tell her when's she's an adult . .
. Ah stand for nothin' like that in ma hoose.' (L, 13)

When his daughter is murdered, Lawson seeks revenge in accord with his masculinist principles. However, Laidlaw understands that the unconscious compulsion to revenge himself upon the murderer also originates in Lawson's need to deny the way he negated the independent existence of his daughter and project the burden of guilt onto the murderer. Laidlaw strikes at the fact that what Lawson feared in his daughter most of all was her potential for reflecting his essentially patriarchal, determined nature, and forcing him to confront the inadequacies of the masculinist ethic in its construction of human relations:

'You're a hider. You couldn't face who your girl was. She was another person, a separate body. She would've been a woman. She would've wanted *men*. Catholics? It wasn't Catholics you were against. Hate Catholics, hate people! You couldn't stand for her to have somebody else. That's what it was. What was it, did you fancy her yourself?' (L, 215)

Again, the necessary consequence of Jennifer going out with a Catholic would be her questioning her father's bigoted, absolute stance and undermining the values he had lived by all his life. McIlvanney makes doubt the principle upon which Lawson destroys his 'unearned certainty' and open up the possibility for a reconsideration of the terms under which he lives. What must be emphasized, is that this growth in awareness is ultimately paid for by Lawson's daughter, and so it would be grotesque in the extreme to describe the situational disequilibrium his female characters face as an aspect of authorial patriarchal attitudes.

Certainly, McIlvanney does depict such attitudes but there is no way in which the closed patriarchy of the Sutton and Lawson families can be considered as articulating authentic personal relations: the narratives of both *A Gift From Nessus* and *Laidlaw* explicitly censure the monologic rationale which prevails within the patriarchal family. Although there is no doubt a phallogentric economy in operation in McIlvanney's discourse, it would be wrong to infer from this fact that he provides an affirmative representation of patriarchy. Indeed, the Law of the Father is seen as interfering in the free exchange between the genders of the power which is associated with the phallus.

Even in *Docherty*, the text where family relationships are presented most positively in his work, McIlvanney carefully documents Kathleen's 'alienation from her family' (*D*, 87) and clearly indicates that the tension between individual and group identity is not confined to male characters:

Sometimes the closeness of her family had almost stifled her. Even her face wasn't to be her own. They were so much involved in one another that, like grotesque Siamese sextuplets, the pain of one reverberated through all the others... as she grew towards herself and her sexuality taught her separateness, she had felt more and more the need to deny the stridency of their demands for identification with them, the certainty of their assumption that she was just one of the family. Her desire to obey her individuality had put her at odds with them. In her family, you weren't just a member. You had to enlist. (*D*, 87-8)

The situation here is far more complex than that which faces Betty Scoular in *The Big Man*. There, the straight confrontation between bourgeois sterility and working-class vitality is resolvable in an unequivocal fashion. Yet Kathleen articulates the acute dilemma at the heart of McIlvanney's work: how to mediate the valid claims of individual

and society. Of all McIlvanney's novels, *Docherty* is the text which is most favourable to the values of community, yet even here there is an expression of concern for the existentialist prioritization of the individual. The family dynamic resolves into the relationship between Tam's restless dynamism and Jenny's 'natural' acceptance:

Her father stood at the heart of her discontent. Whereas Jenny at the final level was the family, she still allowed within its amplitude great freedom and flexibility. There was about her something enduring, enfolding, and ultimately unshockable. You felt that whatever you did, no matter how terrible, she was the one you could tell it to. She might not understand, but she would accept it as a part of you. Her love was a gift, a necessity, yet still a form of freedom for you, and indefinitely extensive, it seemed, like air.

But Tam's proximity was somewhat more overwhelming. There was a fierceness about his affection, a relentlessness about his commitment to you. In his eyes you acquired an importance that you couldn't always live with. His love wasn't like Jenny's, uncompromised, a gently suffused warmth in which it was comfortable to move about. His was fuelled by odd, apparently disconnected fragments from other parts of his life, his rage at the man-made predestination that loomed over them, his contempt for the acceptance of it in others, his dread that they would none of them have a chance to be what they might have been. All the refuse of his experience was gathered into and consumed by the irrational belief in the worth of people which was as intense as a flame in him. In the middle of that belief, as both benefactors and victims, were his family. More than once Kathleen had been obliged to withdraw from the blast-furnace glare of his concern for all of them.

She had come to find it a burden. (*D*, 88)

It must be emphasized that, though suffocating, Tam Docherty's definition

of family is entirely different from Bud Lawson's; Docherty 'saw families as little fortresses of loyalty and sanity and mutual concern, set defiantly in a landscape of legalised looting and social injustice' (*D*, 93). Family is a survival mechanism for Tam, not a chorus affirming his power and status. He is shown as strong because he has his family's respect—with the departure of Angus and Kathleen and Mick's injury, his sense of himself is eroded.

For Kathleen, the development of her sexuality as the recognition of difference takes her away from the sphere of familial identification, yet it requires the liberating influence of Jack to confirm that individuality:

Between her and such outrageous intensity had come Jack, and, Kathleen understood with joy, her dilemma was resolved...Sexual awareness had come on her like a secret formula for transforming the quality of her life. Before she met Jack, it had already removed her from the immediate sphere of her father, had convinced her that his passionate harangues about the state of things were just a masculine attribute which didn't have any significance beyond itself, like hair on the chest. Her relationship with Jack had completed her liberation. (*D*, 89)

A more detailed and aware discussion of the role of the phallus in animating the feminine could not be found. The relationship with Jack is 'liberating', it has the force to 'transmute' her life. What she was unable to do herself, within the confines of the family, Jack has allowed. She finds it important that her sexuality (and the individuality which is so connected with it) is acknowledged by the family because of her relationship with him. This acknowledgement allows her to re-establish a relationship with the family, but more on the terms of her own individual nature:

she felt gratitude as well as love, because it was through him that within herself she had made peace again with her family. By

finding her own identity, she was able to give them back theirs, and saw them in a clearer perspective. Having now a choice, she could afford them the full run of their qualities, because they didn't encroach on her as they had done. (*D*, 89)

Yet the tragic irony is that, by ignoring Tam's warning about the 'predestination' of their lives, she is unable to arrive at a realistic view of her situation—life for Kathleen in love is like 'a fairy tale'. The deterministic circularity of life in High Street forces her back to the family she once was suffocated by. Jack, her liberator, reveals the double-edged nature of male power (particularly the danger of being in the proximity of frustrated male power: like a bolt of lightning it seeks the nearest viable outlet for its expression) and she is beaten by him. Bitter experience teaches her that masculine attributes do have significances beyond themselves: just as Kathleen saw in Jack a means of obtaining the power to realize her identity as fully differentiated from the Docherty family identity, so Jack uses Kathleen as a means of denying his own powerlessness in the face of Capital; hence his resentment of Tam Docherty's pride. Ironically, it is in her return to her mother and their shared experience of childbirth, that Kathleen finds some satisfaction: a gripping image of the iron determinism which turns the lives of the High Street inhabitants in on themselves.

Alongside McIlvanney's explicitly hostile attitude to the patriarchal family there is a further representation of the family which receives narrative censure. This family unit embodies many of the attributes of mediocrity and moralism which McIlvanney's discourse associates with bourgeois inauthenticity. In 'Homecoming' we see the negative significations of bourgeois family life; a gentility paid for by emotional distance. The possibilities opened to Fran Ritchie by the chance meeting with a stranger on a train (like the possibilities opened by Marion's meeting with Eddie Cameron in 'Hullo Again') promise release from her

emotional inertia, yet the mere presence of her family is enough to shatter her resolution and convince her of the tragic inevitability of the familial determination of her personality:

They were standing thirty yards away, waiting for her to notice them. They would be doing that—not for them the spontaneity of running towards her. Victor and Agnes Ritchie, informal as a letterhead. They stood slightly apart, her father with his clipped, grey military moustache, a general in the army of the genteel, her mother with that expression some unknown experience had pickled on her face countless years ago. Fran wondered again how they had acquired their ability to turn joy to a dead thing at a touch and how they had managed to pass the gift on to her. Years of hopelessness they had taught her resurfaced in her at once. She suspected the value of the pleasure she had just had.

Her life in miniature, she thought, this journey. A promise something in her wouldn't allow her to fulfil. She didn't think she would be phoning him. She hoped she would but, standing there, she would have bet against it. She felt her faith in life and living evaporate. Her parents had taught her well. Maybe home is simply where you can't get away from, she thought.

(*WW*, 71-2)

In such a family situation, barring the emergence of a figure like Dan Scoular capable of liberating her from her environment, the concrete choices available seem to be few: intense alienation (like Margaret Sutton) or acquiescence in communal mediocrity—the family threatens to become a self-perpetuating circularity, each generation bequeathing a narrower vision of life to the next.

In complete contradistinction to the familial solidarity of the Dochertys, the middle-class family emerges as a tool for the realization of material aspirations: in the Laidlaw novels Matt Mason's children are

inventoried along with the house and the business. Just as Betty Scoular in *The Big Man* is trapped in the clutches of bourgeois inertia before she meets Dan, so the pattern is repeated in Harkness' girlfriend's family in *Laidlaw*. Here, importantly, the scene of family necrosis is seen from the perspective of the male outsider:

Harkness was finding it hard to focus on who he was. He found it impossible to connect himself as he was with Mary's offering him 'a wee cup of tea' and home-made ginger biscuits. He sat eating biscuits while the photograph of Jennifer Lawson weighed on him like the corpse, while Mary's father sat watching 'Late Call' on the telly as if it was news of Armageddon.

The room seemed as unreal as a stage-set. They all seemed to know their parts. He watched Mary's father, trying to catch a glimmer of dismissal of what he was hearing. There was nothing. Mary's father stared solemnly at the set as if the minister was telling him something. Harkness began to worry about Mary's father. He also began to worry about ministers who clasp their hands across their knees and talk about God as if they were His uncle, who seem to suggest that He's not such a bad lad when you get to know Him and that whatever His past, he means well in the future. He also began to worry about Mary's mother making ginger biscuits and about Mary. Harkness began to worry about everything . . .

He watched Mary's father complacently watching television, her mother reading the Sunday Post, Mary herself putting papers in her briefcase for tomorrow's teaching—each with a finger in the dyke of their own illusions. He decided, to his surprise, that he didn't want to share their illusions. He wasn't sure, as he had thought he was, that he and Mary would be getting engaged. The things which were happening outside, and which he didn't know about, seemed more real to him than this room. (*L*, 60-1)

A good rule of thumb for the critic of Scottish literature would be this: whenever a minister of the Kirk appears, *Nota Bene*. This scene is one of high pastiche, though the cultural signifiers of conservative sterility ('Late Call' and *The Sunday Post*) are far from subtle. McIlvanney is obviously trying to tell us something here; this theme of a parodically mediocre Holy Family recurs throughout his work. Mary's family in *Laidlaw* is undoubtedly like Margaret's in *A Gift From Nessus*, though the explicitly religious element is toned down here, the Presbyterian necrosis is unmistakable.

This disgust with the conventional morality of the non-elect (the fallen ones who are oblivious of the authentic mode of existence, of despair that leads to redemption in Kierkegaard's sense) extends as far back as *Remedy Is None*; notice how the 'domestic' crisis of Charlie possibly getting his girlfriend pregnant is rendered insignificant, if not banal, by the altogether more meaningful event of his father's death:

[Mrs Littlejohn] enclosed herself in a crinoline of rigid convictions and seemed constantly offended that the rest of the world was out of step. Every time she moved, she rustled with bigotry. In her presence Charlie always felt like being in a room cluttered with ornate bric-a-brac of cut glass where you couldn't make a wrong move or say a wrong thing without another transparent prejudice being smashed. When she heard of this, the noise was going to be deafening. Charlie didn't relish playing the bull to her china shop.
(R, 5)

A clear pattern has emerged for this model of the family: one of the male characters (Charlie Grant, Brian Harkness, Dan Scoular) has a relationship with the girl of the family. The father (in direct contrast to the patriarchal family of Lawson and Sutton) is seen as weak compared to the forbidding matriarch. The mother, in contrast to Jenny Docherty, is narrow-minded, bigoted and materialistic and while in *Remedy Is None*

and *Laidlaw* the male characters plainly have a lucky escape from being absorbed into the stultifying family nexus, *The Big Man* signifies a new development, in that Dan braves the family atmosphere to liberate Betty. Betty's family in *The Big Man* follows the conventional pattern:

Her mother had known things with a certainty beyond the power of reason to refute. She had known that housework put off is housework doubled. She had known that you would see things differently when you were older. She had known that a girl shouldn't cheapen herself, steam irons never get the job done properly, once a Catholic always a Catholic, educate a girl you educate a family, some men only want the one thing, if she had her life to live again she would do it differently, you're only a virgin once, nobody needs to be out at two in the morning, they should hang them, the truth never hurt anyone, marry in haste, repent at leisure and Dan Scoular wasn't good enough for her daughter.

She had also been a very good cook and baker and the house had always been tidy, very tidy, but Betty honestly couldn't remember when her mother had touched her spontaneously. She could recall her mother kissing her goodnight but that was a ritual, something she had decided you were supposed to do, not an unrehearsed act of affection. When she thought of her mother, and she had often tried to do it justly, she thought of that voice like a barking dog forbidding the world to come near her. She thought of *One Thousand and One Nights* of clichés, of a Scheherazade whose frenetic variety of repetitions was not a postponement of death but of life, a charm against the dread of coming alive. (*TBM*, 31-2)

While the competitive nature of such familial patriarchy might forbid association with the male partner, in taking-up with Dan Betty can still be seen to have successfully escaped the middle-class verities of security, predictability and absence of passion. Importantly this identification of an

antithesis between bourgeois security and the passion of authentic being is to be found in Kierkegaard: 'Passion is the real thing, the real measure of man's power. And the age in which we live is wretched, because it is without passion' (16).

The ensuing struggle between the competing claims of her middle-class lover and her working-class husband can therefore be seen as a way of comprehending Scoular's own phallic power (once Scoular himself validates this power in his act of cleansing rebellion where he risks his life by assaulting Matt Mason); Scoular has nothing to offer his wife in material terms to compete with the bourgeois Gordon, yet it is the very qualities of reliability and security which seem insignificant compared to Scoular's magniloquent gesture (which may be considered as a variant of Camus' 'superior suicide'). There is also the added consideration that by accepting Gordon's offer of security she will fulfil those very requirements set by her family and be engulfed once more in the stultifying closure which the bourgeois family signifies in McIlvanney's work.

The structure of *The Big Man* is in many ways like Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*: Mrs. Stockmann is initially the materialist-minded anchor which hinders Stockmann's idealistic self-sacrifice. However, in Act II such is the force of Stockmann's commitment (particularly when contrasted with the pettiness of his opponents) that Mrs. Stockmann is won over to his side; there is a strong analogy to be made with Dan and Betty Scoular, excepting the fact that it is also Scoular's superior libidinal power which draws his wife away from her lover and back to the home.

In McIlvanney's discourse there is a qualitative difference in sexuality predicated upon class-lines: the sexuality of the bourgeois characters is often shown to be cold and calculating, driven by purely financial motives. The materialism of McIlvanney's mature female characters make them susceptible to seduction away from the values of the working-

class home into the ranks of the bourgeoisie. However, it is the very determined distinction between working-class sexuality—passionate, intense, personal—and bourgeois sterility that is the site of conflict (clear comparisons can be made here with Lawrence). The bourgeoisie's material power, expressed in financial terms, is seen almost as compensation for the lack of phallic virility shown by McIlvanney's male working-class protagonists:

Even their love-making had been almost formal, like a convention they had followed. She wasn't sure whose choice that had been. Certainly she was wary of making it merely physical. She was aware of the way some men kept their genitals and their private lives at separate addresses and she wanted no part of that. Since she had always been determined to hold making love as an integral part of her life, she had perhaps not given herself to it fully.

But she sometimes wished that Gordon had simply come at her with passion so that happening, sheer physical occurrence, had stranded both of them beyond the viable range of their own doubts. This way, she felt that Gordon was offering her a contract. He analysed convincingly the unsatisfactoriness of the way they lived. He presented a logical solution to that dilemma. But it was as if their lives existed in the abstract. He had worked out financially how they could manage to realise a new situation for themselves but he gave no hint of passion, the living reality by which it would be habitable. She often felt less like a lover than a co-opted member of a committee.

(TBM, 105)

Notice the key terms here: 'formality', 'convention', 'logic', 'abstraction'—all anathema to the existentialist discourse of authenticity. Again, it is not Gordon's characterization as a member of the bourgeoisie which is at issue here; rather the implied modes of bad faith which he displays in his individual subjectivity. As we shall see, McIlvanney's

narrative structure attempts to do the impossible.

As an existentialist, McIlvanney denies the sufficiency of 'external' categorizations of his characters. His characters are not to be judged by abstractions which define them as 'policeman' or 'murderer'. Similarly, the existentialist paradigm can have nothing to say about the individual character's membership of this or that economic class: such 'classes' simply do not exist for the existentialist. Yet quite apart from the consideration of McIlvanney's own heartfelt commitment to his model of socialism, we find that the narrative structure smuggles in a number of preconceptions about his characters which seem to be determined by this categorization of class.

As a general rule, the bourgeois characters in McIlvanney's fiction display certain set characteristics: they privilege material achievement above moral and personal concerns, they exist in bad faith to the extent that they flee from knowledge of themselves, their sexuality is linked to the abstract values of Capital and so is devoid of the passion which would give it authenticity. We are now confronted with two possible interpretations: either it is entirely accidental that these characteristics coincide with the characters' socio-economic status, or McIlvanney has suspended the existentialist principle of relying upon the characters' subjectivities for an ethical evaluation, in order to construct a generalization based on class characteristics.

The second model is more persuasive if we consider the fact that McIlvanney's socialism is ethical in character—if his discourse attempts to articulate solidarity with the working-class against the classes of Capital, then it is forced to posit a Manichean division of character traits along class lines. This is by no means to say that the working-class characters are presented as necessarily authentic (the doctrine of universal guilt precludes that), only that if existentialism cannot comprehend the social structures of capitalist reification, then his bourgeois characters must

themselves embody them in their modes of being.

Capitalism is not inauthentic, because capitalism is not a subjectivity, and so is outside the scope of existentialist analysis: therefore the characters who are themselves members of the capitalist classes must embody the bad faith associated with commodification and abstract quantification of humans and objects (and the necessary constitution of humans as objects) for McIlvanney to constructively counterpoise the socialist values which he identifies with authenticity.

The above discussion may perhaps explain why (while denying the existence of such an abstraction as, for example, 'bourgeois sexuality') Gordon's sexuality is necessarily defined in terms of logic and convention—a *priori* significations of bad faith for the existentialist. This is in direct contrast to the corresponding relationship between Betty and her working-class husband:

The sensation she had was not of familiarity but of renewed risk. She felt afresh the exciting unpredictability of their two presences. It was a feeling Gordon and she had never created between them. Perhaps that was why they hadn't tried to realise the relationship more fully. All the possibilities they had talked about were somehow anonymous, like package deals in a brochure. They could have been inhabited by any other two people as well as themselves. They were a shared abstraction, ideas of how a life might be. With some surprise she realised that the feeling she had just now was simply personal to her. It was an irrefutable part of herself, a compulsion she might resist or try to manipulate but which she couldn't deny. Anything else was just a holiday, not quite to be taken seriously. (*TBM*, 253)

In the dialectic of individual identity developed in existentialism, the bourgeois abstraction of the individual as an interchangeable element in

the rationale of Capital is directly countered by an appeal to the body as the site of an irreducible otherness which resists insertion into social structure. Here Betty is given the opportunity denied to the Spinster to articulate her sexuality as an authentic site of rebellion against 'anonymous' social inscriptions. Her affair with Gordon is therefore nothing positive in itself, it merely signifies a lack in the relationship she has with Dan. The relationship Gordon offers merely reduplicates the alienation which sexuality is authentically understood to oppose, and is radically contrasted with her experience with Dan:

If this is what she meant by 'love', it didn't feel to her safe at all. It felt very dangerous. It had no form that she could trust in. It wasn't about being married to Dan. It was about their being together for just now. It wasn't form. It was content, waiting for form.

She understood that the risk of looking for that form was loss of self. At the furthest reaches of the intensity of commitment to the other lay the possibility of total betrayal. She thought some people emasculated their passion by calling comfort and withdrawal from doubt love. Whatever love was, she found it almost frighteningly various. It had many faces, all of them your own, and some of them were as terrifying as grotesque masks.

