

Devolved Scotland: The Schizophrenic, the Monster, the Progressive  
Subjectivity, Identity, and Scottish Devolution in Jackie Kay's  
*Trumpet* and Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar*

Dory Athey

December 2012

Prepared for Dr. Scott Lyall

In *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, Brown and Riach write, “Scotland, in literature, can only be defined as a multi-faceted, complex identity”<sup>1</sup>. Though questions of “Scottishness” and identity might be said to be at the heart of most Scottish literature, the Scottish literary landscape from 1979 to 1999 showed a marked re-consideration of them, canonizing fiction and film concerned with exploring the idea of a postdevolutionary identity. This notion of the multiplicitous Scottish identity is originally described by G. Gregory Smith’s 1919 term “Caledonian antiszygy:” “We have a refection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn...we need not be surprised to find that in his literature the Scot presents two aspects which appear contradictory”<sup>2</sup>. While, of course, the notion of the Caledonian antiszygy continues to inform Scottish literature, postdevolutionary fiction reveals a growing movement away from the dualistic thought embedded in the term. For Smith, this multiplicity is dualistic only, contains only “two aspects,” where devolutionary and postdevolutionary fiction (at the risk of simplistically attributing literary qualities only to historical events) has, as John Caughie writes, “the potential to defer solidification and the settled assumptions of an ineluctable ‘us,’ opening a space for difference, a disassemblage of unity into an assemblage of disunities, not just trying on national identities, but imagining not having one”<sup>3</sup>. Traditionally, these national identities in Scottish literature are sexed, and are almost always feminized, as in Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s *A Scots Quair* (“Oh Chris Caledonia, I’ve married a nation!”<sup>4</sup>) or (as discussed by Kristen Stirling in *Bella Caledonia: Woman, Nation, Text*), in Hugh MacDiarmid’s poem *A*

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Brown and Alan Riach, Introduction, *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 1-14, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1919), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> John Caughie, “Morvern Callar, Art Cinema and the ‘Monstrous Archive,’” *Scottish Studies Review*, 8.1 (2007), pp. 105-115, p. 103.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *Cloud Howe* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1989), p. 139.

*Drunk Man Looks at Thistle*<sup>5</sup>. Late in the twentieth century, post devolution, two novels essentially explore the same concept of feminized national identity, albeit in new, poststructural dimensions: Jackie Kay's 1998 *Trumpet* and Alan Warner's 1995 *Morvern Callar*.

Both *Trumpet* and *Morvern Callar* are theoretically conscious novels that begin with the death of the predominant female character's male counterpart. From a post-structuralist standpoint, this can be read as the "death of the author"<sup>6</sup> – literally in *Morvern Callar* – Morvern's boyfriend has committed suicide leaving a finished manuscript behind – and somewhat figuratively in *Trumpet*, where the patriarchy of the central male character, Joss Moody, collapses as it is revealed, upon his death, that he has a biologically female body. Immediately the novels are placed in the theoretical space of poststructuralism and they immediately search to challenge structuralist binaries. The resulting narratives engage with national identity both in terms of gender and in terms of colonialism. This combination yields intriguing analytical results that align postdevolutionary Scottish fiction with poststructuralist concepts as they apply to identity and subjectivity. Dissimilar as the texts may be, both, textually and contextually, dismantle structuralist binary paradigms – male-female (the "post-" feminist reading), Englishness-Scottishness (the postcolonial reading) and signified-signifier (the poststructuralist reading). The interplay of these theories within *Morvern Callar* and *Trumpet* disassemble binary thought paradigms indicates the devolution or collapse of the sexed nation archetype. It reveals a postdevolution Scotland as one searching not for *identity* but for *subjectivity*.

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<sup>5</sup> Kristen Stirling, *Bella Caledonia: woman, nation, text*, (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2008), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Roland, Barthes, "Death of the Author," *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, ed. by David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford, 1994) pp. 222-226.

