

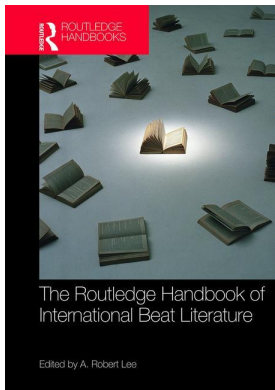
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### Cosmopolitan Scum

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## 4

# COSMOPOLITAN SCUM

## A Genealogy of Beat in Subaltern Scottish Literature

*Fiona Paton*

When Irvine Welsh took the stage at the 2012 Edinburgh World Writers' Conference (EWWC), he stated with characteristic bluntness, "I don't know why I'm here... I don't particularly like doing these things" (Welsh). As the keynote speaker on "A National Literature?" he nonetheless admitted that he found the topic "quite compelling" and went on to give a sophisticated talk on the challenges facing a national or regional literary voice within the homogenizing marketplace of transnational capitalism. "No matter how strong economic and cultural hegemony is," he said, "there is always room for maverick opposition" (Welsh, 2012). Welsh is ideally placed to articulate such a view, of course. Since achieving notoriety with *Trainspotting*, in 1993, he has published a steady stream of scabrous assaults on the middle-class novel. Writing almost exclusively in unfiltered Scots vernacular lifted straight off the streets, Welsh was an apt choice to speak on "Nationality and Identity in the Novel Today." He is the best known of a group of subaltern Scots who reconfigured Scottish literature in the 1990s much as the Beats reconfigured American literature in the 1950s, expanding the parameters of content and language to effectively remove any restrictions altogether. Indeed, Welsh has been called Scotland's answer to William Burroughs, ("Irvine Welsh" 2016) and with good reason. Like Burroughs, Welsh embodies the "beaten down" aspect of Beat much more than the "beatific," revelling in the deconstruction of human identity through extreme narratives of drugs, sex, money, and power. Yet while there is none of Jack Kerouac or Allen Ginsberg's fervent mysticism in his work, Welsh and his compatriot "chemical generation" owe a significant, albeit somewhat displaced, debt to the Beat movement as a whole.

Organized to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the landmark 1962 Edinburgh International Writers' Conference, the 2012 EWWC returned to the original five topics: "Should Literature Be Political?," "Style Versus Content," "A National Literature," "Censorship Today," and "The Future of the Novel" (Edinburgh World Writers' Conference 2012). This retrospective look back generated some sardonic quips in the national press. Stuart Kelly of the *Scotsman* reflected that "in ways which are as interesting as they are depressing, the debate about Scottish literature has barely moved a jot since" (Kelly 2012). Welsh himself joked that "It's the exact same debate that we had in 1962, so if we've not worked out the answers to these questions after 50 years we're not really going to find them" (Welsh 2012). But fifty years ago, the Scottish novel was defined largely by the tasteful lyricism of Neil Gunn and Lewis Grassie Gibbon. *Trainspotting* would have been unthinkable, and a keynote address by Welsh, whose linguistic register moves effortlessly between "half-arsed" and "hegemony," would have been impossible.

The 1962 conference was a landmark event not only because of its scope, but also because of the notorious verbal clash between the young Scottish novelist Alexander Trocchi and the kilted patriarch of Scottish poetry Hugh MacDiarmid. Widely reported by the media, this contretemps occurred

during the “Scottish Writing Today” session, when Trocchi called MacDiarmid “an old fossil” and received the epithet “cosmopolitan scum” in return (Campbell and Neil 1997: 151). The insult had a degree of accuracy. At 37 years old, the expatriate Trocchi had already lived in Paris, where he founded and edited the journal *Merlin*, had published two novels and an assortment of pornography, had joined the Situationist Internationale, moved to the United States, cultivated a heroin habit, been busted, skipped bail, fled the United States, and returned to Britain. During his adventurous travels, he had connected with Beat communities in Mexico, California, and New York. Among the major Beat figures he knew personally were Allen Ginsberg, Herbert Huncke, Gregory Corso, and Robert Creeley. Having met William Burroughs for the first time on the plane to Edinburgh, he formed a creative alliance with him that helped to shape the 1960s counterculture.