In the sexuality of Dan and herself, what love appeared to mean shifted bewilderingly. In the extremity of their love-making, she had sometimes been afraid of herself, had suspected 'love' of being a noble, ceremonial pretence that individuals conspired in with each other to contain, as with gossamer (the strength of which lay in believing in its strength), the utter rawness and promiscuity of their passion, a way of putting a face on the void, painting a mask on the darkness, the last socially habitable cliff-edge above the abyss of pure animality. (*TBM*, 253-4)

The bourgeois ethic is understood in McIlvanney's discourse as the need to calculate, to quantify what, for an existentialist, has no authentic

potentiality for symbolic exchange—selfhood. This is directly opposed by the sense of risk which defines the relationship between Dan and Betty; they do not define themselves with reference to the social signification of marriage ('It wasn't about being married') or even to the communitarian 'hard man' ethic articulated by Wullie Marshall; Dan explicitly forgoes the face-saving act of vengeance prescribed by this code. This in itself marks a recognition of a cultural change in the relations between the sexes in the sixty years which have elapsed since the end of Tam Docherty's era.

For Betty the emasculation of passion and denial of authentic doubt which defines bourgeois sexuality is a refusal to face the 'darkness' and 'pure animality' of human nature at ground zero; and, interestingly, McIlvanney expresses a Freudian reading of the social significations which attend sexuality, understanding them as a way of symbolically containing the uncontainable element of human desire. Underneath the explicit taboos of social behaviour, in the 'darkness' of personal intimacy, the essential self is revealed:

You were taking so many chances. You were going beyond manners, self-censorship, deliberate projection of the 'good', conventional kindness, morality, your carefully structured sense of yourself. You were discovering yourself without cerebral protection. You were helplessly becoming who you were.

Knowing, throughout the evening, the intense exchange of selves towards which they were moving, feeling again the mysteriousness of her own body, Betty remembered the effect their early love-making had had on her. Before that, it had seemed to her in retrospect, her body had been like luggage. She felt now again the tremors of expectation, each pore coming alive. But now as she moved towards the fulfilment of the feeling, she understood what she was leaving behind. The possibilities she had been imagining with Gordon would be erased for her. She couldn't release herself into what might happen unless she acknowledged

that to herself. The force of what was coming would only yield itself to you if you yielded yourself to it, were prepared to be changed by it. (*TBM*, 254)

Here the incarnation of authentic sexuality can be seen as the prototypical existentialist act of authenticity, in its defiance of material context and acknowledgement of its transitory nature if nothing else:

But they had had the courage to throw everything into the maelstrom and in the following calm that drifted them away from its whirling power, they found they had emerged with the human gifts of tenderness and passion and kindness cleanly theirs, earned on their bodies, not ingested like socially processed capsules. They had discovered them for themselves through the honesty of their experience. They hadn't learned them by rote in the abstract. (*TBM*, 255)

It is noteworthy that Lawrence similarly employs sexuality as a bulwark against the daylight world of social convention, though he expresses the opposition in more extreme and abstract terms:

'There is', he [Birkin] said, in a voice of pure abstraction, 'a final me which is stark and impersonal and beyond responsibility. So there is a final you. And it is there that I would want to meet you—not in the emotional, loving plane—but there beyond, where there is no speech and no terms of agreement. There we are two stark, unknown beings, two utterly strange creatures, I would want to approach you, and you me. And there could be no obligation, because there is no standard for action there, because no understanding has been reaped from that plane. It is quite inhuman—so there can be no calling to book, in any form whatsoever—because one is outside the pale of all that is accepted, and nothing known applies. One can only follow the

impulse, taking that which lies in front, and responsible for nothing, giving nothing, only each taking according to the primal desire'.

Ursula listened to this speech, her mind dumb and almost senseless, what he said was so unexpected and so untoward.

'It is just purely selfish', she said.

'If it is pure, yes. But it isn't selfish at all. Because I don't *know* what I want of you. I deliver *myself* over to the unknown, in coming to you, I am without reserves or defences, stripped entirely, into the unknown. Only there needs the pledge between us, that we will both cast off everything, cast off ourselves even, and cease to be, so that which is perfectly ourselves can take place in us'. (17)

Birkin takes this consideration of sexuality as discovery of the essential self much further than McIlvanney does in *The Big Man*: while Betty relies upon 'the iron rations of mutual concern' to save her from the 'abyss of pure animality', Birkin actually pursues this realm which is so other it is actually 'inhuman'. In *The Plumed Serpent* the sexuality which is seen in *Women In Love* as a denial of the absolutism of daylight social relations is actually invested with an authority of its own—and therefore it would be quite wrong to uncritically identify McIlvanney's consideration of sexuality with Lawrence's.

The tension between the feminine desire for material security, and the necessary sacrifice of sexual fulfilment such security entails, originates in McIlvanney's first novel. Having left her working-class husband for the bourgeois Whitmore, Charlie's mother in *Remedy Is None* senses the disparity between material possession and personal fulfilment:

Something about herself arrested her, something indefinable . . .
But she was a little frightened of admitting it fully to herself
because she knew that the substance of its shadow derived
somehow from a lack in her life, and she dreaded the extent to

which its acknowledgement might undermine her security. And yet, how could anything undermine her security? What was there that she lacked? She looked around the well-furnished bedroom, dwelling on the rich curtains, the plush carpet, the expensive furniture that reflected the light in polished patches. This was hers. And Peter's. This was their house. A bungalow. Her mind inventoried its rooms smugly, emphasizing special features as if for an advertisement, refrigerator, stainless steel sink-unit, garage with room for two cars. She was very fortunate. Peter was good to her. What cause did she have to feel dissatisfied? One closed door away, Peter was sitting in the lounge, talking with Raymond and Eleanor, their guests. What was there to trouble her? Unless it was the past. (R, 54)

We must take care to distinguish this ambiguous relationship with the past from that which was discussed in Chapter One with reference to McIlvanney's protagonists. The past referred to here is not the Edenic moment of full potentiality, but the moment which defined her for her family—the time she left her first husband. She attempts to justify her decision:

She shied away from the thought. She had got over everything by now, she told herself. She had known that there were things she would miss terribly. She had known she would have to adjust. And she had adjusted. She had lived with herself for a long time by compromise, by a tacit and gentle self-deception, the studied exclusion of certain thoughts. She knew that you could only gain certain things by forfeiting others, that, where the achievement of one desire precluded another, you had to choose, that to possess was to relinquish. That had been her lesson, a hard lesson. Surely she had learned it by now. She had thought she had. She had tried, certainly. She owed Peter such an effort. It seemed unjust that old longings she had ascetically starved to death should

resurrect their hunger in her heart. After so long. After so very long.
(R, 54)

Here the unspoken desire articulated by the text is that of authentic sexuality: in acquiring the sterile security of a bourgeois lifestyle, Jane has to forgo her authentic identity as a family member. Like Alma Brown in *The Papers of Tony Veitch* or Margaret Mason in *Laidlaw*, Jane has discovered that bourgeois sexuality is contractual in nature, sex is considered as a quantifiable commodity rather than an authentic experience. In *Remedy Is None* the narrative pursues the thesis, which McIlvanney takes to be the heart of his socialism, that there are other needs which have priority over material ones:

Yet something of those longings had survived. She knew it had. She knew that what had troubled her was a gap that remained from the past, a need that the years between had not fulfilled. They had been good enough years and they had brought everything that she had hoped for, except their own self-sufficiency. She had hoped that her life with Peter would absorb her entirely, leave nothing of her over to be a prey to nostalgia or regret . . . Everything that she had any right to was here. There was nothing for her anywhere else. Then why was she not content? What was it that she wanted? (R, 54-5)

Her own evaluation of what she lacked in order to overcome the 'alienation' (R, 64) she feels associated with Peter Whitmore's bourgeois world, is authentic contact with her family. This decision, just as her decision to leave Charlie's father six years before, is the origin of the tragic action—the responsibility for Charlie's father's moral and physical destruction (and, indirectly, that of Charlie himself) is placed squarely on Jane Whitmore's shoulders. This is again signified by the profusion of the passive tense used to describe Charlie's father:

A man had been destroyed through no fault of his own. He had been made to believe devoutly in his own worthlessness, in his personal failure, and he had been made to believe in it simply because he could not conform to the rules which had been set for him. (*R*, 51[My emphasis])

This is entirely divorced from the ethical conjunction of freedom and responsibility envisaged by the early Sartre.

In McIlvanney's later fiction, there are indications that he is trying to subvert the gendering of the materialistic/idealistic complex mentioned above. In *Strange Loyalties*, although Laidlaw's brother and sister-in-law confirm the existing significations of their genders, Anna's parents reverse the association:

I recognized the frozen solidity of Martin's unexamined attitudes and the way Alice could see wistfully beyond them but couldn't quite get out, a maiden trapped in someone else's castle that was moated with stagnant water. I had always enjoyed her company. She was a warm and open woman. But Martin's presence tended to sit on her spontaneity like a scold's bridle. What had heightened my awareness of her position was my worry for Scott. I thought I saw the potential for a reverse image of her parents' relationship in Anna's marriage to my brother. If Scott had the same openness as Alice, Anna was her father's daughter. Self-interest followed her everywhere like a minder, telling her feelings where it was safe to go. I had feared her calculation would always outmanoeuvre Scott's impetuosity. (*SL*, 104)

Notice again the inauthentic subversion of spontaneity to 'frozen solidity' and of risk to calculation, indicative of McIlvanney's characterization of the bourgeois ethos. Such cold materiality is explicitly contrasted with the existentialist exaltation of risk and openness to experience:

As I had seen in Scott a big spirit, I saw in Alice a person of some stature. Her husband might be the public success but she had the substance. Her vulnerability meant that life could still take her by surprise, make moments to remember, leave room where dreams still unfulfilled could grow. The size of the humanity is the size of the person. (SL, 105)

In his characterization of Martin and Alice, McIlvanney disrupts the identification of the female character with materialistic values that marrs some of his earlier work: the materialism, lack of vision and coldness are seen to be the same in father and daughter, devolving from, as we have seen, McIlvanney's location of specifically class-based sources of bad faith.

As we have seen, there is a conceptual linkage made in McIlvanney's earlier work between his mature female characters and a tendency to be concerned with material satisfaction to the exclusion of other human needs. Katherine Hannah in 'On the Sidelines' is the protagonist's vicious ex-wife. She is perceived as inculcating her children with a false perspective of the world, and John Hannah thinks of his daughter that she 'was her mother's daughter, had chosen which side she was on . . . Lying in bed at night he used to wonder what her mother was telling her about him' (WW, 32). Katherine Hannah is presented both a compromiser of male aspirations and a weakener of class-solidarity:

Katherine, acquisitively middle-class, had overlaid the vagueness of his dreams with the structure of her ambitions. Because of her they had moved from the flat....Because of her he had moved out of the factory to be an agent. (WW, 33 [My emphasis])

This seems to be a key motif which runs through the collection. Bert

Watson in 'Waving' is alienated from his essential self by the conditions of his labour and the domestic environment dependent upon them. Yet he blames this death of youthful idealism on his wife; he remembers an evening with his wife (significantly, 'before they were engaged') in which they spontaneously made love 'near the Bringan' (*WW*, 20)¹. This contrasts negatively with married life:

She had turned herself into a Geiger counter for dust and seemed able to hear a glass making a ring-mark on a table from the next room.

Never mind a blood test before marriage, Bert thought. They should invent a machine that, when you stepped into it, projected your nature into the future so that the other person could see which characteristics would survive, which aspects of your character would wither and which get more pronounced. Then maybe you could tell which randy teenager was destined to become a pillar of the Women's Guild, which demure young woman would learn to keep a tiger in the bedroom, and which girl could bare herself beautifully among the trees would, in middle age, wear a nightdress like a cotton chastity belt. (*WW*, 20-1 [My emphasis])

In Chekhov's 'A Dreary Story', Professor Nicholas Stepanovich is similarly disillusioned with femininity's betrayal of its own promise:

I look at my wife and feel a childlike wonder. This elderly woman, very stout and clumsy, with her stupid love of petty anxiety, her fear of falling on evil days, her eyes clouded by brooding on debts and poverty, her capacity for harping on the price of things, and for smiling only when it comes down—can this woman, I wonder in

¹ The Bringan, significantly, is represented in *Docherty* as an area of nature in which Conn can escape the definitions of High Street; in this story it would seem to have an identical function.

amazement, really be the slim Varya with whom I once fell so deeply in love because of her good, clear brain, her pure heart, her beauty, and because she felt the same sympathy for my profession which Desdemona felt for Othello's? Can this really be my wife Varya who I once bore me a son?

I stare intensely at this fat, clumsy old woman's face, seeking my Varya, but of her old self nothing remains except her habit of calling my salary 'our salary', and my cap 'our cap'. She's a painful sight to me, so I let her say what she likes to give her what comfort I can, and I don't even answer when she criticizes others unfairly, or nags me for not taking up private practice and publishing textbooks. (18)

Note that the specifically libidinal investment Watson makes in 'Waving' overrides McIlvanney's customary existentialist reticence in attributing given natures to his characters; Bert Watson's relationship with his wife (on all levels, although the emphasis here is primarily sexual) is definite and fixed, and depends upon an unfolding of pre-given (one might almost say genetic) attributes. There is no hint here of the existentialist determination to make oneself anew (it seems that McIlvanney's male characters have a limited time-span in which to do so) and yet again the responsibility for the stultification of the relationship rests squarely with the female character. The narrative argues that his wife, before being socialized through the ritual of marriage and domestic responsibility, fulfilled his sexual ideal, yet now she has reneged on the deal by transmuting into a different being.

Such a model does not in any way take account of the infinitely complex evolution of a relationship over such a period of time. There is no evaluation of Bert's own role in the stultification of the relationship, although his time-machine is for 'people', he envisages its operation purely from a masculine point of view. The narrative perhaps implies that the phallic partner is immune from such concerns as the domestic sphere

(the woman's obsession with home life is seen as symptomatic of her breaking the contract) and, once again, the male character is represented as having no material concerns of his own but as merely trying to satisfy his wife materially while, ironically, she fails to satisfy him sexually (and the sexual is here taken to represent the full range of spiritual concerns).

Perhaps it is *A Gift From Nessus* which articulates most sharply this conjunction of femininity and materialism. Though both Eddie Cameron and his wife are having affairs, there is an extreme qualitative differentiation made in the motives for their extra-marital relationships. The narrator is at pains to emphasise the emotional and spiritual investment Cameron makes in his relationship with Margaret. As in so many McIlvanney scenarios, this 'spiritual' relationship is contrasted with the purely economic one of the bourgeois wife:

Genus suburbanus: found only in semi-detached houses. The sexual behaviour of these creatures is their only interesting feature. After mating, two offspring are produced at intervals mathematically calculated by the female. Whereupon, the female swallows the male whole and re-emits him in the form of a bank balance. (*GFN*, 38)

Notice once again the passive linguistic position assigned to the male and the masochism inherent in Cameron's self-presentation. In this passage, too, we have the conjunction of two of Freud's key concepts: the attempt to devour the Other in order to absorb them into the ego (oral stage of libidinal development), and the equation of money with faeces in the anal phase. The narrative seeks to direct judgement upon the inauthenticity of Cameron's wife, but it also reveals the neurotic nature of Cameron's own vision of reality.

The narrative structure of McIlvanney's fiction goes to great lengths to

argue that, however determined the exterior environment is, the characters' wills are unconditioned and are uniquely responsible for their own existence, perfectly in accordance with existentialist practice. Yet, for reasons stated above, this principle does not in fact hold for these characters' interactions with their female partners. The narrative seems to be in two minds about the origin of feminine materiality: if it attributes this materiality to the female characters' given nature, the existentialist belief that 'existence precedes essence' is violated. The other option, one with extremely disturbing consequences for the interpretation of gender relations in McIlvanney's fiction, is that the female characters actively will their bad faith, and deliberately set out to ensnare the male characters.

Paradoxically, both these models are explicated in the same passage in 'Waving'. Initially, Mrs Watson is presented as having actively 'turned herself into a Geiger counter for dust'. Yet the implication of Bert Watson's time machine is that some women are 'destined' to become inauthentic. The narrative structure swings between these two conflicting interpretations of the materiality it ascribes to the feminine, without ever being clear about what the true nature of the feminine is. This leads to cases like Jeanie McPhater in 'End Game', where her narrow-mindedness is seen specifically in the context of compromising male aspirations.

Walking Wounded provides some of the most striking conjunctions of materialism and femininity in McIlvanney's fiction: in 'On the Sidelines' Katherine is seen to relate to the world by what she has. This is in stark opposition to John, who makes the authentic gesture of leaving behind all material encumbrances which would define him:

It was perhaps that rediscovery of himself, the resurgence of vague longings in him that made him part from Katherine with a grand, flamboyant gesture. He had simply walked out of the house with nothing more than two suitcases and his collection of jazz

records. At thirty-seven he went romantically back out into the world with aspirations as foggy as an adolescent's, some changes of clothes, and records for which he had no record-player. . . . The house lay behind him like a discarded uniform. He wasn't who they had all thought he was. He was a mystery, even to himself. (WW, 34-5)

Jeanie McPhater in 'End Game' won some money on the pools, and, true to type, is content to leave the money in the bank to obtain some feeling of security from its abstract (unrealized) existence. Gus McPhater, on the other hand, reasons that life, money and so forth can only realize their true potential through use, and harbours a dream of travelling beyond the fatalist confines of their environment. Gus is an intellectual traveller, reading Schopenhauer, while Jeanie is happy to have her consciousness subsumed by TV movies. The narrative ironically criticizes Jeanie's materiality; here Gus is reading his Schopenhauer:

Gus glanced back at Schopenhauer: 'Money, which represents all the good things of this world, and is these good things in the abstract...' (WW, 130)

The full sentence cited by Gus is as follows:

Money is human happiness in abstracto; consequently he who is no longer capable of happiness in concreto sets his whole heart on money. (19)

The narrative then clearly implies, through the intertextual connection with Schopenhauer, that Jeanie's motives for wishing to keep the money are not in any way positive or rational: the desire to preserve the money is a measure of how impoverished her horizons of authentic action have become. For Jeanie, happiness cannot be considered to be achieved through anything as vitalizing as travel; Charlton Heston movies are the

limits of her desires and aspirations. The money becomes a site of contention, and, ultimately, a weapon:

Jeanie smiled. It was a smile it had taken years to temper, steely and impregnable. It was a fortress of a smile. Gus philosophically regretted, not for the first time, that law of diminishing returns in human relationships whereby what was given in intimacy came back malice. When they were younger, Gus's ambition to take a train through the Rockies, from Calgary to Vancouver, was a dream they had jocularly shared. Out of all the travelling he had done, that was the one thing he had quite wilfully decided he had missed. It had become somehow climactically important for him. If he had been Moses, a train through the Rockies would have been Canaan. 'When we're older,' Jeanie had often said. 'An' the weans are oot from oor feet'. He regretted his big mouth. If people didn't know your dreams, how could they thwart them? (*WW*, 133)

After they argue, Gus storms off, though neither have any doubt that he will return, and Jeanie commits the mindlessly petty act of destroying his book to revenge herself upon him. In dumping the remains

she glanced up. The view was of dull back-gardens hemmed in by scabrously weathered council houses. It was the terminal vista of her life. But it would also be his. She painstakingly took out all the other plastic bags, put the one she had brought out at the bottom and covered it with the replaced bags. She put the lid back on the dustbin. 'We'll see what he does now,' she muttered. (*WW*, 138)

Note the genuine perversion of will embodied in the act of destroying Gus's book and frustrating his dreams: Jeanie takes comfort from the fact that his life will be as lacking in meaning as her own. Unfortunately here the female is seen, archetypically, as the weak link, an agent of temptation, luring the hero from the exalted aim of pursuing the grail of

Authentic Being.