The “death of the author” that launches *Morvern Callar* has been read by some critics as a feminist escape from male patriarchy. Berthold Schoene writes in “Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation,” that “Morvern successfully extricates herself by impulsive intuition not only from her older boyfriend’s patriarchal authority but also, much more importantly, from her passive male-authoredness as a literary character”<sup>7</sup>. Morvern’s self-extrication from patriarchy is in line with the devolution of traditional gender roles. Her actions following the discovery of “His” death depict a character refusing to participate in the predicted, gender normative role, in this case, the grieving widow figure. Rather than alerting “the police or ambulance or whoever takes things to the next stage”<sup>8</sup>, and then noting that she won’t have enough money to call until payday (Warner 5), Morvern goes to work. Morvern does not publish the novel under the boyfriend’s name as he asks in his suicide note: “I only ask you to get it published. I’ll settle for posthumous fame as long as I’m not lost in silence” (Warner 82); he is lost in silence. The note itself, as the only form of narrative communication we have from the author, operates in structuralist patriarchy, anticipating a role for Morvern in which she will stay “immaculate” (Warner 82) as she carries out his last wishes – the virginal, angelic, grieving widow figure. Morvern, as noted above, refuses this role, this defined (it is literally written down for her) identity, set up in juxtaposition to the Author’s identity: “You are better than the rest of us” (Warner 82) in favor of what John Caughie would call “experimentalism”<sup>9</sup>. This experimentalism “privileges subjectivity”<sup>10</sup> over what Paul Willemsen calls the “identity

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<sup>7</sup> Berthold Schoene, “Alan Warner, Post-feminism and the Emasculated Nation,” *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. by Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2007) pp. 255-263, p. 256.

<sup>8</sup> Alan Warner, *Morvern Callar* (London: Vintage Books, 1995) p. 2. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in the text following the reference.

<sup>9</sup> Caughie, “Monstrous Archive,” p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> Caughie, “Monstrous Archive,” p. 103.

straightjacket”<sup>11</sup>. The experimental nature of the text is the embodiment of Morvern’s movement toward subjectivity outside a national or patriarchal identity following the symbolic death of the author.

Much of the experimentation within the text has to do with the construction of the text itself, where Warner leaves out specific forms of punctuation, devolving the text and privileging a sort of experimental ambiguity. For example, Warner uses no quotation marks to set dialogue out of the narrative:

She flung an arm over my shoulder then just says, Morvey, can we just use your room cause V the D’s always phoning the Complex; we can’t get any peace?

Aye, do as yous like, I says.

Are you okay?

Yup.

Wait til I move in and that, we’ll have a great time, she says. (Warner 183-184).

From a poststructural point of view, the eschewal of quotation marks can be read as part and parcel to breakdown of the signified-signifier relationship. The signifiers (the speaker, here either Morvern or Lanna) are not set apart from their respective signs (the content of the dialogue). The signified and signifier are intertwined and linguistic ambiguity is achieved. Such ambiguity contributes to the breakdown of structuralist binary paradigms and opens the door for analyses that consider devolution/postdevolution texts in a subjective, rather than identity based context. In another movement toward linguistic ambiguity, the text, somewhat inconsistently, leaves apostrophes out of contractions as in this scene where Morvern receives the news of Granny Couris Jean’s death: “I’ve bad news...I’m no meaning that...Thats just awful...You

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Willeman, “The National Revisited,” *Theorising National Cinema*, ed. by Valentina Vitali and Paul Willeman (London: British Film Institute, 2006) pp. 29-43, p. 31.

haven't really been about...I can't explain...He's here" (Warner 180). Within one page of dialogue are seven instances of varying apostrophe usage without an obvious pattern or significance. Potentially, this is the point, as in Sophy Dale's consideration of punctuation omission in the novel: "The whole novel is narrated in Morvern's voice, without the use of apostrophes or other punctuation markers nodding...over the character/persona's head at the reader"<sup>12</sup>. Such is echoed in Willemen's criticism of what he calls "ventriloquist identification," that is, "when someone presents him/herself as the mouthpiece for others"<sup>13</sup>. The someone here are the authors, both Warner and the deceased author within the text. Morvern transcends, through poststructural readings, the "male-authoredness" of identity, and thus, gender binary entirely. Without the gender binary, notions of a sexed Scottish national identity, or a Scottish national identity at all, give way to individual subjectivity and experimentalism, to as Caughie would have it, "an assemblage of disunities...imagining not having [a national identity]"<sup>14</sup>.