Tracing the lines of descent from the American Beats to the subaltern Scots of the 1990s might initially seem an easy enough task. Both the popular and academic presses were quick to connect the jazz and cannabis culture of the Beat generation to the Ecstasy-infused rave scene of the British “chemical” generation. A notable example is the *New York Times* photo-essay, “The Beats of Edinburgh,” with its lead-in caption, “From the margins of Scottish society comes a new, beer-soaked, drug-filled, profanity-laced, violently funny literature” (Downer 1996: 42). The article strenuously reinforces the theme of drop out deviance:

In a cyber era in which literary circles are usually metaphors, they hang out in Edinburgh’s pubs, clubs, and rave bars. Few of them can support themselves by writing; some are on the dole, taking full advantage of the steady income and enforced leisure it provides. They live the life of Edinburgh beats—get up at noon, drink, talk and write the day away and party through the night.

Downer 1996: 42

Welsh may be “the undisputed star of the dozen or so writers,” but Downer also profiles Duncan McLean, whom she identifies as the group’s father figure despite being “one of the youngest of a group of Scottish writers who have smashed their way out of rave culture onto the British literary scene” (42). She also mentions authors Gordon Legge, Alan Warner, and Paul Reekie, and editor Kevin Williamson, who first published excerpts from *Trainspotting* in his magazine *Rebel, Inc.*, and who sees it as equally representative of its generation as “*The Catcher in the Rye* or *On the Road* or *A Clockwork Orange*” (Downer 1996: 42).

Given the ready associations in the media between the American and Edinburgh Beats, it is somewhat perturbing to hear the same group of writers dismiss their Beat heritage in Steve Redhead’s 2000 anthology of interviews *Repetitive Beat Generation*. The anthology’s title primarily referenced the phrase used by the Tory government to characterize the music associated with transgressive youth culture (Redhead 2000: xvii). But Redhead acknowledges that the title was also a deliberate nod towards “Jack Kerouac’s famous phrase” (xvii). However, the reactions by the interviewees are decidedly mixed. Gordon Legge, while praising Burroughs’s later novels, admits that he never finished *On the Road*: “I’ve tried it again every two or three years but I didn’t enjoy it. It does nothing for me I must admit. I’m not aware of Ginsberg at all” (Redhead 2000: 74). Duncan McLean names Lewis Grassie Gibbon and James Kelman as “by far the most important literary influences on everything I’ve done and am likely to do” (195), and then complains, “there’s been some daft stuff written about the ‘Scottish Beats’ etc., so I think I should take this opportunity to say that—with the sole exception of “Howl” which is a good rant in the Jerry Sadowitz mould—none of the Beat Generation writing does anything for me at all. In fact I’ve read very little of it” (105). Irvine Welsh sounds apologetic: “I wanted to like Kerouac and Burroughs more than I did, you know what I mean, because of the influence they had” (138), while Alan Warner, is positively bitter: “I think it’s this formal/linguistic area of interaction that needs to be studied and talked about in contemporary writing rather than endlessly name-dropping and harping on about that Bukowski guy that everyone reads, or William bloody

Burroughs and all Bono's other favorite writers" (129). Is this just evidence of what Welsh called in his EWWC address "Scottish contrariness"? Or is it possible that the revolutionary currents of the Beats in America simply evaporated in the staid air of 1960s Scotland? Unsurprisingly, the genealogy of Beat in late twentieth-century Scottish literature lies somewhere between glib media identification and the writers' own grouchy dismissals. Tracing it requires that we return to the Edinburgh Writers' Conference of 1962, to Alexander Trocchi shouting down Hugh MacDiarmid, and to what "Scottish Writing Today" meant to each of them.

Organized by the publisher John Calder and the American expatriate Jim Haynes (who ran the Paperback Bookshop in Edinburgh), the conference has been hailed as forever changing the nature of literary culture, with book festivals large and small becoming a regular part of the global arts scene (Bartie & Bell 2012: 14). In 1962, it was a radical idea. Calder's insistence from the start that writers would speak freely and without censorship was a major part of the draw (Bartie & Bell 2012: 6). The presence of Trocchi and Burroughs testified to Calder's and Haynes' own dissident impulses. On the second day, the stage of McEwan Hall functioned almost as a microcosm of the larger national stage of Scottish literature. The first speaker was Douglas Young, whose brief history of Scottish literature centered mainly on the "language question": "the colloquial basis of spoken Scots has weakened. If you want Scots whisky, pure and strong and undiluted, you can get it; but the Scots language, as spoken, is increasingly diluted with English or American pouring through the mass media" (Bartie & Bell 2012: 61). Why this dilution of the language should be a problem leads us straight into the heart of twentieth century cultural politics in Scotland, simultaneously foregrounding a key element in the trajectory of Beat in Scottish writing: the opposition between literary and spoken language.