It is important to see McIlvanney's ascription of materialistic values to the feminine in a wider context: the character configuration of idealistic husband and materialistic wife has a long pedigree. In his introduction to Gissing's *New Grub Street*, Bergonzi notes the 'theme of the inevitable conflict between masculine aspiration and feminine materialism was common in the fiction of the final decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. The pitfalls of marriage for the ambitious male are dwelt on by Hardy in *Jude the Obscure* and by Wells in *Love and Mr Lewisham* and *Tono-Bungay*' (20). As we have seen above, Chekhov does not hesitate in making the connection: in his translation and edition of Chekhov's short stories, Hingley notes that:

It is, incidentally, often Chekhov's women who drag down the more idealistic men to the level of *pohlost* and vulgar domesticity. . . . The Professor's wife in *A Dreary Story* with her tendency to fuss about food and money; Ariadne, who has to be served with roast beef and boiled eggs in the middle of the night; Zinaida in *An Anonymous Story*, with her frills and fusses and copper saucepans . . . all these are typically female intruders on a male world comparatively idealistic. (21)

It appears that the structural dyad strong-materialist-woman/weak-idealistic-man is far from being limited to one tradition. In Zola, master of the reification-trope, there is an acute awareness of the materiality of human aspirations and their genderfication. Gervaise in *L'Assommoir* foreshadows the concerns of many of McIlvanney's female characters:

These pieces of furniture were her religion, and she wiped them with a mother's care, heartbroken if she saw the tiniest scratch. If she knocked them with her broom while sweeping, she stopped dead as though she had given herself a nasty bang. The chest

was her special pride and joy, and she thought it looked beautiful, solid, a symbol of respectability. (22)

The same discourse can be found in Lawrence: as in *Women In Love*, for example, where Birkin finds this same materialism associated this time with a kind of sexual metaphysics which is completely absent in McIlvanney's presentation:

But it seemed to him, woman was always so horrible and clutching, she had such a lust for possession, a greed of self-importance in love. She wanted to have, to own, to control, to be dominant. Everything must be referred back to her, to Woman, the Great Mother of everything, out of whom proceeded everything and to whom everything must finally be rendered up. (23)

Irigaray depicts the deep psychological insecurity which underlies this ascription of materialism to the feminine: 'Admittedly, because she is deprived of everything, "she" also wants to take possession of everything. And that has to be prevented, since anything she might thus attract to herself will be reduced to a mere reflection, shadow, fantasy, absence, of what it had been in its natural wholeness' (24). The meta-narrative generated by McIlvanney's discourse clearly falls under the purview of Irigaray's critique. Women's association with materiality is initially comprehended naturalistically in the existentialist paradigm as Being-for-itself confronting Being-in-itself. There can be no value judgment following from this presentation.

While McIlvanney's authentic male characters either actively fly from material concerns (the youthful idealists) or feel themselves alienated by them, the young female characters are doubly alienated by their lack of access to the power associated with the phallus. The older characters either entrap men in order to acquire that power for themselves (the materialist Viragos) or are regarded by the narrative as 'maternal' and

therefore dependent upon an existing or imagined relation to masculine presence. The ahistorical universality of the existentialist paradigm, in ignoring the infinitely complex mediations of the social sphere, tends to view object-relations exclusively in terms of ontology. Therefore, a certain aura is acquired by McIlvanney's female characters in their association with the domestic sphere. The weakness of this form of literary realism is that it finds itself unable to investigate the historical and social factors conditioning the relationship between women and the domestic sphere.

The only exception in McIlvanney's fiction is in *Docherty* where materialism is perceived as part of the order of necessity. The cause of alienation (labour) is too proximate to be attributed to femininity in itself. Feminine care for objects (e.g. Jenny cleaning her mother's house) is represented as a legitimate source of pride which contrasts strongly with the castigation of house-pride elsewhere in McIlvanney's work. Jenny seems to be exempt from narrative censure because she exemplifies values common to most of McIlvanney's working-class mother-figures: in *Docherty* the house is a home, not a possession.

The patriarchal ascription of materialism to the feminine has been the subject of much criticism. In the patriarchal model, women are seen as ineluctably circumscribed by their gender; yet capitalist society insists on considering women in commodified terms and restricting their activities to the 'secondary' domestic sphere, rendering their labour invisible, and depriving them of a voice in wider society. In the following Chapter we examine the consequences of Irigaray's critique of symbolic exchange for McIlvanney's discourse concerning gender relations.

CHAPTER THREE NOTES

- (1) Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) 51.
- (2) Ian Bell, 'Fighting the Corner of a Working-class Hero,' rev. of *The Big Man*, *Scotsman* 30 Aug. 1985.
- (3) Cairns Craig, 'Fearful Selves: Character, Community and the Scottish Imagination,' *Cenchrastus* No.4, Winter 1980-81, 29.
- (4) Christopher Harvie, *Scotland & Nationalism. Scottish Society and Politics 1707-1994*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1994) 157.
- (5) Craig 'Fearful Selves' 31.
- (6) Beth Dickson 'Class and Being in the Novels of William McIlvanney,' *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 60.
- (7) Carol Anderson, *The representation of women in Scottish fiction*. University of Edinburgh PhD. thesis 1985, 385.
- (8) Carol Craig, 'On Men and Women in McIlvanney's Fiction,' *Edinburgh Review* 73, (1986) 42.
- (9) Honore de Balzac, *The Black Sheep*, trans. D.A. Adamson (Harmondsworth:Penguin 1970) 21.
- (10) Balzac *Black Sheep* 198.
- (11) Balzac *Black Sheep* 169.

- (12) Honore de Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, trans. M.A. Crawford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 429.
- (13) Balzac *Cousin Bette* 198.
- (14) D.H. Lawrence, 'England My England,' *England My England*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) 20.
- (15) Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia,' *Penguin Freud Library Volume 11: Metapsychology*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1984) 258.
- (16) Kierkegaard *Journals* 103.
- (17) Lawrence *Women in Love* 162-3.
- (18) Anton Chekhov, *Ward Six and Other Stories*, trans. and ed. R. Hingley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 94-5.
- (19) Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1970) 170.
- (20) Bernard Bergonzi, introduction to his ed. of George Gissing *New Grub Street*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1968) 18.
- (21) Ronald Hingley, preface to his trans. and ed. of Anton Chekhov *Ward Six and Other Stories*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) xv.
- (22) Emile Zola, *L'Assommoir*, trans. Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 109.
- (23) Lawrence *Women In Love* 224.
- (24) Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. G.C. Gill New York: Cornell

University Press, 1985) 167.

(25) Luce Irigaray, 'The Poverty of Psychoanalysis,' trans. David Macey and Margaret Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) 90-1.

CHAPTER FOUR

Irigaray's work may be used as a point of departure here for the discussion of symbolic exchange in McIlvanney's work. Irigaray's model locates itself in the context of contemporary society's sexual 'indifferentism', and itself addresses a number of feminist issues which are commonly overlooked in the socialist critique of capitalist society. Irigaray's keen sense of woman as the 'sexual proletariat' and linkage of discourse to material conditions gives a powerful and convincing account of how society objectifies the feminine. Here she considers different visions of freedom from patriarchy:

But to what reality would woman correspond, independently of her reproductive function? It seems that two possible roles are available to her, roles that are occasionally or frequently contradictory. Woman could be *man's equal*. In this case she would enjoy, in a more or less near future, the same economic, social political rights as men. She would be a potential man. But on the exchange market—especially, or exemplarily, the market of sexual exchange—woman would also have to preserve and maintain what is called her *femininity*. The value of a woman would accrue to her from her maternal role, and, in addition, from her 'femininity'. But in fact that 'femininity' is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation. In this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her femininity. The fact remains that this masquerade requires an *effort* on her part for which she is not compensated. Unless her pleasure comes simply from being chosen as an object of consumption or of desire by masculine 'subjects'. And, moreover, how can she do otherwise without being 'out of circulation'?

In our social order, women are 'products' used and exchanged

by men. Their status is that of merchandise, 'commodities'. How can such objects of use and transaction claim the right to speak and to participate in exchange in general? Commodities, as we all know, do not take themselves to market on their own; and if they could talk . . . So women have to remain an 'infrastructure' unrecognized as such by our society and our culture. The use, consumption, and circulation of their sexualized bodies underwrite the organization and the reproduction of that social order, in which they have never taken part as 'subjects'.

Women are thus in a situation of *specific exploitation* with respect to exchange operations: sexual exchanges, but also economic, social, and cultural exchange in general. A woman 'enters into' these exchanges only as the object of a transaction, unless she agrees to renounce the specificity of her sex, whose 'identity' is imposed on her according to models that remain foreign to her. Women's social inferiority is reinforced and complicated by the fact that woman does not have access to language, except through recourse to 'masculine' systems of representation which disappropriate her from her relation to herself and to other women. The 'feminine' is never to be identified except by and for the masculine, the reciprocal proposition not being 'true'. (1)

As we shall see in the following discussion on the masculine gaze, even when 'liberated' from the material fact of their gender, women are still objectified by the discourse of capitalist society which denies them the presence of the speaking subject and instead considers women in terms of the value of a specific libidinal commodity ('femininity') defined by a male desire which erases female subjectivity. Irigaray here is clearly sceptical of the ability of traditional political means to achieve liberation: capitalism allows the commodification of women as moments in a wider exchange process. Similarly, unless socialism was to consider a new society not only in terms of material satisfaction, but also as one where

there can be reference to an equality of discourse which allows every individual to articulate their desires, then the charade of masculinist ventriloquism will continue to marginalize and oppress the majority of women.

It is my contention that in McIlvanney's discourse there is an implicit recognition of female commodification inscribed in the male gaze, though this is complicated by a number of existentialist assumptions constituting his discourse. There is the further fact that in certain texts an explicit narrative gaze actively performs the objectification of his female characters and rather than reporting that objectification naturalistically. McIlvanney's discourse is therefore at once hostile to the symbolic exchange presupposed by capitalist society but at the same time, his discourse is itself permeated by a phallographic consciousness which at times threatens to destabilize the hard-won equilibrium achieved by his characters between the ideal of transcendence and the suffering empirical world they inhabit. In the following pages, we will discuss the presentation of the gaze in McIlvanney's work, and contrast the differing narrative approaches to symbolic exchange in order to consider the general implications for gender representation in McIlvanney's discourse.

Existentialism by definition disqualifies any abstract conceptualization of the individual in any structure larger than itself: for the existentialist, society cannot be more than the sum of its parts. Similarly, the existentialist cannot talk of gender or economic class without distorting the actual lived experience of the individuals which constitute that group. This has been a real problem for McIlvanney as, in holding to a socialist political position, McIlvanney must necessarily address questions of class. Secondly, in attempting to absolve certain of his characters (for example, Eddie Cameron, John Hannah) from responsibility for their own lives, McIlvanney's narrators sometimes rely upon the expediency of designating the feminine as the source of the characters' alienation,

fundamentally distorting the true relation between the individual and his society. It is worth noting however, that such a policy is not carried out in *Docherty*, where alienation is firmly ascribed to the lived environment and conditions of labour, rather than anthropomorphized in the shape of a *femme fatale*.

While making a number of correct, if obvious, points about the articulation of gender relations in McIlvanney's work, recent criticism has not comprehended the full complexities of this issue. The *locus classicus* for the feminist criticism of McIlvanney's work must lie in his short story 'Death of a Spinster', which illustrates many of the difficulties inherent in McIlvanney's approach to gender.

The unnamed protagonist of 'Death of a Spinster' does not speak, the totality of her life is articulated by the narrator who judges her life according to phallogocentric standards. She has a job and friends at work, yet the narrator is solely concerned with the fact that she is unmarried, and rather than impute some meaning to the things she actually did with her life (or comment on the limitations imposed on her ability to convert aspiration to reality) the narrator sees her underwear as the point of all-consuming interest. There is the disturbing implication that the narrator's sole purpose in articulating the woman's story is to nullify any independent worth the woman may have had apart from men.

Contrary to the impression created by the title 'Death of a Spinster' a woman is not the actual protagonist of the story. It would be more correct to describe the woman as the story's pretext. The woman does not exist—she is in fact dead. This suits the narrator's purpose as it is easier to objectify that which is no more than to confront an existing being capable of growth and change. The narrator makes it clear that the 'spinster', even when alive, does not exist in any meaningful sense:

Each weekday was mapped . . . The day took her to itself like an

assembly line . . . The working day was full of apparent differences that turned out to be the same . . . The afternoon was the same as the morning. (*WW*, 54)

Unlike McIlvanney's self-defined male characters her existence does not consist of free action in a world of moral choice, but in dealing with 'problems that didn't really matter'. Of Tam Docherty's death McIlvanney makes a momentous eulogy; of the spinster's death the narrator dryly observes 'The dishes were unwashed. The alarm would be unanswered'.

Her name is never mentioned, an important point since Gus McPhater in 'In the Steps of Spartacus' says 'names matter . . . the ancients used to believe names had magic in them. They impart a quality to the thing named' (*WW*, 83). McPhater makes this statement in connection with a greyhound. How much more significant is it that the woman has not even the distinction of being **the** spinster? As Actor said in Gorky's play *The Lower Depths* 'I don't have a name at all here. Can you imagine how that hurts—to lose your name? Even dogs have names. No name—no man' (2). Interestingly, Camus also has recourse to a narrative distancing when dealing with Arabs who, as Conor Cruise O'Brien has convincingly shown, have only a mitigated—and nameless—presence in Camus' *L'Étranger*.

McIlvanney's male characters are defined in part by what they are; Docherty is a miner, Laidlaw is a policeman and Scouler is 'The Big Man'. Yet 'the spinster' is defined by what she is not. Her existence is predicated upon a lack; that of a husband, a defining male presence. The woman is further objectified by the forensic language which describes her: in the space of six paragraphs 'She' occurs fourteen times; the third paragraph alone consists of seven paragraphs beginning with 'She'. No attempt is made to elucidate what such a property constitutes and so her identity is shackled to a grammatical construction.

The constant emphasis on suppressed sexuality further underlines the defining absence of the male: 'Sometimes she had one sherry, sometimes two. Three was an orgy . . . Sometimes the fantasies came almost more fierce than she could bear and containing images she could hardly admit' (*WW*, 54). This lack again manifests itself in the 'man with the gentle eyes' she never had the courage to talk to, the photograph of her nephew she did talk to, and the 'handsome waiter' to whom she gave 'lavish tips'. The story's final paragraph is a *fait accompli*: having suffered a rigid monotony in life she is further objectified in death. In an article defending the story McIlvanney writes: 'I had written the story partly as a compliment to the woman, an admiration of an appetite for life she sustained against all the odds' (*SS*, 101).

This 'appetite for life' manifests itself as the fulfilment of a voyeuristic fantasy: it is clear the underwear exists to be viewed, and so does not function as an objective correlative of individual fulfilment, but as an assertion of the meaninglessness of her life without men. In the article McIlvanney states: 'These are tricky times to talk or write about relationships between men and women or even, as in this case, the lack of them. The ambushes are everywhere. Round the corner of the most casual remark, stern-eyed women lie in wait, wielding self-righteousness like a very roughly hewn club' (*SS*, 100).

This of course begs the question of who decides what a 'casual remark' is. McIlvanney here seems to be proposing a monologic model of language, and its relation to intentionality, in which meaning is given alongside language, rather than being constructed from it. Again, we ask who 'owns' the text. This study would answer that the text is 'owned' by everybody and nobody. Everybody in the sense that each reader is entitled to interpret the text, nobody in the sense that no-one has access to a definitive conception of the text which would render all other views of the text false. In this article, McIlvanney seems to confuse authorial

intention with a 'master code'.

Throughout the article, McIlvanney avoids any dialogue with the real issues of feminism: the roots of patriarchal power, female sexual repression and male labour's collusion with Capital against women in the world of work. The recognition of injustice in society signifies nothing in itself; it is a gross idealism to expect that such recognition is in any way adequate.

Once again the contradictory strains of McIlvanney's thought (existentialism and humanism) come into conflict on the question of epistemology—humanism argues that there is a common human nature from which we can infer the consciousness of others, while existentialism insists that the consciousness of the individual is unique and essentially incommunicable: 'What can a man know about being a woman? . . . I have always felt that whatever it means to be a man is inextricably bound up with whatever it means to be a woman' (SS, 102).

Jung has an interesting aside on this point, noting that the 'elementary fact that a person always thinks another's psychology is identical with his own effectively prevents a correct understanding of feminine psychology' (3). If nothing else, Hegel's dialectic of Master and Servant has revealed that whatever it means to be an oppressor is inextricably bound up with what it means to be oppressed; one is logically dependent upon the other, and so McIlvanney's argument is not very helpful in this connection. McIlvanney's acceptance of Millett's *Sexual Politics* would appear to rest upon Millett's desire to eradicate the ground of gender differences, thus rendering all people androgynous. Again this strategy is as utopian as his belief in a 'humanist salvation'. One realistic answer would be not to reject masculinity and femininity (which is impossible in any case) but the definitions and roles patriarchal society has assigned to them.

Mcllvanney complains that 'women's attitudes to themselves cover such a wide spectrum that direct communication can be difficult' (SS, 101). Surely this is a plea for women to restrict themselves to one mode of discourse, yet he also complains that some women reject sexual relations with men as part of patriarchal society. To him it seems that 'to restrict debate in this way seems to me equivalent to replacing conversation with monologue'; the very technique the narrator uses in 'Death of a Spinster'.

Mcllvanney thus embraces, without seeing their incompatibility, the two main stereotypes of feminism. Firstly, that feminism is incoherent and lacking in any logic. Secondly, that feminism is a rigid dogma demanding strict orthodoxy from its believers. In commenting 'One woman's compliment is another woman's sexism' he is echoing Blakely's article 'Is one woman's sexuality another woman's pornography' (4) thus suggesting that as women do not have a univocal definition of sexism, a man cannot be blamed for being sexist. The danger of idealism *a la* Camus should be evident now. Camus was happy to talk of equality in metaphysical terms, yet he regarded de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* as an assault upon masculinity.

As to Mcllvanney's charge that feminism is incoherent, postmodern feminism argues that women should not establish one feminism:

It is typical 'male thinking' to seek the 'one, true, feminist story of reality'. For postmodernists, such a synthesis is neither feasible nor desirable. It is not feasible because women's experiences differ across class, racial and cultural lines. It is not desirable because the One and the True are philosophical myths that have been used to club into submission the differences that, in point of fact, best describe the human condition. That feminism is many and not one is to be expected because women are many and not one . . . by refusing to center, congeal, and cement their separate

thoughts into a unified truth too inflexible to change, feminists resist patriarchal dogma. (5)

It is ironic, then, that McIlvanney accuses feminists of dogmatism. Derrida criticized this dogmatism as phallogocentrism, 'the primacy of the phallus, which connotes a unitary drive toward a single, ostensibly reachable goal'¹ (6). McIlvanney tries to justify the narrator's refusal to give the spinster's life a meaning outside her existence as a sexual Being-for-Men:

All writing inevitably inhabits silences vaster than itself. And just as intelligence is partly assessable by the skill with which it relates to the areas of its own inevitable ignorance, so creativity is partly judgeable by the implied stances it takes towards its own areas of inevitable silence. This does not mean it will have to articulate those silences. (SS, 101)

This articulation is of course the very point and purpose of a symptomatic reading of the text, and it has a uniquely valid application in the case of feminism, as women are defined by patriarchal society as The Silence: Tong argues that postmodern feminists in general 'believe that woman, the Other, the feminine, has been left, unthematized and silent, in the gap that continually blocks union with reality' (7).

The narrator of 'Death of a Spinster' makes a mockery of a woman's life by not allowing her any kind of voice, allowing his phallogocentric judgment of her to go unchallenged. She was condemned to this objectification by her crime of being without a man. In *Docherty*, Tam is objectified by the middle class for the crime of being dispossessed, yet he is given a voice, and is allowed to point out that 'the bastards don't

¹ Ironically, this criticism of a drive towards totality and closure is taken up by McIlvanney in his criticism of Marxism, contrasting it with the flexibility and indefinite nature of his idea of socialism.

believe we're folk!' Dale Spender explains the inconsistency:

The semantic rule which has been responsible for the manifestation of sexism in the language can be simply stated: there are two fundamental categories, male and minus male. To be linked with male is to be linked with a range of meanings which are positive and good: to be linked with minus male is to be linked to the absence of those qualities. (8)

We must take care to notice that the narrative's own self-understanding (as explicated in Chapter One) considers negative objectification as a universalist phenomenon; the model presented being in accord with the early Sartre's consideration of 'the look'. However, it is important to recognize that in relation to the construction of femininity, McIlvanney's narrator suspends a number of the author's own existentialist principles concerning human nature; contrary to the humanist ideal of human nature realized individually in each nature according to each nature, many of the women in McIlvanney's fiction are shown to be unable to achieve even the limited idealized transcendence of their material conditions allowed to his male characters.