Like *Morvern Callar*, Jackie Kay's novel *Trumpet* begins with the death of a predominant male figure whose absence dominates the novel that follows. In *Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999*, Carol Jones observes, "Popularly...a generic Scot has been a masculine man"<sup>15</sup>. To dismantle the binary and structuralist paradigm of pre-devolution Scotland, this generic Scot must be fundamentally challenged. Where both novels initially challenge this through the death of the central male figure, the death that initiates *Trumpet* is complicated by the revelation, upon his death, that the male figure, Joss Moody, has a female body. If *Morvern Callar* depicts a character refusing to occupy traditional gender roles,

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<sup>12</sup> Sophy Dale, *Alan Warner's Morvern Callar: A Reader's Guide* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2002) p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Willemen, "National Revisited," p. 36.

<sup>14</sup> Caughie, "Monstrous Archive," p. 103

<sup>15</sup> Carol Jones, "Introduction: Dissonant Selves and the Literature of Gender Disorientation," *Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999* (New York: Editions Rodopi B. V., 2009) pp. 11-29, p. 20.

*Trumpet* depicts characters demanding to occupy traditional roles despite the transgressive nature of such. The result is the same: the experimentalism that informs Kay's novel privileges subjectivity over notions of "identity," and by extension, "national identity." Experimentalism in Kay's novel takes different forms than in Warner's. Where *Morvern Callar*'s narrative is singular and contained within the parameters of the main character herself, *Trumpet* employs fragmented narrative style, with many different narrators and narrative styles. Contained within the novel there are eleven individual narrators and at least nineteen different narrative styles, ranging from first person narrative, to third person narrative to newspaper, journalistic narrative to narratives taking place via another character, interview style, to letter-style narrative. The polyphonous narrative of the novel offers, much more simply than in *Morvern Callar*, an consideration of postdevolutionary fiction as lacking a narrator, that is, lacking a central signifier, opting instead for fragmentary narration, provided by characters with varying motivations. Joss Moody achieves subjectivity through nineteen different narrations of his character.

Considered within three different theoretical perspectives, Joss Moody defies identification altogether, and must instead, occupy a subjective space. From a feminist or post-feminist perspective, Judith Butler's performativity theory is useful in determining Joss Moody a subject. Butler's central critique of epistemology and ontology as it applies to gender resonate in the larger aim of this paper, that is, to show the devolved state of the concept of identity in devolutionary postdevolution Scottish fiction. She writes in the preface to the Tenth Anniversary Edition of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, "In particular, I opposed those regimes of truth that stipulated that certain kinds of gendered expressions were found to be

false or derivative, and other, true and original”<sup>16</sup>. The multiplicitous narrative structure of the *Trumpet*, as discussed above aids in this opposition, offering nineteen versions of the truth, nineteen different pronoun usages, privileging none as the singular identity of Joss Moody.