In 1936, the poet Edwin Muir published *Scott and Scotland*, a study of the nineteenth-century prose romance writer Sir Walter Scott that sought to account for the "very curious emptiness... behind the wealth of his imagination" (Muir 1936: 11). Muir attributed this intellectual void to the lack of both community and tradition in Scotland itself, a condition that he felt still beset the writer in his present day: "a Scottish writer who wishes to achieve some approximation to completeness has no choice except to absorb the English tradition, and if he thoroughly does so his work belongs not merely to Scottish literature but to English literature as well" (15).

Hugh MacDiarmid had already wrestled with and, he believed, solved this problem through the creation of a complex poetic voice that drew on multiple currents in the Scots language, both historical and geographical. Author of the long, philosophical poem *A Drunk Man Looks at a Thistle* (1926), he has been credited with bringing modernism to Scotland and thereby initiating the Scottish Literary Renaissance. MacDiarmid believed passionately in this renaissance, because "the genius of our Vernacular enables us to secure with comparative ease the very effects and swift transitions which other literatures are for the most part unsuccessfully endeavoring to cultivate in languages that have a very different and inferior basis" (quoted in Dunn 1992: xx). But was it really possible to create a synthetic national literary language for a country that had not had a distinct language for several centuries? Muir thought not, stating that MacDiarmid "has written some remarkable poetry; but he has left Scottish verse very much where it was before" (Muir 1936: 22). MacDiarmid was perhaps most wounded by Muir's observation that "The curse of Scottish literature is the lack of a whole language, which finally means the lack of a whole mind" (22). Douglas Dunn describes the opposition between Muir and MacDiarmid as one of the "celebrated enmities" of Scottish literature, and "the most disagreeable" in terms of the "conspicuous side-taking" it engendered (Dunn 1992: xxxi). It is important for this study because of the currents it generated later in the twentieth century.

Had Muir not passed away in 1959, he would surely have been present at the 1962 Edinburgh Writers Conference. As it was, the 70 year old MacDiarmid clearly did not need his erstwhile opponent to inspire his sectarian resentment towards England:

So far as I know there is no parallel in literary history to the way in which Scotland has abandoned its own languages, Scots and Gaelic, its literatures in these languages, and even its

own history, in its schools and colleges, and given a virtual monopoly to the very different language, history and literature of its traditional and only enemy.

Bartie & Bell 2012: 63

MacDiarmid's description of current Scottish poetry as "an abyss of mindless sentimentality" and contemporary fiction as "simply a millstone around the necks of the few really creative writers" (63) prompted a few rejoinders from fellow delegates. But none of their remarks could compare to the torrent that issued from Alexander Trocchi when he was finally called on to speak.

Trocchi famously described the intellectual atmosphere of the conference as "turgid, petty, provincial, the stale-porridge, Bible-class nonsense" and said he felt "ashamed to sit here in front of my collaborators... those writers who have come from other parts of the world, and to consider the level of this debate" (Bartie & Bell 2012: 68). Referring back to his years at the University of Glasgow, Trocchi recalled that "those people with whom I could talk were writing Lallans, and they seemed to me to be chasing a red herring. It was pathetic... I had to get away" (68). This reference to Lallans was a deliberate slight to MacDiarmid, who retorted, "Mr. Trocchi seems to imagine that the burning questions in the world today are lesbianism, homosexuality, and matters of that kind... [he is] so blinded by his American pre-possessions that he doesn't know anything at all about what ... is of value, in Scottish literature today" (Bartie & Bell 2012: 70). Trocchi grandiosely claimed that he himself had written the only interesting Scottish literature in twenty years (70) and that the significant issues, such as identity, were "being discussed by young American writers, and young French writers" (71). When Trocchi then announced, "I am only interested in lesbianism and sodomy" (71), his notoriety was assured.