Within McIlvanney's discourse there is a central contradiction between the existentialist analysis of negative objectification (the universal reciprocity of the 'look') and a gender-specific specularization of his characters through the Lacanian gaze. In *Laidlaw* we have an excellent example of the former process:

They [Mr & Mrs Stanley] stared across at each other. Laidlaw and Harkness sat silent. It wasn't the kind of look to interfere in. That stare was about twenty years of marriage and it was carrying more complicated traffic between them than the M1. It was no longer about a dead girl or policemen's questions. It was about how much a woman had never got out of a relationship and the

decency she had maintained in spite of it, about how much a man had hidden from promises he perhaps didn't know he had made. It was about pride kept and pride lost.

Across that long look they defined each other. Nothing he had ever been able to do had bullied her out of her hunger for whatever it was she wanted more than this. In her eyes there was still a light that he could neither feed nor douse. (L, 118)

The important thing to consider in this exchange is that each defined the other by the look; on the level of the characters' self-understanding this phenomenon is entirely in accordance with the existentialist model within which they function². Yet often on the level of narrative consciousness, the universalist nature of this look becomes a gender-specific, unreciprocated negative objectification.

In 'Death of a Spinster' while McIlvanney considers the woman's underwear as an expression of defiance, it ironically simultaneously affirms her dependence on the power of the phallus and her inability to acquire it. The reader is invited to approve of the woman's defiance of the 'tragic situation' of a meaningless existence (and for the spinster this is coextensive with a life without men and the animating presence of the phallus) yet the double objectification (primarily her death, secondarily her annihilation of individual signification—she is 'a spinster') of the woman as an unfulfilled, and, tragically, unfulfillable, 'lack' (in the Lacanian sense) turns her into a spectacle for the masculine gaze.

A useful analogy in discriminating between the look and the gaze is

² Within the patriarchal domination of *Docherty's* world, female characters are largely deprived of the freedom to articulate their condition; there is no institution comparable to the men's corner represented. Because of this, the look is used between Jenny and Kathleen to articulate their mutual understanding of the limitations of their lives: 'They looked at each other, a deep inarticulacy of childbirth shared, men coming home drunk, an experience branded on their hands in callouses, a message whose meaning was that it couldn't be expressed. The words were substitutes'. (D, 266)

that between Manet's *Olympia*, so shocking to the bourgeois 'art lover', and the paintings of courtesans prior to Manet's which collaborate with the bourgeois wish to render the world as indiscriminately consumable. What is shocking about Manet's work is that it dares to lay claim to the right to assert a parity between the object consumed and the consumer, inferring that bourgeois consumption leads every much as inevitably to the alienation of the client as the prostitute. The look is an affirmation of identity between the subject and its objectified object of desire (the woman becomes object-for-him through his desire, but he also becomes objectified for her through the impersonality of the transaction). The gaze is on the other hand a denial of this equivalence.

Within McIlvanney's discourse, there is a basic conflict between its existentialist presuppositions and those dimensions of human existence existentialism cannot properly account for. This disjunction is evident in the conflict between his discourse's self-understanding of objectification by the Other in terms of the Sartrean Look, and the wider perspective represented by Lacan's consideration of the Gaze.

The Look fundamentally derives from a Cartesian construction of subjectivity: selves encounter themselves and each other in the banal democracy of pure extension. One self can objectify the other by the agency of the Look, and the objectified self is free to respond in kind. The bourgeois ideological roots of such a conception are obvious. Lacan's Gaze restructures the concept of objectification by re-inscribing those very elements the Look erases. Lacan's concept takes into consideration the inherently social nature of objectification, and characterizes the encounter solely in terms of power relations. One subject may objectify another without the reciprocal objectification being available. A passage from *Remedy Is None* illustrates this well:

She [Jane Whitmore] was aware of Raymond's eyes on her legs. Like limpets. She didn't bother trying to distract them or cover her

legs more effectively, nor to stare him into embarrassment. He would probably have taken any acknowledgement of his attention, no matter what form it was in, as a secret victory. He was always furtively intruding on her in this way. Sometimes when he was speaking to her he would stare very deliberately at her breasts as if it were with them that he was communicating. At other times he would engineer careful accidents and casual collisions. Sitting in at table, he would unavoidably brush against her thigh, pressing hard with his hand just as he touched her. Looking at something over her shoulder, he would lean on a little, his hand imprinting itself on her back. He always seemed to position his chair in such a way that when he faced towards her, his face was averted from Peter's. He didn't seem to mind about Eleanor. He probably wanted her to notice. Mrs Whitmore had mentioned his behaviour to Peter, but because of Peter's flippancy, she had not mentioned the subject to him again, for it hurt her too deeply. (*R*, 58-9)

Here we have a strong, if ambiguous, presentation of the Gaze. Notice that the power of the masculine Gaze is here irresistible: any attempt to reciprocate, to 'stare him into embarrassment' would have been a 'secret victory' for Raymond. Eleanor is also a prisoner of this objectifying gaze as he 'probably wanted her to notice'. Here the existentialist ideology of democratic, qualitatively equal space is revealed to be false—the masculine Gaze openly avows the power differentiation of patriarchal society: Raymond is free to objectify and humiliate Jane and Eleanor, and they are deprived of any socially recognized resources to resist this. John Berger discusses this phenomenon as a species of interiorized alienation:

To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the

cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.

And so she comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman.

She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (9)

We are first introduced to Jane Whitmore before the dinner-party:

Mrs Whitmore glimpsed herself in the full-length mirror as she passed. She paused automatically, making the ritual gestures of arranging her hair while at the same time being careful not to disturb its lacquered elegance. She noticed a wrinkle in her stocking that was like an omen of age . . . She . . . strafed herself with a last expert glance (*R*, 52)

Later in the novel the narrator informs us of the reason for such care:

She hurriedly bathed her face and dried it and applied fresh make-up. . . . when she was finished her eyes scouted anxiously from the smooth mask she had created. In the dull, stale room, she made a small moment of pathos that had no witness as she advanced on and receded from her careful image, mouthing and

pouting, in the glass whose scruffiness was like an ironic prophecy, a mercury preaching. Her vanity, too desperate to be damning, contained its own punishment, being overshadowed by its own futility like fatalism. The importance she attached to every pore of her face was juvenile in its morbidity. To her, age was a personal and avoidable misfortune, like pimples. She beat back nature with a powder-puff. Against those inroads of age to which most people capitulate imperceptibly, and often casually, she fought a desperate rearguard action, simply because it was all that she had left to defend . . . All she had was the body she stood in, her physical desirability. She couldn't face the thought of losing that. (*R*, 123-4)

We see that women are subject to a double alienation under the Gaze: the actual Gaze of the male and the woman's own interiorized version. Jane Whitmore quite clearly recognizes herself as commodified, an object of consumption, and must market this commodity to best effect.

To return to the dinner-party scene, it is significant that Raymond positions his chair so that he does not face Peter, this is a *de facto* recognition of the gendered nature of this Gaze: Raymond occupies a higher place on the power gradient than the women, yet he is wary of challenging someone similarly empowered. For his part, Peter is also keen to avoid issuing any challenge to Raymond: hence his hurtful flippancy when Jane mentions this to him. This passage neatly subverts the dominant trend of the existentialist discourse of the novel in order to reveal the true patriarchal nature of this inauthentic society.

Yet this deviation from the standard existentialist discourse must be effaced: the narrator ensures that this momentary insight into the way in which Jane Whitmore and other women are objectified in patriarchal society must be subordinated to the moral judgment the discourse of the authentic wishes to pass upon the bourgeois group as a whole. Indeed,

the narrative is in many ways doubly severe upon Jane; far from being a 'natural' bourgeois trapped by historical and environmental circumstance, she has chosen this life of inauthenticity, betraying her authentic links with her family. Indeed, it is this awareness of bad faith which impels Jane to reestablish contact with her family and provides the narrative dynamic for the coming tragedy. The narrator implies that this presentiment of bad faith has coloured her attitude to men:

It had left her on the defensive about herself, inclined to sift the most trivial attitudes and remarks for concealed implications. The sort of perfunctory masculine examination that most women would construe as a personal compliment, she would distort into a personal insult, while it was nearly always no more than an impersonal instinct. (*R*, 59)

In the light of this section, we can see that the confrontation with Raymond is highlighted to illustrate the moral inauthenticity of bourgeois life, Jane's alienation from the life she so desperately coveted³. Yet the episode also escapes this narrow narrative definition, and the narrative re-establishes control by insisting that Jane is somehow responsible for this alienation, conflating this genderified alienation with the alienation she feels from this bourgeois lifestyle. The narrative insinuates that as a result of her insecurity she 'distorts' innocent male intentions, rather than submitting to the socially validated interpretation.

Ironically, having let the jack-in-the-box of female objectification by patriarchal society out in the form of the masculine Gaze, the narrator is forced to resort to this very Gaze in order to re-assert interpretive authority over the text. The masculine Gaze is disarmed, rendered as 'no more than an impersonal instinct'. The socially accepted response of

³ 'She felt betrayed in some small way that alienated her even further from the others. It made her realize again with a sudden familiar hollow feeling just how loosely she was anchored to her present life even after all this time'. (*R*, 59)

'most women' is itself a distortion of a neutral phenomenon, but one which is taken as a 'personal compliment'. This distortion is approved as it illustrates female vanity while ensuring the integrity of the phenomenon itself as 'impersonal'. Jane is discredited because she 'distorts' the phenomenon the other way, and is shown to be deluded about her relationship with masculinity and its social significations⁴. This is typical of the way in which McIlvanney's discourse of existentialist universality is continually undermined and strained by his own equally powerful recognition of social forces and practices that existentialism cannot admit to its field of conceptualization.

As so often in McIlvanney's work, the existence of women without men is actively inscribed by the narrative consciousness as meaningless, yet the double tragedy in this story is that the only 'rebellion' open to them against their 'tragic' condition is an affirmation of an unfulfillable desire to be associated with inaccessible power. While all of McIlvanney's characters, regardless of gender, suffer from the alienation caused by the 'natural' attrition of infinite possibility which lived experience demands, they suffer a double alienation in the gender-specific alienation from the vitalizing force of the phallus.

Just as, even when divorced from John Hannah, Katherine is represented by the narrative gaze as 'wanting to show him what he had lost', the Spinster, though unable to form a meaningful exchange with phallic power in reality, reinforces the necessity of such dependence by her fantasies. While much of McIlvanney's 'idealism' in his male characters can be linked to the tragic freedom of their noumenal selves denying their phenomenal selves' environment by affirming the importance of their 'dreams', there is no such limited transcendence for the spinster, however much McIlvanney would like to equate her actions

⁴ This communicative authoritarianism is evident from *Remedy Is None*, where the narrator refers to 'that feminine logic which enables a woman to turn any compliment into an inverted insult'. (R, 84)

with those of his male characters.

Certainly there is a fundamental pessimism about the possibility of permanent relationships in McIlvanney's work: there is the existentialist dread that the value of a sexual relationship (the evasion of societal definition) may itself be used to trap his characters into a reified identity. This certainly seems to have happened in the Laidlaw novels. In *Laidlaw*, his marriage is presented as embodying all that is stultifying about socially defined roles: when Laidlaw is called out on a murder case, he is torn between the guilt he feels towards his family and his need for self-definition:

'All I want is a nice, uninterrupted Sunday,' she said.

'I know.'

'No you don't. You don't know at all. What the hell do I care who's been murdered? My children need a father.'

'Oh, come on,' Laidlaw said. 'Don't try to attack me on that front. My relationship with them's made of steel. It's not at hazard, and you know it.'

'Do I? Do they? You say you know. Do you know what this kind of thing does to me? To the whole family? I mean, how often does this happen? What's happening to us is a crime, too. But then you know.'

Ena was waving the knife about distractedly.

'Yes, I know. I also know the difference between *Hedda Gabler* and *East Lynne*. And you are 'East Lynne', missus. You want to live as if the rest of the world was just a necessary evil. Somebody is fucking dead. That may be a nuisance to you. But it's a fucking sight worse for them.'

He realised he had been shouting.

'Don't swear. The children can hear you.'

'Fuck-off! Swear-words they'll survive. What they might not survive is your indifference to everybody but them.' (L, 28)

Throughout *Laidlaw*, his relationship with Jan, though plagued with inevitable guilt, is represented as signifying a release from the sterile certainty of married life. Yet by the time we reach *Strange Loyalties*, Jan has come more and more to take on Ena Laidlaw's role:

'I never intended to fall in love with a band of guerrillas. You take up a new cause every day. Group sex was never my thing. We make love the best. But outside of bed, who are you? I never know who's getting out of bed, never mind who's getting in. I need a Jack Laidlaw of my own. I'm thirty now.'

She had been talking lately of having a child. I knew I was first choice as the father, but only first choice. She seemed to think there was potential in my genes, given the right training, which obviously I hadn't had. The clairvoyance of women amazes me. They can project a smile into a relationship and some embraces into a future. They can nest in a promise you didn't know you had made. Jan saw a future in us but, if I didn't, she still saw a future. I could understand her impulse. I wasn't the only one who stared into the darkness above the bed and heard age whispering around me. Jan had her own dark voices. Somewhere inside her, she knew the faces of her young glowing hopefully, featureless as candle flames. If they didn't take after me, they would take after someone else. Time was running out for her, too. Wasn't it always for all of us?

(*SL*, 19)

Clearly this evinces a deep pessimism about the limits of human communication derived from the existentialist tradition, and this fundamental skepticism about the possibility of experiencing authentic *Mitsein* as anything other than a momentary wholeness of being permeates all levels of McIlvanney's discourse. Yet while Jan and Ena are seen as being victims of Laidlaw's 'moral aggression' (*L*, 65) there is

a yet more alienated form of relationship represented in McIlvanney's fiction, as I shall discuss in the following section the confluence of existential and class-based alienation in his characters' relationships.

In McIlvanney's work the upper-class relationship, in which the authentic currency of physical passion is replaced by the counterfeit of financial considerations, is best exemplified in the relationship between Alma Brown and Milton Veitch:

'Tony hates what Milton stands for. He once told Milton the only way he could make love to a woman was with a dildo made of tenners.' (*PTV*, 173)

In passages such as this McIlvanney's writing can achieve a raw and shocking political force. At its best, McIlvanney's insight cannot be denied:

Margaret, Mason's wife, was still the best-looking woman at the table. She usually was. She dressed well, he thought. She undressed well, too, and that was as much as he asked of her. He had his two sons, Matt and Eric, by his first wife, Anne. Anne's death, just when he was beginning to make real money, had simplified his basic nature further and the last traces of his altruism had been buried with her. He paid for services rendered, that was all. It was the way he liked it. Margaret knew the rules and, in return for what she gave him, she had as much money as she needed and an easy life. His sons, who were at boarding school, were expected to repay the investment by what they made of their lives. (*TBM*, 133-4)

There are a number of important significations to take account for here: the way Mason compares Margaret with the other women, as if checking the price of a commodity on the market—this is a true reflection of the

commodified nature of their relationship. This is explicitly contrasted with Mason's relationship with his first wife, but it is structurally important that Mason's aspirations to wealth are linked with a reification of everything around him. The environment he lives in, the narrator infers, is poisonous, and no genuine relationship could survive it. McIlvanney explicitly makes the connection between the capitalist ethic and the Gaze: 'Lennie said nothing. He knew the way Mason sometimes used people like a mirror in which to examine himself. Mirrors shouldn't talk back' (L, 87).

Later we are told that Mason enjoyed 'the feeling he got at such times that everybody was on the market and he knew their prices' (L, 173). In this respect, Milton Veitch and Matt Mason are both Laidlaw's enemies, regardless of what laws they may have broken. Here McIlvanney shows that male characters convicted of a materialistic denial of the 'true' nature of human being are condemned equally strongly as those inauthentic female characters:

Like someone checking his notes, Mason inventoried briefly what he had, as if this was a normal morning. The house had to be worth more than forty thousand pounds. There was a housekeeper living in with them, doing everything except answering the phone. Margaret was still upstairs in bed, probably preparing to have a headache. Her hardest work was sitting under the hairdryer. At one time her uselessness had bothered him, especially when he thought of Anne, who had died just when he was really beginning to make it. But now he took a certain pride in her. Not everybody could afford a wife whose only talent was bed. When he was angry, he could still call her a migraine with tits. But they were good tits. Then there were the businesses and Matt and Eric at the private school.

(L, 76)

McIlvanney should certainly be given full credit for this penetrating analysis of the links between human objectification and the bourgeois drive for accumulation. The fact that McIlvanney does not consistently apply this insight throughout his work is in no way a weakness. As well as the valid criticism that McIlvanney's existentialist model sometimes narrows his focus too closely to individual action, there is the consideration that McIlvanney's realism tries to present a model of the world as it appears to his characters, in all their reified and alienated consciousness (mystified by ideology and commodity relations) and that a fully balanced objective world-view would be massively anachronistic.

We have seen in the Chapter One how existentialist epistemology is nominalist in character, being hostile to any tendency to organize empirical experience in other terms. Nominalism is thus inherently hostile to any form of symbolic exchange, whether embodied in commodity economy or libidinal economy⁵.

In *Remedy Is None* we see how the narrative rejects Capital's logic of evaluating the human in terms of commodities:

Who made it that a man had to measure himself against money in the bank or what he owned or how he 'succeeded' or 'security'? Who decided that a man had to be judged in terms that had no connection with his manhood, that coinage was a yardstick for a man? When had it happened that this man had accepted that everything he had was nothing when set against what he didn't have, an eight-roomed house with his name on the door, a car, a bank account? Who passed that judgment on him? How did it

⁵ We cannot agree with Baudrillard or Lyotard in their claims that commodity and libidinal economies are merely epiphenomena of symbolic exchange (though Lyotard would not put it so vulgarly to claim symbolic exchange to be the skull beneath the libidinal skin): symbolic exchange is merely the genus of which commodity/libidinal economies are actual species.

happen? (R, 26)

'Why did even the most natural things you did have to pivot on economy?' (R, 4) Charlie asks. The capitalist ethic in *Remedy Is None* is represented by Gowdie the publican: 'He measured people according to their pockets. You rated as highly as your rate of exchange and your friendship ended with your money' (R, 141).

Similarly, we have demonstrated above how Matt Mason is illustrative of the tendency to consider the human in the alienated/alienating terms of Capital, and McIlvanney's narrative makes an important advance in the presentation of Matt Mason and Milton Veitch in recognizing the genderified nature of that alienation. The nominalist assault upon structure which characterizes McIlvanney's ethicist rejection of capitalism thus becomes an attack on patriarchy. Marriage is seen as a betrayal of individual potentiality in favour of the preformed essence of 'husband' and 'wife' designed by the structure of patriarchy to serve its own ends, and the patriarchal definition of self and other encoded in the narrative presentation of Bud Lawson is a definite target of McIlvanney's existentialist critique.

It is then doubly frustrating that we find in 'On the Sidelines' that the narrative utilizes the very mode of symbolic exchange McIlvanney so urgently opposes elsewhere. Whereas female objectification in 'Death of a Spinster' is performed by the narrator directly, in 'On the Sidelines' it is accomplished through the consciousness of the male protagonist. In this story we are presented with two of the more extreme manifestations of female objectification. (The masculine psychology which conjures such phantoms has been thoroughly explored in Gray's 1982, *Janine*).

Again, we see the familiar passive role applied to the male character, and the narrative reveals Hannah's acceptance of the role by the terms

he sets for any future relationship⁶): 'He would be defined by her. Her, wherever she was' (*WW*, 35). Here Hannah surely falls into bad faith having ascribed to Katherine the reifying role of 'structure' defeating his dreams. The distance between narrative consciousness and Hannah collapses. In order to avoid accepting the inevitable responsibility of subordinating potentiality to action, Hannah insists that the (future) female partner shoulder the responsibility of ascribing an essence to him.

Sally would define him as Katherine had done, and if he later disagreed with this definition he could always disown it, disclaiming all responsibility. Sally would be to blame as it would be her definition of him. In doing this Hannah exhibits the ultimate in bad faith; a self-deception which pretends that the Other can define the self, relieving the self of any responsibility. In order to achieve this, Hannah has recourse to the very structure he feels alienated by.