The narrative begins with Millie Moody grieving the loss of her husband, remembering their courtship and the first several years of their marriage. The fact that Joss is not biologically male is only mentioned once in the forty one pages that make up Millie’s first section: “I am still holding out my hands when the first of his breasts reveals itself to me. Small, firm”<sup>17</sup>. The use of the male possessive pronoun characterizes Millie’s portrait of Joss as male, as Colman’s narrative, even when grappling with the revelation of his father’s biological sex: “My father had tits. My father didn’t have a dick. My father had tits. My father had a pussy. My father didn’t have any balls...I’m going to track him down.” (Kay 61). Colman’s portrait of Moody is less certain than his mother’s of the “truth” of his father’s masculinity, but, although Colman is obsessed with finding out “his whole story” (Kay 62), as Butler writes, “the demand for lucidity forgets the ruses that motor the ostensibly ‘clear’ view,”<sup>18</sup> thus, lucidity need not be the aim. Sophie Stones, the journalist uses “she” to refer to Moody, even when interviewing characters who use “he” as in this conversation with Colman: ““What we really need is the early stuff. What did *she* do before *she* played the trumpet?’ ‘I haven’t got a fucking clue,’ he says. ‘Always was a bit cagey about *his* past as I remember”” [emphasis added] (Kay 120-121). The narrators who knew Moody vary in their sexing of Joss, but for the most part, settle in using pronouns that fit in the context in which they knew him as a man, or her as a young girl. Big Red, the drummer, and Maggie, the cleaner both refer to Joss as male. Edith Moore, Moody’s

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<sup>16</sup> Judith Butler, Preface 1999, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999) pp. vii-xxvi, p. viii.

<sup>17</sup> Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (London: Picador, 2011) p. 21. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in the text following the reference.

<sup>18</sup> Butler, Preface 1999, p. xix.

mother, and May Hart, Moody's childhood friend, both refer to Moody as female. The three narrators that knew Moody posthumously, the doctor, the undertaker and the registrar vary in their sexing of Moody. Both the undertaker and the doctor ultimately settle on the female, but referring to Moody as "the body" (Kay, 44, 108) while the registrar writes the "male" name, Joss Moody, and ticks the "female" box, settling somewhere in between. The penultimate section of the novel is narrated by Moody himself as author, telling the story of his father's journey from Nigeria to Scotland. The fragmented and plural narratives offered in *Trumpet* offer multiple readings of Joss Moody: Joss the man, the girl, the sexed body, the sexed document, the sexed object of a book and finally the author.

There is one more reading of Moody: Joss, the musician. A. Lâmia Gülçur argues in "Resistance and Reinvention of the Subject in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*" that Joss Moody is best read with post-colonial terms, against Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridization and the Third Space: "Here reading Joss Moody as a 'hybrid' instead of a woman who chose to be a man is more appropriate. I argue that he is in the third space, nor woman nor man anymore"<sup>19</sup>. There is one section in *Trumpet* that transcends gender entirely. This section is entitled, "Music." Music, it could be argued, is the third space in which Gülçur places Moody. Such is a valid argument in considering *Morvern Callar* as well. Music informs both texts throughout, creating spaces where gender binaries do not apply, and experimentalism reaches its peak. Throughout *Morvern Callar*, Morvern makes mixtapes that she listens to on the Walkman given to her by her deceased boyfriend. In this way, very subtly, Morvern interacts with "Him," when she listens to "all the stuff on the Walkman" (Warner 4). In this way, *Morvern Callar* is able to both challenge the patriarchy while engaging with it in the equalizing musical third space. In *Trumpet*'s section,

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<sup>19</sup> A. Lâmia Gülçur, "Resistance and Reinvention of the Subject in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*," *Ethnic Studies Review*, 29.1 (2006) pp. 101-110, p. 106.

“Music,” Moody, though never named, is unsexed entirely: “When he gets down, and he doesn’t always get down deep enough, he loses his sex, his race, his memory” (Kay 131). This section marks the peak of *Trumpet*’s experimentalism, moving through Moody’s musical unsexing lyrically while dismantling the binaries that inform every other reading of his character in the text: “He is a girl. A man. Everything, nothing. He is sickness, health. The sun. The moon. Black, white...He explodes” (Kay 136). Uses of music as the third space in both *Trumpet* and *Morvern Callar* show dismantled binaries, giving way to what Gülçur calls, “the contemporary schizophrenia of cultural globalization”<sup>20</sup>

In *Bella Caledonia: Woman, Nation, Text*, Kristin Stirling considers Scottish national identity in terms of gender:

Since, for political reasons, the woman-as-nation model cannot work in the Scottish context, she is pulled in opposite directions, thereby becoming monstrous... This also has its echo in twentieth century critical approaches to Scotland, as Gregory Smith’s term ‘Caledonian antisyzygy’ has been appropriated by later critics and developed into a discourse of doubleness and schizophrenia to describe Scotland – effectively making Scotland into a monster<sup>21</sup>.