At this point, Daiches felt the need to return the debate to the safe controversy of Lallans:

Does anyone think that the natural worry about the language that the Scottish writers use is inhibiting? It is easy to say, one writes in the language that is appropriate for the subject, but if you are not sure what language is appropriate, or that there is no language that you feel really represents all of you, intellectual and emotional, the childhood and the adult part, is that an inhibiting situation?

Bartie & Bell 2012: 74

The poet who responded was Edwin Morgan, one of the most important conduits of the Beat ethos in Scotland:

I would still like to see writing in Scots, but I would like to see it going back to the speech basis. [...] I think that the Scottish spirit of the writer will manage to show through, as the American spirit, recent American writers show through wonderfully in the writing for example of Jack Kerouac, I would like to see a Scottish Jack Kerouac doing for Glasgow what he has done for San Francisco.

Bartie & Bell 2012: 76

Morgan, for his part, undoubtedly caught sparks from both Trocchi and Burroughs. He and Trocchi corresponded throughout the 1960s about project sigma, and Morgan offered materials for inclusion in the *sigma portfolio*. After Trocchi's death, in 1984, he wrote a short but comprehensive appreciation for the *Edinburgh Review*, admonishing critics to recognize "the force and range and originality of Trocchi's work" (Morgan 1985: 58). And after hearing Burroughs describe his cut-up methods in Edinburgh at the "The Future of the Novel" session, he was sufficiently inspired to write his own experimental account of the event called "The Fold-In Conference," which was published in the journal *Gambit* in Autumn 1962 (McGonigal 2013: 131).

The product of a traditional, Presbyterian, middle-class upbringing, Morgan was a graduate of Glasgow University, where he also served as a lecturer in English. He lived in Glasgow all his life,

and wrote about the city extensively. But he was an adventurous thinker, with an early love of science fiction that coexisted quite happily with his interest in Anglo-Saxon poetry. His openness to innovations in poetry, such as the futurist and concrete poetry movements, enriched his early romantic style, but it was the discovery of Beat writing that really transformed his voice and vision (Young 1984). Although Morgan had admired Whitman and Hart Crane from an early age, his exposure to the Beats led him to a broader acquaintance with American poets: “Coming from the Beats, I began to look again at some other American poets like William Carlos Williams, whom I hadn’t liked before that time. But somehow, because the Beats admired him, I had another look at him and got something of him” (quoted in Boddy 2000: 183). This “something” was twofold. First, “here was someone who could write about anything happening in his own place. He was doing it about Paterson New Jersey and therefore I could do it about Glasgow” (quoted in Boddy 2000: 183). Second, as we have seen from his remarks at the Edinburgh Writers’ Conference, Morgan advocated the use of living rather than synthetic vernacular: “The MacDiarmid ‘renaissance’ of a general synthetic Scots fifty years ago can still be felt, and learned from, but the move should now be towards the honesty of actual speech, and in the decade which has been a decade of spoken and recorded poetry and the poetry-reading explosion, this is indeed what has been happening” (Morgan 1974b: “Scottish Poetry” 178).

But Morgan’s appreciation of the Beats finds even more direct expression in two 1962 essays, “The Beat Vigilantes” and “The Beatnik in the Kailyard.” In the latter, with typical dry wit, he places the wild Beat poet in the orderly environs of the kailyard, or kitchen garden, a ubiquitous feature of the Scottish smallholding, but also the name of a nineteenth-century Scottish literary movement “the Kailyard School,” whose defining features were “the sentimental and nostalgic treatment of parochial Scottish scenes, often centered on the church community” (Knowles 1983: 13). The idealized depiction of Scottish life associated with the Kailyard School led to the term accruing strongly pejorative associations, and indeed MacDiarmid’s modernist fashioning of Synthetic Scots was a strong rejection of its sanitized sentimentality. But MacDiarmid would still have reached for his rifle if a beatnik had found his way into the kailyard, whereas Morgan opened the gate for him:

There are patterns and meanings in modern Scottish life, but writers who are most conscious of their Scottishness are often afraid to look for them in case the vivid image of the truth should over turn their notions of what ‘Scottish’ ought to mean. If we see a Beatnik in the kailyard, he is as well being studied as shot down. Better still, if he will come forward and tell us his story.