Sally Galbraith is a victim of male sexual objectification from her first appearance in *Walking Wounded*. As Bert Watson's secretary in 'Waving', she is represented only as 'breasts framed neatly in [a] doorway' (*WW*, 12). To Hannah she is notable primarily for her 'luxuriant brown hair, gentle eyes and quite marvellous breasts' (*WW*, 36). The description of their intercourse belies Hannah's determination to be 'defined' by her: 'In the arrogance of his formidable erection John knew that he was the scriptwriter for this scene . . . He was above her now and they were moving towards a meeting he knew he could arrange to the

⁶ This recalls a similar structure envisaged by the lecturer at the beginning of *Remedy Is None*. He refers to Shakespeare's *Romeo*:

'In fact, it might be truer to say that at this point his love is not so much directed at any specific person as at woman in general. The American writer William Saroyan has a short story entitled *Seventeen* which effectively conveys the state of mind we may assume him to be in. I think we all know it. Do not all young men fall in love first with a chimera . . . ? . . . It is only later that this idealized woman transmigrates to the body of a living person - and the trouble starts". (*R*, 3)

and as long as she does not threaten Hannah's structure she is safe from judgment.

This is, however, disrupted by the appearance of Manson. Though there is definite violence in Manson's threat, Hannah is too egotistic to consider Sally's fears for herself and her child. Having been objectified by Hannah she is now called upon to perform a different role to ensure their safety and here Hannah's bad faith is self-evident; he condemns Sally for her acting, yet hopes it succeeds for his own sake. Dostoyevsky has something to say about the kind of personality which falls into such bad faith:

A man who lies to himself and who listens to his own lies gets to a point where he can't distinguish any truth in himself or in those around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others
A man who lies to himself can be more easily offended than anyone else. For it is sometimes very pleasant to take offence, isn't it? And yet he knows that no one has offended him and that he has invented the offence himself, that he has lied just for the beauty of it, that he has exaggerated to make himself look big and important, that he has fastened on a phrase⁷ and made a mountain out of a molehill—he knows it all and yet is the first to take offence, he finds pleasure in it and feels mightily satisfied with himself, and so reaches the point of real enmity. (11)

Sally's association with 'The Barley Bree' is the pretext for Hannah's 'sense of her' changing irrevocably. Yet her association with the pub is as arbitrary as Hannah's. It changed his 'sense of her' because an acquaintance had once seen 'a dog and a . . . bitch consummate their passion in a corner' (*WW*, 46) there, thus implicitly identifying Sally with the bitch. He has already referred to women's alleged tendency to forget 'risk when they were feeling roused' (*WW*, 44), further strengthening this

⁷ In Hannah's case, 'a fortnight'.

impression.

In the light of this, the contention that he 'wasn't judging her life or anybody else's. It wasn't in his nature to do that' (*WW*, 47) is discredited. Hannah's creation of unrealistic criteria to measure women against has led him into a number of dangerous generalized assumptions about women wholly incompatible with an existential viewpoint which theoretically denies such essentialism. Hannah is similarly neurotic about Katherine, needing to believe he is still important to her even after their divorce: 'She seemed to like to show him what he had lost' (*WW*, 50) and he even sees the divorce settlement in this egocentric way: 'His life had been used by her and now she was paying him off like a hired hand whose services were no longer required' (*WW*, 50). Again note the proliferation of the passive tense, and the perverse satisfaction Hannah derives from this self-representation as victim. Although he attributes to himself the virtue of being selfless over the settlement, stating that he accepted less than half for the sake of peace, this does not take into account the differing financial needs of a single man and a single mother with two children to support.

Sally Galbraith never stood a chance of measuring up to Hannah's archetype of the *mater dolorosa*—the fusion of purity and sensuality. He refers to her as a 'maiden': a pre-existent image Sally is objectified as. Yet this concept of womanhood is fetishised out of existence; the criteria are impossible for any actual woman to fulfil or withstand the willed undermining of his ideal. Look at the terms in which she is condemned: '“Oh shite” was something he would never have imagined her saying' (*WW*, 45). Sally is condemned through her deviation from the 'imagined'—her very physicality is both what attracts Hannah and what he most fears. In Sally he looked for the physical realization of his ideal, yet it is her physical independence from him (encountered in the fact of her sexual past, not as he thinks, her sexual present) which is denigrated—Hannah's ideal would never have anything to do with shit.

Hannah's problem is that his egocentricity is such that he can only have a relationship with a woman who would physically embody the ideal he creates. Anything real women do that deviates from this unattainable ideal simultaneously affirms their unworthiness and confirms him in his role as persecuted idealist. 'He was simply looking for a habitation for his private longings' (*WW*, 47) as the narrator sympathetically puts it, while Jung phrases his condition in more realistic terms:

The world is empty only to him who does not know how to direct his libido towards things and people, and to render them alive and beautiful. What compels us to create a substitute from within ourselves is not an external lack but our own inability to include anything outside ourselves in our love. (12)

Once again we are confronted with the longing for full presence which lies behind McIlvanney's fiction: Hannah's idealization is structured such that the relationship would rather be a totalization, an absolute, rather than a real relationship subject to change and contingency. When Hannah leaves Katherine he

had to confront the continuing reality of his romanticism. He didn't want a career, he didn't want a big house, he didn't want stability. He wanted a grand passion, he wanted a relationship so real, so intense that it would sustain him till he died.
(*WW*, 34)

Hannah is perhaps McIlvanney's most disappointing character— the nature of his romanticism involves the denigration of actual relationships and a negation of responsibility which acts against the whole tenor of McIlvanney's writings. This is a theme we shall meet again when we consider the abortive tragedy of *A Gift from Nessus*.

The true tragedy in *A Gift From Nessus* is that of Margaret Sutton. Estranged from her father and abandoned by her lover, in the patriarchal world of McIlvanney's characters she is, quite literally, redundant. McIlvanney's ethics revolve around such concepts as 'concern', 'compassion' and authenticity and so deprived of these, the female has the choice between two materialisms—the materialism of the Virago who, still perversely dependent upon men, traps them into a purely financial relationship. For the other course, the one where men are excluded even as a term of opposition (as in the case of the rejected daughter, the spurned lover or the spinster) there remains only death—Margaret Sutton's suicide and the spinster's accident are revealed to show the necessity of men if women are to survive in McIlvanney's fictive universe.

With the animating presence in her life removed, Margaret is exposed to her innate worthlessness and her subjectivity evaporates:

Desperately she clutched for something that would anchor her to herself, fix her to safety. Her eyes searched the anonymity of the room for something of her own, one of the objects with which she had tried to superimpose herself on the fifth, sixth, seventh hand furnishings. The poster of Paris. Nothing of hers here. No recognition. Blackness everywhere. Faces in the crowd. (*GFN*, 127)

The way in which the girl attempts to prevent the dissolution of her subjectivity is by looking for some material object which was an expression of her-self, but all she encounters are the reified objects which litter her room. Again (as with the anonymous woman in 'Death of a Spinster') Margaret's authentically autonomous link with the world—her work—is left unexplored as a potential agency of worth, of existence as a valued person in a social situation. We are left simply to infer that outside of the patriarchal repression of her family, she had no-one but Cameron.

No work-mates, no friends, nothing. It is a noticeable feature of McIlvanney's work that without male characters the female characters simply cease to exist in any real sense, and the area where they are actually and materially independent of their families (their work) is rendered largely invisible by McIlvanney's narrators.

But here, rather than finding her work enlivening and fulfilling, the reifying aspect of her work only increases her alienation. The whole structure of her world becomes reified as a grotesque parody of her family situation. In a stream-of-consciousness sequence her head of department and her father coalesce, subjecting her to an objectification in which every trace of her-self is erased under the pressure of judgment: 'Miss Fox and her father stared into her like a tunnel. Where all their voices reverberated endlessly' (*GFN*, 128). For her boss she exists only in her capacity as teacher, and must be judged by purely impersonal criteria. For her father she exists as an offshoot of a collective family identity, to be defined by his rigid impersonal morality.

Without Cameron as source of worth, of subjectivity, of existence, she is left utterly exposed to society. We have seen before that the individual's experience of society is one of unmitigated alienation and so Margaret's fate is predictable; even the children she teaches become harbingers of the dreaded Look ('Always eyes feeding on her. Faces trapped her'). The reification of her work and the repression by her family slowly destroy her: 'The strongest expression of individuality at the moment was a desire to lie down and sleep on this bed. She was simply exhausted with the struggle to be herself' (*GFN*, 135).

And so, like Ophelia, she has the simple option of suicide. The parallel with *Hamlet* is not gratuitous; while the male protagonist frets about metaphysical questions of being and nothingness, people love and die, beyond the borders of the kingdom there is war. While Hamlet gratifies himself with scholastic niceties, the world goes on. And when

Hamlet finally acts, he is compelled by an inarticulable force beyond logic (*vide* Charlie Grant's killing of his step-father). Cameron regresses beyond even the limited action initiated by Grant as a response to society's indifference; Cameron's noble intentions dissolve in a welter of self-pity and resentment—a Raskolnikov without a crime: 'All the time the individual was being badgered to make decisions that no one could honestly make and, once made, that the individual was powerless to augment' (*GFN*, 182).

Upon finding Margaret's body, Cameron indulges in a good deal of moral self-flagellation, which, if anything, he exacerbates by attending her funeral. This is the existential moment of decision Cameron has been travelling towards and he resolves to tell his wife of the affair and leave to work in Stan Gilbertson's bookshop. However, when he does tell his wife, she remarks blandly that she was having an affair with his boss, (in stark contrast to Cameron's spiritual love for Margaret, his wife's affair was merely 'Biological gymnastics. The beast with two backs' (*GFN*, 209)) and she blackmails him into staying with her for the children's sake: 'He could either go on alone, leaving most of what was real to him behind or he could submit to the gradual but utter suppression of himself' (*GFN*, 217). Cameron chooses the latter course.

Cameron here falls into bad faith—the whole direction of McIlvanney's discourse militates against the kind of despair we find, for example, in Joyce's story 'A Painful Case'. True, Cameron also comes to a realization of guilt, but he feeds upon that guilt in a way totally foreign to the spirit of 'A Painful Case'. Cameron is intent on identifying himself as a tragic figure trapped by circumstances beyond his control. In Joyce's story, Duffy does achieve moral recognition, however despairing it may be; the same cannot be said of Cameron for he, like many of McIlvanney's protagonists, is bent upon seeing himself as a victim. In his relationship with Margaret, he is a victim of his compassion and desire to have a real relationship (his marriage being made redundant, of course, by the

grasping materialism of his wife).

Paradoxically, this 'sense-of-oneself' must be defended at all costs, even if the price paid is objectification. Cameron 'saw the life to which his oath of dishonesty had committed him as being as impersonal as a ceremony, in which the individual participation was unimportant, since the externals would persist more or less unchanged regardless of who was animating them' (*GFN*, 178).

As Cameron insists upon being treated as a victim, his sense-of-himself is in far more danger being exposed in a reciprocal relationship (which calls for the moral responsibility he lacks) than being objectified, removed from the sphere of judgment. Laing describes such a situation:

It is usual to cherish if not the reality, at least the illusion that there is a limited sphere free from this dehumanization. Yet it may be in just this sphere that the greater risk is felt . . . one may find oneself enlivened and the sense of one's own being enhanced by the other, or one may experience the other as deadening or impoverishing. A person may have come to anticipate that any possible relationship with another will have the latter consequences. Any other is then a threat to his 'self' (his capacity to act autonomously) not by reason of anything he or she may do specifically, but by reason of his or her very existence. (13)

Cameron abuses his 'capacity to act autonomously' by putting himself in the position of victim. When Margaret, the true victim, commits suicide, he is faced with the choice of renouncing his masochist actions, or allowing himself to be deprived of moral responsibility. The latter course is chosen because it allows him the luxury of feeling victimised by his wife when, in reality, he freely renounces his status as a morally responsible being. His self-justification of this act is that it is for the sake of the children, yet it is the paradoxical psychology of McIlvanney's

protagonists (in which the freely-chosen project is to renounce that freedom) that makes him seek objectification and return to his wife.

Similarly, John Hannah in 'On the Sidelines' is objectified through his own objectification of all those who threaten to form a real relationship with him. This allows Hannah to continue to sexually objectify women and justify his refusal to engage in a real relationship with his belief that the woman seek to objectify him. It must be noted that in his latest work McIlvanney has given explicit recognition of this phenomenon. In *Strange Loyalties* Laidlaw surmises:

Perhaps we choose our fears, I was thinking. We frighten ourselves with smaller things so that the bigger things can't get near enough to bother us. Perhaps Ellie Mabon chose the fear of breaking the pattern of her life to avoid confronting one of the biggest fears we have—the fear of feeling. Let go the reins on that one and where might it take us? (SL, 81-2)

We have seen in the type of the feminine materialist the inauthentic destiny of McIlvanney's female characters, but does he offer an authentic version of womanhood?

In much of McIlvanney's fiction, the authentic female characters tend to belong to the group McIlvanney terms the 'martyrs of decency', the (predominantly but not exclusively) women who inherited the High Street's 'VC' for living a decent life in the face of positively indecent circumstances. They are generally memorialized by the male protagonist:

'For that generation of working-class women,' I said, 'I'd burn down buildings. I know how much they gave and the shit they got back. You don't have to convert a disciple.' (SL, 149)

As we talked, I realised I knew her. I should do. I had seen her

often enough, on buses, in shops, in innumerable houses of my youth. She was my auntie, a woman who lived along the street, a friend of my mother. She was one of a courageous multitude of women who without too much fuss made all of our lives better than they would otherwise have been. I found it no hardship to tell her many lies about her son. In any case, they weren't lies to her. They were the truth of her dream and it was a dream that she had earned and that no one should take from her. (*SL*, 153)

Dan remembered sitting in that gloomy living-room with his mother and realising how much she had to carry all her life. He saw those women outside as her descendants. Not only did they have to deal with the daily problems of living. They had to impart to it its true feeling as well, dignify it with their tears. (*TBM*, 213)

It is interesting to note that Hoggart's warning in 1957 that 'to write of a working-class mother is to run peculiar risks. We know, if only from the profusion of novels published during the documentary thirties, that she has an honoured place in most accounts of working-class childhoods' (14) has relevance for contemporary working-class writers. The day-to-day heroism of working-class mothers between the wars is described by Eric Hopkins in his *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes* in strikingly similar terms, even to the extent of endorsing the award of the High Street 'VC' in *Docherty*:

whatever the miseries of the individual unemployed man or woman, the mainstay of many families was the housewife and mother. It was she whose work had to go on as before, often performing minor miracles on a severely reduced family income, keeping the family fed and the house respectable. No one actually starved to death on the dole, but the margins were very narrow. Life became an endless round of cooking meals, shopping, house-work and darning and sewing (clothes often had to be

patched). Millions of women kept their families going in this way, and for years on end. Among their number are the unsung heroines of the years of depression in this country between the wars: they should have had campaign medals. (15)

However, there is an unacknowledged danger in such representations; while writers such as McIlvanney and Hopkins wish to recognize the suffering and sacrifice these generations of working-class women have undergone, there is a danger that such approbation becomes elided with the question of powerlessness itself. Hoggart quite rightly cautions us against a naively celebratory aesthetic when representing working-class experience:

We need to avoid any suggestion of a sense of heroism in the people (and there are men, as well as women) who actually live this kind of life. It is challenging, and the lines on the face of an old working-class woman are often magnificently expressive—but they are hard earned. We should not try to add a glamour to such a face; it has its fineness without any artificial light. (16)

Yet it is precisely this sense of heroism which animates *Docherty*—McIlvanney here explicitly challenges the conception of working-class life as alienating, and specifically sets up young Conn against Lawrence's Paul Morel. McIlvanney finds himself confronted with the major dilemma of working-class representation: if we reject the argument that working-class life, disadvantaged materially and politically, gives rise to a culture of impoverishment, then there is a very real danger of valorizing the constraints capitalist society impose upon working-class life:

Laidlaw surrendered. He respected where she came from too much to argue. She [Jinty Adamson] was one of a species he recognised.

They were decency's martyrs, who would treat death itself with instinctive politeness, the unofficial good, uncalendered. You wouldn't find their names in any book because they gave off their good, quite naturally, in actions. They weren't dedicated to God or high political principles or some idea but to an unforced daily generosity of giving, a making more bearable for others and themselves. And they were legion.

Everybody, Laidlaw thought, must know many of them. He himself was in debt to countless of them, aunties and uncles, strangers chatted to in pubs, small miracles of humanity witnessed, unself-aware. Recently, on a trip back to Ayrshire, he had caught up again with another, Old Jock, an ex-roadmen in his seventies who lived uncomplaining with his wife on a pittance of pension, spending more on his budgies than he did on himself. His modest Calvary had been forty years on the roads for barely enough enough to feed his family and him, coming home on black winter mornings from a night skinned with the cold. He had taken it as no concern of anybody but him. It was what he did. (PTV, 163-4)

The complacent overtones of this cannot be mistaken. Certainly we can admire the individual's fortitude, but it is only a short step from positively endorsing the conditions under which these people live—we return again to the idealist basis of existentialism in its privileging of form (the aesthetics of how we live) over content (the material basis of how we live) as exemplified by Kierkegaard's dictum that: '*The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective on HOW it is said*' (17).

The existentialist belief that external material conditions are of no account in the question of whether we can live authentically, result in 'bracketing' vast spheres of human life—the entire social sphere is disregarded and the only question of ethics is what aesthetic impression the individual makes of his/her life. Now the existentialist cannot

condemn capitalism itself—such an ‘ism’ is a meaningless abstraction (as is socialism)—but only condemn the inauthentic nature of individual capitalists. Similarly poverty is an external factor of no concern to the existentialist, only *how* the individual bears the suffering—inauthentically or with nobility—excites the attention of the existentialist. That such a dubious ideology has no connection with socialism is clear:

Faced with people like Jock, or Jinty Adamson, Laidlaw was reminded that he didn't want the heaven of the holy or the Utopia of the idealists. He wanted the scuffle of living now every day as well as he could manage without the exclusive air-conditioning of creeds and, after it, just the right to lie down with all those others who had settled for the same. It seemed the hardest thing to do.
(*PTV*, 164)

For all the sound and fury of Laidlaw's condemnation of bourgeois life as inauthentic and decadent, the idealist nature of his project leaves the world he rages against, bathetically, untouched. If socialism is in any way a demand for change in the material circumstances of the lived world, then it has been decisively rejected by Laidlaw as 'Utopian', as indeed he rejects all political action because it acts on the basis of an future which is only possible.

As we have seen, the existentialist demands certainty in such matters, and, convinced that such certainty is a prerogative of the Divine, forbids its assumption by any mortal. Since certainty appears to be a precondition of social praxis, the social world is simply legislated away by the existentialist, leaving him to account for all social phenomena in terms of individual ethics. It is to McIlvanney's great credit that characters such as Gus Hawkins are free to reject this position:

He felt an anger that was never far away from him. He looked down at what had been the Gorbals. This was improvement? His

parents lived thirteen storeys up in a building where the lift broke down if you looked at it askance. His father's life had made him an offshoot of the pub. His mother still offered the world an irreducible decency the world didn't deserve. Something had to be done.
(PTV, 85-6)

And this itself parallels Duncan Thaw's passionate denunciation of such celebration of decency to the exclusion of practical help:

I'm *sick* of ordinary people's ability to eat muck and survive. Animals are nobler. A fierce animal will die fighting against insults to its nature, and a meek one will starve to death under them. Only human beings have the hideous versatility to adapt to lovelessness and live and live and live while being exploited and abused by their own kind...All that lasts is this mess of fighting and pain and I object to it! I object! I object! (18)

Why then does Laidlaw's approbation of the martyrs of decency undermine his narrative characterization as an ironist? The earnestness with which Laidlaw treats these figures excludes them from a notional reduction of the Ideal to the Real: whereas Laidlaw deflates what he describes as Ena's fantasy of suffering in *Hedda Gabler* terms by referring to them as more in the mould of *East Lynne*, Laidlaw finds that these women's sacrifice and self-abnegation closes the channel for communication. In his perspective, Ideality finds its home in this representation—against such life-experience one cannot presume to sit in judgment, only offer thanks at the altar of working-class motherhood. Such an attitude spells the death of irony, for, as Kierkegaard notes 'The ironical position as such is: *nil admirari* [to wonder at nothing]' (19).