As one might deduce from the descriptors used in this excerpt – “schizophrenia”, “antisyzygy”, and “monstrous” – conclusions about multifarious identity in Scottish fiction, and, it might be said, culture more generally, have been overwhelmingly negative. However, considering the devolutionary novels, *Morvern Callar* and *Trumpet* within the dimensions and interplay of three postmodern theories – postcolonialism and postfeminism, which stem from poststructuralism – reveals quite the opposite. Warner’s and Kay’s novels, in many ways, are fueled by the

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<sup>20</sup> Gülçur, “Resistance,” p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> Stirling, *Bella Caledonia*, p. 14.

multiplicity and experimental ambiguity of their narratives; they are fueled by the inability to find a national Scottish identity. *Morvern Callar*'s linguistic ambiguity devolves the text, disallowing Morvern an identity, but opening up the space for her to be a subject, as she, as Dale puts it, "nods...at the reader," privileging the reader's notion of her as a subject, rather than the patriarchal author's (in this case, both Warner and the deceased boyfriend) attempt to put her Willemen's "identity straightjacket". Morvern refuses to occupy the role of the grieving girlfriend, which the deceased boyfriend has assumed she will do. Both instances challenge the structuralist binaries that privilege identity over subjectivity. Subjectivity, as Willemen says, "always exceeds identity, since identity formation consists of trying to pin 'us' to a specific, selected, sub-set of the many diverse clusters of discourse we traverse in our lifetimes, and that stick to us in varying degrees"<sup>22</sup>. In the same attempt to avoid this "pinning," *Trumpet* operates in radical multiplicity, offering nineteen different versions of one character, which come together in Bhabha's gender/identity-appropriated Third Space, in this case, in the space of music. Identity and lucidity, in these devolutionary texts are not the aim. The singular identity, in the postmodern, postdevolution Scotland is not enough. Both novels refuse to operate within the structuralist binaries that are the legacy of gender inequality and colonialism and create experimental narrative situations that open spaces for subjectivity rather than identity. Gülçur writes, "The contemporary schizophrenia of cultural globalization opens up a liberating mode of consciousness for the scapegoated, marginalized, enslaved and colonized of every community"<sup>23</sup>. Such, it might be said, is the nature of post-devolution Scotland and its literature. In terms of Scottish national identity, such provokes a movement toward "imagining not having one"<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Willemen, "National Revisited," p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Gülçur, "Resistance," p. 101.

<sup>24</sup> Caughie, "Monstrous Archive," 103.

Both Kay's and Warner's novels assert narrative schizophrenia, antisyzygy, and multiplicity as positive and progressive states of selfness.

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But then so has Santa Claus and the monster is in the same category. Does it exist? Rational evidence says 'folks, get a grip...' Since then the fame of the Loch Ness Monster phenomenon has gone round the world. But then so has Santa Claus and the monster is in the same category. Does it exist? Rational evidence says 'folks, get a grip...' Nessie - the Loch Ness Monster Phenomenon. Let's take a look at this Nessie thing at the beginning of the modern phenomenon. How did this Loch Ness monster mania start? The Loch Ness Monster is one of Scotland's oldest and most enduring myths. It inspires books, TV shows and films, and sustains a major tourism industry around its home. The story of the monster can be traced back 1,500 years when Irish missionary St Columba is said to have encountered a beast in the River Ness in 565AD. Later, in the 1930s, The Inverness Courier reported the first modern sighting of Nessie. The "monster" caught on camera was apparently a toy submarine bought from Woolworths, with a head fashioned from wood putty. The hoaxers then gave the photo to Wilson, a friend who enjoyed a good practical joke. Image copyright Getty Images. Image caption Swimming circus elephants have been offered up as an explanation for Nessie.