In *The Big Man*, Scouler recognizes the ambiguity of such representations, arguing that however noble the women were in making those material sacrifices, 'they still shouldn't have been asked to make

them'. McIlvanney's consideration of the relationship between Scoular and his mother rejects the uncritical heroism of earlier works:

He had always known her life a selfless giving, a bequest from the living of everything she had. That moment was the codicil, not one that changed what was given but clarified the terms on which it was received. The proviso was the selfishness of others. The beneficiaries could only become beneficiaries through their own greedy indifference. Otherwise, how could they have accepted a gift so destructive of the donor?

Dan had seen a glimpsed truth not only of his mother's life that day but of whole generations of working-class women. From then on the praises he would hear given to those self-sacrificing many were to have a doubtful ring for him. It was right, justice, that the true heroism of working-class life should be accorded to those women. But like all heroism it was a dubious commodity. That lost army of fraught, unglamorous women, with the coats they had to make last for years and the shoes inside which strips of cardboard, absorbing dampness, recorded the passage of hard times like rings of a dead tree, had done unbelievable things. But they shouldn't have been asked to do them.

With a few pounds and some sticks of furniture, they had every day performed a very commonplace white magic. They had sewn comfort out of rags, brewed surprising satisfaction from unimpressive ingredients, calmed storms and taught decency in the face of the injustice their own lives suffered. But the cost of it had often been themselves. They were the ingredients of their own magic, last ounce of magic, last ounce of spirit, last shred of ambition, smallest fragment of dream. The wastage—the good minds starved, the talents denied, the potential distorted—was beyond computation. So when Dan was to hear afterwards a woman who had married well make a small shrine of her mother, or a man who had been successful praise his mother's sacrifice,

he appreciated their feeling but thought it would have been better not to need to feel it. Those attitudes seemed to him like wreaths laid at the graves of the prematurely dead, ones on which the cards should read 'With fond misgivings' and 'Guiltily remembered'. (*TBM*, 156-7)

This recognition of the dangerous nature of substituting metaphysical esteem for material well-being is a real advance upon some of the earlier considerations of these characters, such as that offered in *Laidlaw*. In *Laidlaw*, however, there is criticism of the masculinist ethic that McIlvanney is so often accused of applauding: the monologic certainty of Bud Lawson is rejected outright by the narrative, and John Rhodes' independence is seen as increasingly irrelevant to the modern era. Rhodes and his like will eventually have to choose to 'professionalize' their criminal activity and end up like Matt Mason, or be driven out of the city as the criminal element becomes more and more organized and perversely come to resemble the impersonal efficiency of their enemy, the police.

Just as the characters of Rhodes and Lawson belong to another era (in terms of the 'hard man' ethic, not their inauthenticity, which is a perennial feature of human existence in McIlvanney's discourse) so Wullie Mairshall in *The Big Man* is seen as a throwback. Contrary to the expected presentation of the fight between Scoular and Cutty Dawson as a celebration of these past values, there is a recognition of their inadequacy, particularly in their endorsement of female repression:

Dan felt admiration for Cutty and through him for his father and all those men he had felt he was fighting in that field, but he also felt the unadmitted pathos of them. In order to achieve that attitude of strength, much richness of feeling had to be foregone. The reality of their condition could not be admitted. It was as if true human responses to the mysteries of our experience became women's

work and it became men's to predetermine themselves into an immutable stance.

The distinction between the two roles is false. They shared the same condition. The same fragility had to be admitted. (*TBM*, 214)

While being more explicit, this sense of the traditional values' inability to cope with contemporary life is itself nothing new in McIlvanney's work. In an effort to break through the feminine-materialism matrix discussed above, McIlvanney problematized this relationship in *Strange Loyalties*. This text also sees the recognition of female courage in an active, not a suffering, role: ironically it is the very person Matt Mason uses and considers of no account that brings about his downfall:

If we were to expose the truth of Matt Mason's life, Melanie was our last chance.

It was a strange thought. Here was a woman who had more reason than any of us for running and hiding. Life had battered her remorselessly. She had been used by men. She had been on drugs. She was hanging on to what remained of her sense of herself by her fingernails. Who could blame her if she had decided her only allegiance was to herself? It would take a lot of courage to do otherwise. (*SL*, 244)

There can be no doubt, then, that in the last two novels, McIlvanney has moved away from some of the overtly anti-existentialist characterizations of women which have marred his earlier fiction, and give us grounds for hoping that he may continue in the reconstruction of gender assumptions in his future work.

CHAPTER FOUR NOTES

- (1) Luce Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine,' trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) 129-31.
- (2) Maxim Gorky, *The Lower Depths*, trans. K. Hunter-Blair and J. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1985) 45.
- (3) Carl Jung, *Psychological Reflections*, ed. J. Jacobi (London: Ark, 1986) 109.
- (4) Mary Kay Blakely, 'Is One Woman's Sexuality Another Woman's Pornography?' *Ms.* April 1985, 17-27.
- (5) Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought*, (London: Unwin, 1989) 7.
- (6) Tong *Feminist Thought* 222.
- (7) Tong *Feminist Thought* 218.
- (8) Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1990) 23.
- (9) John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1972) 46.
- (10) Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David Magarshack (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958) 47.
- (11) Jung *Psychological Reflections* 99.
- (12) R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) 47.
- (13) Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) 41.

- (14) Eric Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes 1918-1990 A Social History*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1991) 37-8.
- (15) Hoggart *Uses of Literacy* 49.
- (16) Kierkegaard *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 181.
- (17) Alasdair Gray, *Lanark*, (London: Paladin, 1987) 295-6.
- (18) Soren Kierkegaard, *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, (ed. and trans. H.V. and E.H. Hong) (Indiana U.P., Bloomington, 1967-78) II, 1688.

CHAPTER FIVE

As this thesis has demonstrated, McIlvanney's work as a writer is conditioned by his existentialist convictions and the social morality he articulates both in his fiction and his journalism. By examining the area of gender representation in his work I have shown that the marriage of existentialist theory and pragmatic practice can neither be complete nor unproblematic. It is also important to stress the fact that the dialectic between fidelity to past identity and openness to new possibilities, which provides the dynamic for his protagonists' actions, is evident in McIlvanney's own development as a writer.

As the previous chapters have shown, there are a number of central thematic concerns which McIlvanney returns to time and time again in his fiction. This is perhaps unsurprising for a writer in the existentialist tradition—the doubts his characters constantly introduce into any discussion of social frameworks for moral legitimacy effectively forestall any definitive closure, or resolution of these doubts into a fixed credo or formula. This accounts for the undoubted continuity of interest which stretches from his first novel in 1966 to the present day. Nevertheless, alongside a recognition of this continuity we must also acknowledge a real development in how these themes are articulated in his fiction.

The first two novels, *Remedy Is None* and *A Gift from Nessus*, show the growth of moral sense in the protagonists as they are wrenched from the coherent narrative of 'normal', stable family life, and confronted with the absurdity of an alienated social sphere which has no room for transcendent values. That these novels may be characterized as belonging to what we may describe as the classic existentialist tradition, can be demonstrated with reference to Cruikshank's typology of absurdist literature:

Individual experience of the absurd doubtless takes its most dramatic form in the 'horror of dying'/'jealous love of living' contrast. But the absurd can make itself felt in other ways: recognition of the remorseless passage of time; a highly private sense of self-alienation; awareness of the gulf, which neither love nor friendship can satisfactorily bridge, between the self and other selves; a feeling that the physical world is alien, that the strength and endurance of nature mock our frail mortality. (1)

Charlie Grant's encounter with the absurd is prompted precisely with the confrontation with mortality: with his father's death he begins to question the assumptions which underpin his relationships with friends and family, and impels him on the road to tragedy. Eddie Cameron is a victim of age, alienation from his work, disillusion with his marriage, and he faces a developing crisis of identity. Both of these characters are ripe for their meeting with the absurd. For Cruikshank there is a further element required:

But any one of these forms of experience of the absurd is only likely to arise when the routine which characterizes most people's lives has been abruptly destroyed. The senseless repetitiveness of social existence, which ought itself to prompt awareness of the absurd, normally seals us off from it. We follow easily enough the continual rhythm of 'getting up, taking the tram, four hours in an office or factory, a meal, the tram, four hours' work, a meal, sleep' (*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.27), and this pattern is repeated week after week, month after month, year after year. But if something occurs which causes us suddenly to query this existence, to utter the simple word 'why', a link in the chain of daily gesture is broken, meaninglessness breaks in upon us, the absurd becomes a reality. (2)

Both Cameron and Grant are forced by an encounter with death to

question their lives: Charlie is determined to secure for his father recognition of his worth as a human being, and following Margaret Sutton's suicide Eddie Cameron pledges himself to an authentic existence. Yet each attempt at realizing freedom ends in tragedy: Charlie commits murder and is handed over to an abstract system which is intent on erasing every trace of individual existence; Cameron's dream of a simpler life and authentic labour is destroyed by his manipulative wife and, like Charlie, is committed to a life sentence of regret and self-betrayal. Both characters' desire for freedom is thwarted as they find themselves ensnared in myriad social connections and mystifications which prevent them from realizing their true destinies.

While there are strong claims to be made for both these works in their own right, it is difficult to imagine how McIlvanney could have developed this area of work further—the classic existentialist confrontation between tragic individual consciousness and alienated social sphere having been thoroughly explored in these works, as it had been by Camus in *L'Étranger* a quarter-century earlier. To give McIlvanney credit, a lesser writer could no doubt have pursued this genre, and with a good deal less success. But it would have been impossible to predict on the basis of his career to date, that McIlvanney's next work would be *Docherty*.

McIlvanney had a clear agenda in rejecting the model of working-class representation used by Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers*:

In trying to arrive at the vision of working-class experience I was hoping to reflect, therefore, I had to begin by knowing what I couldn't use, by discarding what would distort the image I felt to be true. It would not be the familiar story of the boy of abilities and sensitivity winning his way out of an underclass into a more enriching form of life, for this is to presuppose the comparative shallowness of the life he is leaving . . . I was determined that *Docherty* wouldn't be an escape story with the escapee

patronisingly looking back on the lives of those who were still inmates. The vision would be from within, frontal not tangential. In this connection, Conn's instinctive refusal to seek an alternative life to the one he has is central to the book. (SS, 225-6)

Cairns Craig has identified certain structural continuities in working-class fiction which considerably problematise McIlvanney's discussion of Lawrence:

Working-class fiction, in the sense of fiction written by working-class writers rather than writings about the working classes, has focused primarily either on the skilled working class, whose ambitions towards a better and more comfortable life are frustrated by the capitalist environment in which they work (*The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*), or on the tragic impossibility of escape from the working class for those with special gifts, either physical or mental (*This Sporting Life, From Scenes Like These, Kes*). Underlying both narrative structures is the drive to confront both characters and readers with a realisation of the fundamentally destructive nature of the industrial process and the enormous sacrifice in energy and creativity required to resist its dehumanizing pressure. Such a narrative strategy can only work where there is a perceived value in the protagonist and/or the community under threat, and that value is essentially directed towards the possibility of a future in which the value of the individual or community will be redeemed from the destructiveness of the present. Working-class fiction is dominated, therefore, by the implication of a lost potential, whether individual or social, and has to take its focus from characters whose experience is viewed as being, in some sense, central to the whole of working-class life in that loss. It is for this reason that the protagonists of working-class fiction are often members of the skilled and politically aware 'labour aristocracy', or have a special

talent that focuses some aspects of working-class interest outside of life in the factory, some aspect which enforces the sense of community and solidarity which capitalism attempts to destroy. (3)

Certainly McIlvanney rejects the notion of the notion of escape from the working-class environment: throughout his work there is a consistent presentation of working-class experience as an authentic blend of thought and feeling which is absent in the bourgeois context. Flight from material impoverishment can only result in spiritual poverty—a lesson Jane Whitmore discovered in *Remedy Is None*.

McIlvanney consciously rejects the temptation to present *Docherty* as a *Bildungsroman* chronicling a young boy's growth within a community, only to culminate in his rejection of that community. Conn is in no way specially gifted, although there is the implication that, under different circumstances, he could be academically able. This allows Conn to structurally function as a continuum with his father, in contrast to Mick and Angus' rejection (for very different reasons) of what Tam Docherty stood for. Tam and Conn therefore supplement each other in a structural sense: just as the novel records Conn's birth and attainment of manhood, so it depicts Tam's decline from that manhood and death. Of course, there is a very great danger that such a structure can be oppressively deterministic, a danger which all naturalist writers face, but McIlvanney's decision to leave the novel poised in the argument between Conn and Mick allows an ideological counter-pressure to develop which prevents unproblematical closure.

Docherty is fundamentally the celebration of a past generation of the working-class in the West of Scotland, and an attempt to reclaim that past as an authentic possession of the people. Hence the beginning of *Docherty* figures the reduction of Universal History (the type Mr Pirrie would teach at Conn's school) to individual experience in order to resist societal definition. Yet this functions within the realist method inasmuch

as the history of High Street is the common inheritance of so many working-class people.

Despite the many concessions to communitarian ideology made by McIlvanney's existentialism in *Docherty*, it is essential that Tam Docherty should stand both as an epitome of the working-class values McIlvanney wishes to celebrate and an exception to the definition the poor are subjected to. Miss Gilfillan, the middle class lady exiled to High Street, is given the task of introducing Tam to the reader:

Her impression of Mr Docherty was not of one man but of several. It was as if among all the stock roles to which she assigned the people of the street, wife-beater, drunkard, cadger, or just one of the anonymous chorus of the will-less poor, he had so far settled for none, played more than one part . . . she had often sensed in passing them a slight distance between him and anybody else. It was a strange, uncertain feeling, as if wherever he stood he established a territory . . . her own observations kept crystallizing into a word, one she admitted grudgingly: it was 'independence'. (*D*, 14-5)

It is important to note that this statement comes from an outsider: such is the force of Tam Docherty's personality that even a hostile observer who doesn't know him on first name terms 'grudgingly' admits his uniqueness. And in due time Miss Gilfillan is saved from the attentions of a peeping-tom by Tam's intervention. Interestingly, though the narrative admits the illusory nature of freedom in High Street, it attaches great importance to the aesthetic relationship perceived between the individual and his environment. Having accepted the brutal conditions and iron determinism of High Street, the narrative valorizes the Stoic indifference to these conditions. Aesthetics supplant politics—making a good show of it is all-important. In just the same way Dan's action in *The Big Man* should not be understood functionally but as an aesthetic gesture—was

Tam's death also a form of Camus' 'superior suicide'?

It is a ruthless environmental determinism which marks out McIlvanney's depiction of High Street and in many ways this conceptual conjunction of labour and alienation brings *Docherty* close to a Marxist reading of alienation as class-based. Once more, the 'illusion of freedom' is generated in the noumenal sphere where the unconditioned will sets itself against its determined external environment. McIlvanney clearly comprehends the specifically class-based nature of this constriction of freedom here and sees it as a developing theme throughout his fiction: in Laidlaw's Glasgow 'the Trongate divides into two streets running east, the Gallowgate on the north, London Road on the south. The sense of a choice is illusory. Both lead to the same waste of slum tenements' (L, 92).

The heroic resistance of the young to their circumstances relies upon the ability to imaginatively counterpose a view of themselves as free, underlining the importance of the aesthetic dimension to McIlvanney as an arena of resistance to the utilitarian squalor his characters inhabit. There is however an underlying tension between the class analysis of alienation presented here and the existentialist counterpart. If the material conditions which are seen to condition the loss of potential in *Docherty's* High Street and Laidlaw's Glasgow could be removed, would the characters be freed from that alienation?

The answer would appear to be negative. By the mere fact of human existence being defined as limited, reined in by the *Grenzsituation*, the individual can never be free from the guilt which arises from finitude. Although material deprivation may intensify alienation by bringing the individual into daily contact with material necessity, no one can ever be free of this failure to transcend their definition as limited and finite.

The consequences for the narrative structure of *Docherty* are great. In order to grant *Docherty* the sphere of (relative) freedom necessary to

order to grant Docherty the sphere of (relative) freedom necessary to present the character as articulating an identity from a point of authentic presence, the alienating sphere of labour must be occluded. Consequently, Docherty becomes the one patriarchal figure in McIlvanney's fiction who is treated sympathetically (but not wholly uncritically) by the narrative. In his confrontation with Angus over whether he should marry the girl he made pregnant (a theme partially explored in *Remedy Is None*, though from the boy's perspective) there is a struggle between McIlvanney's admiration for the class solidarity Tam stands for and the individualism which Angus (negatively) embodies:

'We walk a nerra line. Ah ken hoo nerra it is. Ah've walked it a' ma days. Us an' folk like us hiv goat the nearest thing tae nothin' in this world. A' that filters doon tae us is shite. We leeve in the sewers o' ither bastards' comfort. The only thing we've goat is wan anither. That's why ye never sell yer mates. Because there's nothin' left tae buy wi' whit ye get. That's why ye respect yer weemenkind. Because whit we make oorselves is whit we are. Because if ye don't, ye're provin' their case. Because the bastards don't believe we're folk! They think we're somethin' . . . less than that. Well, Ah ken whit Ah believe. It's only us that can show whit folk are. Whit dae they ken about it? Son, it's easy tae be guid oan a fu' belly. It's when a man's goat two bites an' wan o' them he'll share, ye ken whit he's made o'. Maist o' them were boarn blin'. Listen. In ony country in the world, who are the only folk that ken whit it's like tae leeve in that country? The folk at the boattom. The rest can a' kid themselves oan. They can afford to hiv fancy ideas. We canny, son. We loass the wan idea o' who we are, we're deid. We're wan anither. Tae survive, we'll respect wan anither. When the time comes, we'll a' move forward thegither, or nut at all. That's whit Ah've goat against you, boay.' He pointed at Angus. 'You're a fuckin' deserter. Ah don't harbour deserters. Ye're wi' the rest o' us or ye go elsebit.' (D, 277)

The passage has a clear class perspective: in *Docherty* 'they' are no longer *Das Man* but the class enemy. Once more McIlvanney turns to Hegel's dialectic to insist that those most in thrall to material need are closest to knowing the true nature of existence. Importantly, ethics are considered as spectacle here: just as Tam challenged the tourist gaze with the fact of his physical presence, so Tam seems to assume that the working-class are always held in this objectifying stare: 'It's only us that can show whit folk are'. Similarly, at the end of the novel Conn meets Mick's aggressive political stance with 'Ah don't want tae smash folk. Ah jist want them tae see hoo guid folk like ma feyther were' (*D*, 321). Paradoxically, the same bourgeois consciousness which is the site of the gaze is blind to the inner realities which the working-class are acquainted with through their daily struggle to survive: 'Maist o' them were boarn blin'".

Appealing though Tam's criticism of bourgeois society is, the only way he can insist on consensus is by direct appeal to the body in its risk—if Angus refuses to accept Tam's arguments then a fight will be the inevitable outcome. Unfortunately, this points to an irresolvable tension within the confines of *Docherty*'s world: if he insists that 'we'll a' move forward thegither, or nut at all' Tam's appeal to class norms rather than individual morality makes him powerless to refute Mick's political stance. Tam's positive compulsion to accept class aims is turned by Laidlaw into a negative refusal of societal aims, unless endorsed by the whole of humanity regardless of class.

The narrative therefore refines itself after the heroic epiphany of Tam's death into the argument between Conn and Mick, mediating the opposing claims of Empiricism and History. While Conn has been the narrative focus for most of the novel, Mick can be seen as the one outsider (excluding the tourist Miss Gilfillan) who can talk about High Street from a view not bounded by its confines. Yet, strangely, even

Mick's supremely alienating experience of the Great War is subtly woven into that of Conn down the mine, so that, instead of being a journey into the wholly unknown, Mick's experience of the army is seen as the other side of the same capitalist coin which sends Conn down the mine. Notice how the trench and the pit are brought together by details such as the rats which run across Mick's body (*D*, 196) and the rats which leap away from the miners' lights (*D*, 199).

In *Docherty*, then, McIlvanney brings working-class community to the forefront of his fiction, and, in so doing, has contributed one of the great Scottish novels. By moving from a narrative of individual alienation to one which focuses on the interactions between individual, family and community, McIlvanney escaped the cul-de-sac of existentialist thought, which Lefebvre characterised as being 'based on individual consciousness, on the subject and the ordeals of subjectivity, rather than on a practical, historical and social reality' (4).

In relation to McIlvanney's depiction of community, there are a number of interesting areas to examine. While *Docherty's* High Street is unremitting in its destruction of individual potential, there is a sense of communality, represented both by the corner boys and the shared domestic life of the female characters, which is absent in McIlvanney's other novels. The tragedy of the development of working-class in the century which McIlvanney documents seems to be that the price of an improvement in material conditions is a fragmentation of class identity and increased isolation of the individual in mass society. I do not believe McIlvanney's aim in illustrating this is the advancement of the embourgeoisment theory of class relations, but rather an attempt to articulate a vision of how this society has failed to address the needs of the working-class.

Such an aim is necessarily complicated by the fact that McIlvanney's existentialist heritage makes it difficult for him to say anything positive

about the social dimensions of existence, and in fact McIlvanney's vision of an authentic society (if such a thing be possible) is to be inferred by his negative critique of the existing social relations, rather than by any positive Utopian design. This is doubly important; in his belief that 'freedom involves the right to envision itself' Laidlaw rightly upholds the existentialist refusal to enclose the future in any totalized system of representation. Secondly, McIlvanney identifies Marxism as an ideology which seeks just such closure, and so insists that any socialism wishing to avoid the errors of Marxism must resist the impulse towards closure and totality in its conception of history—a legacy of existentialism's antipathy to Hegel's ambitions.

McIlvanney is able to reconcile a sense of community with a proper existentialist abhorrence for social convention by designating a particular type of working class communality as exempt from the alienating values of society. For McIlvanney, society has middle-class values; sociality has working-class ones:

Standing now in this pub, he felt alone. He knew most of these people he stood among. He liked them. But he no longer felt the sense of community he had once known with them. They had somehow grown apart. There was a time when he thought he could have gone into any pub like this in Scotland and felt kinship, felt wrapped round him instantly the warmth of shared circumstances, of lives a central part of which was concern for how *you* were living. (*TBM*, 52)

He worried about how his sons were supposed to grow up decent among the shifting values that surrounded them, when he wasn't sure himself what he stood for any more. Sometimes just the sheer amount of undigested experience they were asked to deal with through watching television troubled him. It seemed to him that at their age his experience had come at him through a filter of

shared, accepted values which they perhaps lacked, or which at least had more gaps. (*TBM*, 54)

The contradiction is that this set of shared values, the absence of which he deplores in a working-class context, is precisely what he attacks in its bourgeois manifestations (remember the description of Betty's family—it is exactly those eternal verities Scoular utters a lament for). Also, in *A Gift From Nessus*, Margaret Sutton's father is lambasted for 'holding his principles closer to him than anything else' yet, in *The Big Man*, 'Dan felt a liberating affection for his father. Poor, old, hard, honest bastard. Having lashed himself to his principles to survive, he couldn't be blamed for not being able to move, though the times did' (*TBM*, 124).

The Big Man must in some ways be read as an attempt to assess the legacy of the *Docherty* era and how far the values articulated in that novel can be upheld in the changed conditions of late Twentieth Century Scotland. The ending of *Docherty* itself suggests that the trench warfare methods of working men like Tam were being outpaced by an increasingly mystified social sphere: while Jenny's incomprehension of the significance of the Great War is soon dissolved into the infinitely smaller, yet far more real, concerns of the domestic sphere, Tam is shown to be no closer to understanding the implications for his class, reassuring himself with following Keir Hardie's line.

The Big Man recognizes that, however great men like Docherty were, the truths they lived by have been compromised by the changing conditions of working-class life. Wullie Mairshall's evasion of this fact, in attempting to make Dan conform to the hard man image, points to a recognition that an entire way of life (and its attitudes to gender relations, labour and personal identity) must be superseded by a more open attitude, which predicates its values upon an honest doubt rather than communally-held verities. In doing so, McIlvanney quite rightly argues that much of the heritage of working-class life (and the fictional

representations thereof) are suspect.

Yet he is definite in the direction that he thinks this critique should come from. The revolutionary hopes of Mick Docherty are quite simply written off: what was a noble gesture doomed to failure in 1919 becomes in the 1980s an outdated messianic hope in the face of all external evidence. Certainly McIlvanney attempts in *The Big Man* to articulate a socialist message of renewed working-class solidarity, but a solidarity stripped of its machismo, openly admitting its vulnerability and rawness. The Revolution never came: perhaps Laidlaw's 'humanist salvation' is no more than a pious hope, yet moments of epiphany such as Scoular's reception in the pub at the end of *The Big Man* still hold the promise of authentic being, and act as a reproach and a scourge to the thousand acts of self-deception the individual has recourse to in commerce with this corrupt and decaying society.

The shared circumstances and accepted values of Docherty's era are gone forever: Scoular's message is that we should accept the infinitely more difficult task of living those values in defiance of the prevailing social corruption. The existentialist myth of the Fall is interpreted in *The Big Man* as the challenge to realize that Edenic condition through authentic being-now. Unsupported by the shared values of the corner boys, Dan Scoular has to find those values for himself, through his own experience, and so are all the more authentically his, being without the sanction of the peer group. In the context of a God-less world authenticity becomes an ultimate value, and Scoular's life following his determination to achieve it, and certain death have more than a touch of *Imitatio Christi* about it: there are at least two instances in the novel which suggest the Passion narrative:

There was Dan Scoular. His place in the local pantheon was more mysterious. He was young for such elevation, thirty-three.
(*TBM*, 22)

Frankie White had returned from the camaraderie at the bar. He put down Eddie Foley's two drinks. Eddie held out his hand and Frankie remembered the change. Dan Scoular watched the handing over of the silver. (*TBM*, 62)

Certainly this brings to mind Camus' remark that Meursault was 'the only Christ whom we deserve' (5) and answers to an extent Laidlaw's frank inability to reconcile absolute values with his agnostic conception of the universe. Paradoxically, it is Laidlaw's 'humanist salvation' rather than Marx's theory of revolution which is seen as reoccupying the ideological significations of the Christian *Parousia*.

The essential question for the interrogation of McIlvanney's political claims to articulate a socialist fiction is whether such an existentialist model is in fact reactionary in its innate conservatism, or if it has a place in the articulation of a future society. Certainly, we must consider the possibility that such a model has validity, if for example we reflect upon the motivation of this presentation and analysis of his characters' *Lebenswelt* to be the preservation of an intuition of authentic Being in the face of the reified environment the character encounters as his present. If this conservation of authentic ideals can be regarded as one moment in the dialectic totalization of his characters' experience, preserving Utopian semantic potentials as an anticipation of the possibility of their transmission throughout a future (socialist) society, then McIlvanney can be credited with radicalizing the Scottish novel in an opposite direction from the linear accumulation of experience the traditional *Bildungsroman* form presents.

Ultimately, Scoular's rebellion must be considered a heroic failure: for while McIlvanney recognized that Tam Docherty was defeated by specific historical forces (Mick's disablement in the war, the defeat in the 1921 strike), the focus in *The Big Man* is kept on the aesthetic nature of

Scouler's gesture. Whilst we are full of admiration for Tam's attempt to sustain a moral code in the face of overwhelming odds, the narrative is unambiguous about the nature of his defeat: 'His previous authority over his own experience was a joke. He was like a gunfighter, practised to perfection, unafraid, heroically hard, and pitted against germ warfare' (*D*, 210-11). This image recalls MacDiarmid's statement that 'The trouble is that you cannot fight malaria with a sword' (6). While McIlvanney has been attacked for being 'fascinated by violence and the hardman image' and for dwelling 'lovingly on physical confrontations' (7), his depiction of violence in *The Big Man* has a polemical basis:

Things define themselves at the edges. . . One edge is physical violence. You can use that to define other parts of your society. Yet there's a lot of spurious things said about violence. There can be a hypocrisy in expressing horror at physical violence as if it was the only manifestation of society's violence.

In the book [*The Big Man*] I'm trying to say something about Scottish machismo. I see the book as a passing through of machismo in order to understand and defuse it. But the fight is also a metaphor—the central metaphor—for the violence of our society and I think that violence is basically political. The Bare-knuckle fight is an expression of capitalism. (8)

Yet this metaphor is ultimately inadequate to the task of representing the mystified social relations of capitalist society. In *Docherty*, we are presented with three responses to capitalism: selfish co-operation in the case of Angus; a revolutionary threat of violence from Mick; and Conn's tentative, questioning humanism. While Mick's alternative is historically defeated, there is still the possibility that Conn's response can be taken on a political level. This development does not occur in *The Big Man* and one cannot help but think of Patrick MacGill's comment that 'The social system is not like a person; one man's anger cannot remedy it, one man's fist cannot strike at its iniquities' (8).

Whatever one may think of McIlvanney's appropriation of Camusian rebellion in *The Big Man*, after writing *Docherty* McIlvanney could not be reprimanded for ignoring material sources of alienation, as Sartre famously reproached Camus when he stated that 'the absurdity of our condition is not the same in Passy as in Billancourt' (10).

It may fairly be said that the early novels founder upon the question of the origin of the characters' alienation, and that when McIlvanney provides a definite social context for his characters' challenge to that state their rebellion again fails to find social validation and threatens to become merely quixotic. Trapped between the Scylla of existentialist solipsism and the Charybdis of the individual's erasure by History, McIlvanney's aesthetic has evolved to embrace the technique of irony.

In his development away from a novelistic genre depicting the tragedy of individual alienation, McIlvanney has increasingly taken risks with his characters, and nowhere this more apparent than in his series of novels centred on Detective Jack Laidlaw. At the outset, there is both irony and cunning in his choice of profession for Laidlaw: irony in that some years before commencing the Laidlaw series McIlvanney stated 'I don't like policemen' (11); cunning in that as a detective Laidlaw has a professional responsibility towards society which often collides with his own moral concerns. Gide's memorable description of Dostoyevsky illuminates the dynamic which drives Laidlaw:

He has a predilection for baffling cases that challenge accepted psychology and ethics. It is plain that in the midst of everyday morality and psychology he himself does not feel at his ease. His temperament clashes painfully with certain rules accepted as established which neither please nor satisfy him. (12)

Dickson rightly notes the place of irony within the Laidlaw novels:

As a detective story, *Laidlaw* belongs to a genre which sets up expectations about how the story will proceed. McIlvanney discussed these expectations in 'The Courage of our Doubts'. He subverts common expectations by introducing the reader to the murderer on page one. Thus the reader knows more than the detective: in a genre where knowledge is all, McIlvanney exploits irony to the full, almost mocking the detective genre itself when Laidlaw is given the last piece of information he needs by Eck Adamson, an alcoholic, who does not know the significance of what he is saying. (13)

But beyond the narrative irony of *Laidlaw*, McIlvanney is doing more than subverting a genre for its own sake—in destabilising the established narrative of detective fiction McIlvanney seeks nothing less than to bring a radicalized doubt to bear upon existing social discourses of law, medicine and sexuality. We may measure just how radical McIlvanney's gambit is here if we compare the *Laidlaw* series with Franco Moretti's discussion of the 'classic' detective fiction which flourished in the period 1890-1935.

In the traditional paradigm, detective fiction 'exists expressly to dispel the doubt that guilt might be impersonal, and therefore collective and social' (14). In the *Laidlaw* series, McIlvanney goes out of his way to implicate as many people as possible: Laidlaw 'can't stop believing that there are always connections. The idea that the bad things can happen somehow of their own accord, in isolation. Without having roots in the rest of us. I think that's just hypocrisy. I think we're all accessories. It's just that in specific cases some are more directly involved than others' (*L*, 186). In *Laidlaw* Bud Lawson is indicted alongside his daughter's killer; in *The Papers of Tony Veitch* Tony's father is also considered an 'accessory'. McIlvanney is not concerned with arguing that guilt is necessarily impersonal, but he does insist on its universal nature.

For Moretti, the entire dynamic of classic detective fiction is to provide bourgeois society with an alibi for social violence, in effect privatising it:

What, indeed, does detective fiction do? It creates a problem, a 'concrete effect'—the crime—and declares a sole cause relevant: the criminal. It slights other causes (*why is the criminal such?*) and dispels the doubt that every choice is partial and subjective. But, then, discovering that unique cause means reunifying causality and objectivity and reinstating the idea of a general interest in society, which consists in solving *that* mystery and arresting *that* individual—and no one else. In finding one solution that is valid for all—detective fiction does not permit alternative readings—society posits its unity, and, again, declares itself innocent. (15)

In Moretti's view, the traditional model of 'Detective fiction, through the detective, celebrates the man who gives the world a meaning' (16). Thus, the ideological underpinning of detective fiction is to reassure the reader of the operations of causality, the rule of Law, and the innocence of bourgeois society. By choosing to colonise this specific genre, McIlvanney performs an ironic inversion of these key thematic elements in order to problematize the reader's response to questions of social legitimacy. McIlvanney's existentialist heritage denies the attribution of certain meaning, and Laidlaw's doubt, both of the meaning of his actions and their morality, undermines the traditional ascriptions. Paradoxically, in McIlvanney's view, criminality is honest in comparison with the mystifications indulged in the legitimate section of society:

I think life at the criminal level is more honest; it tells fewer lies. I was in the casualty ward of a Glasgow hospital and a man came in with blood all over his face. It was a confession of frailty, of passion. Etiquette and good manners are supposed to improve communication and make life easier but they have the opposite

effect. (17)

Laidlaw's irony is Socratic in the sense in that he is both perpetrator and victim of the ironic: while his doubt corrodes the 'unearned certainties' of the other characters, he is himself the greatest victim of that moral negativity. It seems as if Laidlaw exists on the threshold of positivity. *Verstehen* always presents itself as possibility in his relationships with other characters—he understands Bud Lawson's pain, and how Tommy Bryson can murder a girl and still remain a human being who drinks tea like anyone else—but as to the existential moment itself, the instant of *Parousia* always remains inaccessible.

The 'infinite understanding' Charlie Grant realizes is necessary for genuine humanity is felt to be an impossible: Laidlaw's irony projects itself into the disjunction between 'Is' and 'Ought' and attacks what he perceives to be the two enemies of human existence: nihilism and revolutionary idealism. Laidlaw's Socratic method takes two forms: in dealing with nihilism he juxtaposes the ideal of the human as *locus* of authentic communication with the fallen perspective of the character.

The second method Laidlaw uses is in conjunction with revolutionary idealism. Idealism demands from the individual a level of ethical perfection which does not take cognizance of the empirical individual: hence the existentialist's dislike of class politics and institutionalized moralities. Laidlaw's ironic reduction of the revolutionary's generalization to the level of the individual's *Lebenswelt* is evident in his conversation with Gus Hawkins at the end of *The Papers of Tony Veitch*. Thus Laidlaw's method must be seen as wholly negative: this methodical doubt is anti-Cartesian in that it does not regard itself as a necessary moment in a dialectic which will secure certain knowledge. Totally against what we understand of the detective genre (the reader and protagonist travelling from ignorance to enlightenment) Laidlaw journeys from one doubt to another; at the end of *Laidlaw* he is unable to consider

the crime solved:

'You don't solve crimes,' he said. 'You inter them in facts, don't you?'

'How do you mean?'

'A crime you're trying to solve is a temporary mystery. Solved, it's permanent. What can the courts do with this then? Who knows what it is? It's maybe just another love story . . . But what I do know is that more folk than two were present at that murder. And what charges do you bring against the others?' (L, 219)

As we have seen in Chapter One, Laidlaw's character is conditioned by a propensity to consider individual guilt in ontological terms by relating the empirical subject to Transcendent standards:

'But' [Harkness] said, 'Take it far enough and it's all just an act of God'.

'So maybe we should find out where He is and book Him'. (L, 220)

Yet the cruel irony for Laidlaw is that, while relying on these transcendent values, he is not able to validate them with reference to an intelligible guarantor; he is simply unable to make the Kierkegaardian 'leap of faith' and posit a realm in which justice and freedom can be believed to co-exist. In the service of a justice he cannot presume to have positive knowledge of, Laidlaw uses the guise of the law to deny the law's positivity. This aspect of Laidlaw's characterization is recognised in *Laidlaw* by one of Rhodes men when Laidlaw goes to talk to Rhodes:

'Has John Rhodes been in today?' Laidlaw asked quietly.

The barman kept on cleaning the glass, not looking up.

'Who's lookin' for 'im?' he asked.

'Don't piss me about, Charlie,' Laidlaw said. 'I didn't come in here to see a bad cowboy picture. You know who I am.'

'I know who ye are. But who's lookin' for 'im?'

Laidlaw kept his silence until the barman eventually looked up, as if to make sure that Laidlaw was still there.

'Maybe you should tell me the code,' Laidlaw said. 'Then we could talk over that.'

'There's lookin' an' lookin',' the barman said, back at his glass. 'Are ye Laidlaw lookin' or are ye a polisman lookin'?'

'Oh, I'm Laidlaw looking. A friend looking for a friend.' (L, 95)

The ambiguous relationship between the professional and his role is a recurrent theme in fiction; in Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* the lawman de Granville asks the arch-criminal Jacques Collin 'Are you speaking to Monsieur de Granville or to the King's Attorney General?' (18)

If we bear in mind Kierkegaard's consideration that 'Irony oscillates between the ideal *I* and the empirical *I*' (19) then our introduction to Laidlaw as 'potentially a violent man who hated violence, a believer in fidelity who was unfaithful, an active man who longed for understanding' (L, 9) acquires new resonance. As with Kierkegaard's depiction of Socrates in *The Concept of Irony*, Laidlaw's method remains negative—it is his ability to negate the meaning he so yearns for that characterizes his ironic stance towards the world, and most especially, to himself. Rather than succumb to the temptation of the Pascalian wager, Laidlaw's beliefs (and we must bear in mind here McIlvanney's self-characterization as a 'proselytizing agnostic') look instead to the collective subject of Humanity for validation:

In just about every case I've investigated, I've wanted to implicate as many people as I could, including myself. My ideal dock would accommodate the population of the world. We would all give our evidence, tell our sad stories and there would be a mass acquittal and we would all go away and try again. (SL, 10)

However, in the absence of an absolute judge which could comprehend the infinitely various context of each individual life, such a project is chimerical: Laidlaw wants salvation without good or evil:

But that day in the car I had also told myself that my rage had to find an address to which to go. Now I knew it never could. For it was a rage not just against certain people, Chuck Walker or myself, but against the terms on which we have agreed to live. My quarrel was with all of us. Where did you go to deliver that one? (SL, 260)

In this area at least, it can be argued that McIlvanney is following Kierkegaard in insisting on a 'teleological suspension of ethics'. Such an attitude acknowledges that, in the absence of the transcendent principle of divinity, no-one can arrogate that judgment to themselves. For McIlvanney, the only way that society can lay claim to the divine prerogative is by deifying itself in the manner of Hegel. In existentialism this represents the extension of an important current of Christian thought:

Judge not, that ye be not judged (Mat 7:1)¹

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one (Rom 3:10)

He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone (John 8:7)

Laidlaw's conviction that: 'You know who casts the first stone? The

¹ Cf. Kierkegaard's (as Johannes Climacus) remark that

The Scriptures teach: 'Judge not that ye be not judged'. This is expressed in the form of a warning, an admonition, but it is at the same time an impossibility. One human being cannot judge another ethically, because he cannot understand him except as a possibility. When therefore anyone attempts to judge another, the expression for his impotence is that he merely judges himself. (20)

guiltiest bastard in the crowd' (*PTV*, 78) clearly relates to other texts in the existentialist tradition, as Dostoyevsky's Father Zossima shows:

Remember particularly that you cannot be a judge of anyone. For there can be no judge of a felon on earth, until the judge himself recognizes that he is just such a felon as the man standing before him, and that perhaps he is more than anyone responsible for the crime of the man in the dock. When he has grasped that, he will be able to be a judge. (21)

Such a view quite understandably puts the individual under immense moral pressure to live under such conditions: 'Laidlaw went back to wall-staring. He was wondering how much more energy he had to go on inhabiting the fierceness of the contradictions of his life' (*L*, 218).

Though *Laidlaw* articulates an ideology of individualism, Laidlaw himself is forced to admit the fact that individualism relies upon society for its existence:

'I'm sure I'd be in the Bud Lawson stakes if it happened to one of my girls. But that wouldn't make it right. I'm never very clear exactly what the law's for. But that's one thing it can do—it can protect the relatives of the victim from atavism. It can pull the knot on all those primitive impulses by taking over responsibility for them. Until we get them into balance again'. (*L*, 219)

The weakness in the existentialist position is that he can't actually suspend this illegitimate judgment at all, merely diffuse the responsibility from the individual to the social sphere. Being part of the criminal justice system, Laidlaw protects the murderer from the judgment of the mob only to participate, however indirectly, in the judgmental actions of the courts. Rayburn perceives this all too clearly:

In this moment there hardened in him the admission of a knowledge he had been a long time acquiring. He knew the viciousness of public virtue, how it subsists through the invention of its opposite. He made a simple rule for himself: unjust suffering eventually writes a blank cheque for the sufferer. They would collect theirs. (L, 114)

The problem for the existentialist is how to ensure the subsistence of authenticity without the invention of the inauthentic. Existentialism's weakness lies in its inability to comprehend the supra-individual manifestations of human-being, the sphere where people exist as *zoon politikon*, beings in communion with each other, rather than the lonely ego posited by existentialist psychology. Once more, with Unamuno, we are left with a skeptical ethic so radical that it even rejects the possibility of doubt being a moment in the quest for truth, as Descartes envisioned it. Indeed, we may go so far as to say that, for Unamuno, doubt is the truth, the ground upon which the human must ceaselessly strive:

This methodical or theoretical Cartesian doubt, this philosophical doubt excogitated in a stove, is not the doubt, is not the scepticism, is not the incertitude, that I am talking about here. No! This other doubt is a passionate doubt, it is the eternal conflict between reason and feeling, science and life, logic and biotic. For science destroys the concept of personality by reducing it to a complex in continual flux from moment to moment—that is to say, it destroys the very foundation of the spiritual and emotional life, which ranges itself unyieldingly against reason.

And this doubt cannot avail itself of any provisional ethic, but has to found its ethic, as we shall see, on the conflict itself, an ethic of battle, and itself has to serve as the foundation of religion. And it inhabits a house which is continually being demolished and which it continually it has to rebuild. (22)

That McIlvanney is radically sceptical about the possibility of any totalization of knowledge (represented as God, or History) is evident from much of his work: Laidlaw 'could recall giving up any belief in an overall meaning to living because any such meaning would have to be indivisible, unequivocally total, giving significance impartially to every drifting feather, every piece of paper blowing along a street' (*PTV*, 37). This is indicative of McIlvanney's existentialist concerns, and finds support from Dostoyevsky's assertion that 'Reality is infinitely diverse, compared with even the subtlest conclusions of abstract thought, and it does not allow of clear-cut and sweeping distinctions. Reality resists classification' (23). Thus far McIlvanney and Kierkegaard agree on the impossibility of any finite individual having access to truly systematic knowledge. Yet Laidlaw's doubt is so inclusive it denies the possibility of an Absolute observer who could totalize the infinite complexity of human existence:

'One thing you can be sure about any preconception. It's wrong. If there's a God and he tried to preconceive the world, he got it wrong. If you tried to imagine taking a walk down the street you know best, you couldn't come near the reality of doing it. There's always the bit of paper blowing you couldn't have imagined. The man coming out of his house you didn't account for. That's it. That's what's wrong.' (*PTV*, 184)

Here McIlvanney is even more skeptical than Kierkegaard, who would argue that God could have a rational and complete conception of history:

An existential system cannot be formulated. Does this mean that no such system exists? By no means; nor is this implied in our assertion. Reality itself is a system—for God; but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit. System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality . . . Existence separates, and holds the various moments of existence

discretely apart; the systematic thought consists of the finality which brings them together. (24)

A legacy of his long-standing debate with Hegel, Kierkegaard argues that by definition God can be the only systematic thinker, ridiculing human aspirations to this unity of vision: 'But world-history is the royal stage where God is spectator, where He is not accidentally but essentially the only spectator, because He is the only one who *can* be. To this theatre no living spirit has access' (25).

Laidlaw refuses to make the leap from doubt to faith, and yet refuses to submit to nihilism. The rejection of History has a significant ideological function, as can be seen in Camus' work:

In reality the purely historic absolute is not even conceivable. Jasper's thought, for example, in its essentials, underlines the impossibility of man's grasping totality, since he lives in the midst of this totality. History, as an entirety, could only exist in the eyes of an observer outside it and outside the world. History only exists, in the final analysis, for God. Thus it is impossible to act according to plans embracing the totality of universal history. Any historic enterprise can therefore only be a more or less reasonable or justifiable adventure. It is, primarily, a risk. In so far as it is a risk it cannot be used to justify any excess or any ruthless and absolutist position.

If, on the other hand, rebellion could found a philosophy it would be a philosophy of limits, of calculated ignorance, and of risk . . . The rebel, far from making an absolute of history, rejects and disputes it, in the name of a concept which he has of his own nature. (26)

McIlvanney, following Camus, exploits Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian system-building in his own attack upon what he regards as

Marxism's prime weakness; its aspirations to totality. Yet it is abundantly clear from key works of Marx and Engels that there was no such attempt to reduce the Real to the Ideal, as the Stalinized interpretation of dialectical materialism was later to:

Systematics impossible after Hegel. The world clearly constitutes a single system, i.e., a coherent whole, but the knowledge of this system presupposes a knowledge of *all* nature and history, which man will *never* attain. Hence he who makes systems must fill in the countless gaps with *figments of his own imagination*, i.e., engage in *irrational* fancies, ideologize. (27)

Such an indictment of Hegelian panlogicism comes not from Nietzsche or Kierkegaard, but from Engels' polemic against the epigone system-builder Dühring. It is clear that the Camus–McIlvanney characterization of Marxism as a closed edifice allowing no element of uncertainty is, in this respect at least, highly misleading.

In choosing to inhabit the paradoxes of existence Laidlaw's position is related to that of Romantic Irony, simultaneously acknowledging the claims of Transcendence while refusing the possibility of the finite being uniting with it. Kierkegaard is critical of the Romantic ironist's refusal to resolve the paradox of existence, and go beyond the aesthetic realm, as Collins points out:

The final refuge of the despairing esthetic mind is in the attitude of irony, the favorite pose of the Romantics. Kierkegaard is formally concerned with this attitude in his master's thesis *On The Concept of Irony*, the results of which are accepted in the esthetic books. His position is that esthetic irony has a good side and a bad side. It has a salutary effect in preventing people from regarding their own viewpoint as an absolute, which lies beyond all comparison and criticism. Similarly, it provides a strong

weapon against the Hegelians' identification of the absolute Good with their thoughts about the absolute, as well as their systematic ignoring of the problem of the individual systematist *qua* individual man. But Romantic irony provides only a negative liberation from error; if taken as an end in itself, as a sufficient determinant of existence, it is stultifying and leads to despair. (28)

Irony constantly anchors the individual to the world: every thought of transcendence is brought into sharp relief against the finitude and smallness of human existence. Kierkegaard recuperates this favourite strategy of Pascal's to induce a very special kind of despair: despair of the human ever being able to bridge the gulf between Is and Ought, without recourse to faith. While irony negates the absolute claims of logic, it can also leave no room for this creative despair:

The danger of irony is that it tends to reduce all things, including the individual self and God, to the status of possibilities and points in the polar field of imagination. It levels all values to indifference, and discovers that good and evil are at bottom the same. Paradoxically enough, this abstractness brings the Romantic position close to that of Hegel. The lesson of Kierkegaard's analysis of the esthetic stage is that it ceases to be a genuine mode of existence, when it seeks to be self-contained. This is borne out quite exactly by the rightful, positive place of irony in human life. Although the esthetic order governs the content and expression of irony, it does not provide its basis. This basis is found only in an infinite reality, not in indifference to the articulations and distinctions of reality. Irony results when the finite is brought into comparison with the infinite and its standards. This supposes, however, that both terms in the comparison are real and that the self, which employs irony against its own pretensions and those of others, is a real member of the finite order. Irony tells us that the finite is not the absolute, rather than that the difference

between them is only a moment in a speculative dialectic or one phase in the play of imagination. Romantic irony is incapable by itself of securing the foundations of human existence, for the introduction of God's infinite reality and man's relation to him is possible, only if existence is acknowledged to be a moral and religious affair, as well as an esthetic one. (29)

The precise problem for the existential individual in all his/her thrownness is that in the absence of God then there can be no guarantor of morality: either one surrenders to the formal morality of social practices (as embodied in conventional structures such as marriage or law), or one has to generate a code of authenticity or fidelity to self which takes no regard of social practice. This is the stark choice presented to Meursault in *L'Étranger*. As we have said, Laidlaw is as much victim of irony as perpetrator: just as he inverts conventional police procedure to question the 'unearned certainties' of characters who, in the eyes of the law are innocent, so Laidlaw is beset by the need for certainty in a moral universe whose only certainty is doubt of one's own integrity.

This theme of universal guilt, a dominant trope in much of McIlvanney's fiction, is an ambiguous one. The existentialist position is thus complicit, on a certain level, with a nihilistic conception of the human condition. Laidlaw's much-vaunted 'doubt' virtually excludes the possibility of any practical political action, reasoning that if we are to make judgments on behalf of others, we must be certain of their ethical authenticity. As finite beings, we cannot but doubt this possibility, and so all action which does not come from the individual must be discounted as inauthentic. As far as any notion of salvation goes, Laidlaw insists that universal guilt means that **everyone** should be acquitted of their inevitable wrongdoing (a strange, if honourable, value-system for a policeman): 'Everybody's dying should matter to somebody. The more people who cared, the closer you came to some kind of humanist salvation. There was no other he could believe in'. (*PTV*, 36)

Of course, such a model demands a Transcendent value system which is unattainable in practical terms:

The silence at the other end of the line had felt absolute as if he had been trying to telephone God. That recurrent ambush of despair about how little we care for one another trapped him again and wiped out any sense of achievement he could imagine. Everybody mattered or nobody did. (*PTV*, 37)

For Laidlaw, social concern is more than a political standpoint, for what is at stake for him is not only the well-being of a family or community, but the very possibility of living in the face of the Absurd: 'All we have is one another and if we're orphans all we can honourably do is adopt one another, defy the meaninglessness of our lives by mutual concern. It's the only nobility we have' (*PTV*, 38). The absence of God has bequeathed us a terrible freedom, one which enjoins us to strive like gods so that we can live as men.

The final irony of *The Papers of Tony Veitch* is that we never meet the protagonist: when Laidlaw finds the boy's body all possibility of genuine understanding is lost—for Laidlaw, for Milton Veitch, for Gus Hawkins, for all who knew, but did not know, Tony Veitch. The incompleteness of Tony's oeuvre signifies the impossibility of that totalization which the existentialist sets as a requirement for escaping solipsism: our knowledge of others will always be provisional or fragmentary. By extension History, as the totalization of all these individual totalizations, is even less an object of knowledge and all claims drawn upon it in a political sense are invalid. Laidlaw and Gus' requiem for Tony comes closest to the horizon of that unrealisable *Verstehen*—and this cycle of sacrificial characters (Charlie Grant, Tony Veitch, Scott Laidlaw) can be seen as comrades of Meursault—Camus' martyr de veritié.

Laidlaw has learned the importance of 'Individual sensitivity. . . and the need for ordinary lives to be seen as the most important things in society. Maybe that's what the papers were trying to say. Maybe the papers are what we should be trying to live with our lives' (*PTV*, 252). Of course, no 'humanist salvation' is ever possible, and so, after all this, all we can do is sit in silence, abject before Transcendence (whether it is Kierkegaard's God, or Heidegger's Being, the substance is the same) waiting for the *Deus Absconditus* to at last reveal itself.

Such longing for transcendence (whilst trapped as finite) constructs all non-theistic existentialist thinking: socialism for McIlvanney can only assume the characteristic of a Transcendent Kantian Idea, a 'dream' to be nurtured, unsullied by contact with the mundanities of material survival. How can Laidlaw respond to the fact that his participation in the criminal justice system is, in these terms, absurd?

'Everything you do stays somehow irrelevant, just a process you're involved in. Even if we solve the case, I'll feel worse than I did before. Lumbered with information I can't ignore. And I can't understand. As if I've been reading God's mail . . . It's ludicrous. Just about the entire corpus of Glasgow police in frenetic pursuit of its own ignorance. Because even if we get him, what is it we'll have found? We haven't a clue. And the thing is I don't believe there's anybody who can tell us what it means. It's just that we have to do something. Still. Who thinks the law has anything to do with justice? It's what we have because we can't have justice. . . Maybe the only answer to a crime like this isn't arrest and conviction. Maybe it's for the rest of us to try and love well. Not amputate that part. Just try to heal the world in other places'.
(*L*, 166)

Yet though Laidlaw may be right in saying that we should 'heal the world in other places', such a project requires us to break out of a narrow

egoism to the social sphere. This, however, is not the existentialist interpretation. Laidlaw argues that:

'I mean if everyone could waken up tomorrow morning and have the courage of their doubts, not their convictions, the millennium would be here. I think false certainties are what destroy us. And Milligan's full of them. He's a walking absolute. What's murder but a willed absolute, an inverted certainty. An existential failure of nerve. What we shouldn't do is compound the felony in our reaction to it. And that's what people keep doing. Faced with the enormity, they lose their nerve, and where they should see a man, they make a monster. It's a social industry'. (L, 134)

In McIlvanney's work, as in Camus', there exists a tension between the conviction that the world is devoid of meaning, and the humanist drive to retain the central concept of the human as a valid signifier. In his attitude to ethics and politics (cf. Harkness' thought that 'the most certain thing about Laidlaw was his doubt. Everything came back to that, even his decisiveness' (L, 218)) there is a deep conviction that the certainty which is the ultimate product of Cartesian doubt is not possible within the finitude and contingency of human existence. Once again, as Dixon has acknowledged (30), this existential doubt acts as a check upon messianic political nostrums but further figures the reduction of the political sphere to the ethical. As Kirmmse noted, the Kierkegaardian critique of civil society attacks Feuerbach's presumption that God is a simple transcendent reading of existing human potentialities, and as such strikes at the heart of Marxism's claim to a politics which can fully realise those potentialities:

One who sees oneself as a sinner thus sees oneself related not merely as a rational being to "the eternal" but as a sinner to a gracious God, who alone can transcend the human categories of reciprocity and redeem the promises of justice, right and

equality—categories which ethics and natural religion can posit but on which they cannot deliver. The political implication of this is that any “real” politics must have the humility to acknowledge that these goals—justice, right and equality—which had been political battle slogans ever since the Enlightenment, cannot ultimately be fulfilled in the merely human sphere, and any human attempt to do so leads to the “demonic”. (31)

As we have observed, such is the level of skepticism that McIlvanney holds towards ‘grand narratives’ which evoke Law or History as a final court of appeal, McIlvanney has no other choice but to have his protagonist embrace an ethic which dares not go beyond the horizon which irony has set for it. In this respect, as in so many others, McIlvanney’s career has mirrored Camus’—just as *L’Étranger* opposed an intuition of absurdity to dominant discourses of modernity, McIlvanney’s pre-*Docherty* novels explored the ways in which individual authenticity could be compromised by societal norms. In *La Peste*, Camus faced the problem of radical evil in history with an ethical response which refused the temptations of Kierkegaard’s ‘demonic’ appropriation of political claims to transcendence. In a more direct way, *Docherty* and *The Big Man* struggle to articulate an ethical alternative to Marxism’s desire for totality by appealing to a concept of *mésure* grounded in the agent’s authenticity. Finally, having refused to develop a coherent politics in *L’Homme Revolté*, Camus’ Clamance in *La Chute* embodies an ironic stance towards the century of Hitler and Stalin by insisting upon his own guilt. McIlvanney’s Laidlaw series indicates a similar turn, refusing to have the tragedy of the victim or the heroism of the rebel have the final say.

However, once the turn towards irony is undertaken, what remains for McIlvanney? In the context of his discussion of the *Bildungsroman*, Moretti points to the central weakness of such a strategy:

For a culture that pays tribute to multiple viewpoints, doubt and irony, is also, by necessity, a culture of *indecision*. Irony's most typical feature is its ability to stop time, to question what has already been decided, or to reexamine already finished events in a different light. But it will never suggest what should be done: it can *restrain* action, but not encourage it. Yet to live is to choose, and decision cannot be eradicated from human existence or from history. That is why the paradigm of indecision is forced to resort—along the syntagmatic axis of plot—to its opposite: to *arbitrary decisions*. (32)

The hermeneutic circle is complete: in the absence of any transcendent political reading of history, whether figured in a humanist teleology of liberation (Feuerbach) or in the radical negation of history by God (Kierkegaard), all actions are equally open to judgement. The individual is always-already inserted into a narrative of 'lost illusions' and guilt:

Guilt was at the heart of this kind of mood, he reflected, and it surprised him again to realise it. The need to be constantly sifting the ashes of the past certainly hadn't been inculcated in him by his parents. They had done what they could to give himself as a present. Perhaps it was just that, born in Scotland, you were hanselled with remorse, set up with shares in Calvin against your coming of age, so that much of your energy you expended came back guilt. His surely did.

He felt his nature anew as a wrack of paradox. He was potentially a violent man who hated violence, a believer in fidelity who was unfaithful, an active man who longed for understanding. He was tempted to unlock the drawer in his desk where he kept Kierkegaard, Camus and Unamuno, like caches of alcohol. Instead he breathed out loudly and tidied the papers on his desk. He knew nothing to do but inhabit the paradoxes. (L, 9)

And so we leave Laidlaw, unable to commit himself to the positivity of History, unwilling to take the leap of faith and embrace an unknown and unknowable God. Each day Laidlaw, the character which most fully articulates McIlvanney's vision, is forced to undertake the Sisyphean task of building a habitable ethic which answers the needs of others, and each day inevitable doubt, inescapable guilt will shatter it and force him to build anew. Though Kierkegaard provides McIlvanney with a means of legitimising the claims of subjectivity, and though Camus sustains him in his search for a political meaning which does not surrender his humanist ideals to the brutality of History, I believe that Unamuno, and his religion of doubt, best encapsulates McIlvanney's own ethic:

I do not know, and that is certain. Perhaps I can never know, but I *want* to. I want to, and that's enough.

I shall spend my life struggling with the mystery, even without any hope of penetrating it, because this struggle is my hope and my consolation. Yes, my consolation. I have become accustomed to finding hope in desperation itself. (33)

CHAPTER FIVE

- (1) John Cruikshank, 'Albert Camus,' *The Novelist as Philosopher: Studies in French Fiction 1935-1960*, ed. John Cruikshank (London: Oxford University Press, 1962) 212.
- (2) Cruikshank 212-3.
- (3) Cairns Craig, 'Resisting Arrest: James Kelman,' *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 100.
- (4) Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 92.
- (5) Albert Camus, *Selected Essays and Notebooks*, trans. Philip Thody (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1984) 208.
- (6) Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, (London: Jonathon Cape, 1972) 236.
- (7) Alan Bold, *Modern Scottish Literature*, (London: Longman, 1983) 239.
- (8) Ian Bell, 'Fighting the Corner of a Working-class Hero,' rev. of *The Big Man*, *Scotsman* 30 Aug. 1985.
- (9) Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, (New York, 1914) 269.
- (10) Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Reply to Albert Camus,' *Situations*, trans. Benita Eisler (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965) 98.
- (11) William McIlvanney, 'Growing Up in the West,' *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland*, ed. Karl Miller (London: Faber, 1970) 168.

- (12) André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 115.
- (13) Beth Dickson 'Class and Being in the Novels of William McIlvanney,' *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 57.
- (14) Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs and David Miller (London: Verso, 1988) 135.
- (15) Moretti 144.
- (16) Moretti 155.
- (17) Mark O'Neill, 'William McIlvanney and *Laidlaw*. A Talk with Mark O'Neill,' *Books in Scotland* 1 (1978) 3.
- (18) Honore de Balzac, *A Harlot High and Low*, trans. Rayner Heppenstall (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 514.
- (19) Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, trans. H.V. and E.H. Hong (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989) 128.
- (20) Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968) 286.
- (21) Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David Magarshack (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958) 378.
- (22) Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. J.E. Crawford Fritch (New York: Dover, 1954) 108.
- (23) Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Memoirs From The House of the Dead*, trans.

Jessie Coulson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 306.

(24) Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 107.

(25) Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 151.

(26) Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1971) 253.

(27) Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Anonymous translation (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1955) 469.

(28) James Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard*, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965) 64.

(29) Collins 64-5.

(30) Keith Dixon, ' "No fairies. No monsters. Just people" Resituating the work of William McIlvanney' in Susanne Hagermann (ed.) *Studies in Scottish Fiction 1945 to the Present*. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 194.

(31) Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 313.

(32) Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, (London: Verso, 1987) 121.

(33) Miguel de Unamuno, *Perplexities and Paradoxes*, trans. Stuart Gross (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945) 5.

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