Morgan 1974a: 176

In a later interview, Morgan elaborated on why the Beats were important to him:

Although it’s another country and another tradition, Ginsberg, Corso and Ferlinghetti loosened up my way of looking at things....I’d been writing in a fairly tight, perhaps rather rhetorical, somewhat old-fashioned kind of way until the mid-nineteen-fifties. Then after that I felt that there was some kind of liberation coming.

quoted in Nicholson 2007: 122

We find the evidence of this liberation in Morgan’s 1968 collection *The Second Life*, in which he celebrates the possibility of rebirth even as the poet immerses himself in what is often the tragic squalor of Glasgow in the process of being rebuilt. Yet at times Morgan’s imagination moves beyond his native city as though to acknowledge the source of his liberation. The influence of Kerouac seems especially resonant in the title poem “The Second Life,” particularly in the compound, hyphenated adjectives:

But does every man feel like this at forty—  
I mean it’s like Thomas Wolfe’s New York, his  
heady light, the stunning plunging canyons, beauty—

pale stars winking hazy downtown quitting-time,  
and the winter moon flooding the skyscrapers  
Morgan 1992: 197

*The Second Life* was hailed as an important achievement and established Morgan as a major poet. With its more spontaneous, less formal style, it opened up new possibilities for a number of young Scottish writers, one of whom would form another major branch of Scotland's Beat genealogy. This was Tom McGrath, who said of Morgan, "he opened up his poetry to include the contemporary... His poem 'The Second Life' is the one that goes most deeply into the relationship between the self of the poet and the self of the city" (Selerie 1983: 222).

We find the twenty-two-year-old McGrath off-stage during the 1962 Edinburgh Writers' Conference, wandering the city streets rather than in McEwan Hall, no doubt searching out some of the obscure bookshops and obscurer journals that carried the new, subversive European and American writers. In England, the magazine *New Directions* had been founded by Michael Horowitz in 1959, in which he published Burroughs, Kerouac, Corso, and Ginsberg. However, north of the border, in the same year, a small University of Edinburgh student journal called *Jabberwock* devoted its Autumn 1959 issue to the American Beats, with an impressive line-up that included Ginsberg, Snyder, Corso, McClure, Burroughs, Creeley, Kerouac, Whalen, and Olson (Rae). The editor of that particular issue, Alex Neish, admitted that the radical content "effectively killed it off" but he went on to found another (also short-lived) journal *Sidewalk*, whose title effectively captured its transatlantic impulses and which, said Neish "targeted people who could see further than Edinburgh Castle" (Rae). McGrath was certainly one of those people, and his wanderings serendipitously brought him face to face with Trocchi in what would be one of the most important intersections for the British counterculture: "I first saw him standing beside me in Jim Haynes' Paperback Bookshop in Edinburgh, looking along the shelves that housed the new novels. This was Alex Trocchi, writer and literary figure, just beyond him stood an older man, with glasses and slightly battered felt hat—William Burroughs" (McGrath 1985: 36). Striking up a conversation, McGrath began a friendship that would span the decade, lead him into the center of London and the counter culture, and into his own heroin addiction. Although he would later make his literary name as a playwright, in 1962 McGrath was a jazz musician and aspiring poet looking for his voice. As he told Gavin Selerie, "The problem for me was: if you come up as a Scottish poet, what do you relate to? ... I couldn't feel at home with the native style which MacDiarmid was pushing. He had moved over towards Ezra Pound, but there wasn't really any relationship between the poetics and the culture" (Selerie 1983: 83).

Instead, it was the American Beats that McGrath responded to: "the first American poet I heard was Ginsberg; I heard him reading 'Howl' on the radio and I couldn't believe how percussive it was" (Selerie 1983: 84). Ginsberg would lead him to an appreciation of the "relaxed nature" of William Carlos Williams and "the fact that he was able to talk about the ordinary" (84). Selerie remarks that "For a Scot who grew up in the grey post-war years and whose literary inheritance was a subculture ossified by the terror of losing its identity, the American experience offered a possibility of artistic and psychological release. Small wonder that the young McGrath thrilled to the rhythms of Charlie Parker and Jack Kerouac" (Selerie 1983:13). McGrath remembers Comet's Bookshop in Glasgow, with a copy of *On the Road* in the window and Olympia Press editions of Beckett, "and that was very exciting and you definitely were beginning to get the sense that some things were changing" (Bartie 2013: 52). Here he also found "the *Evergreen Review* from America and the *Paris Review*, although it was American too really, but these were spreading these great new ideas about the Beat Generation and all of that" (54). And it was in the *Evergreen Review* that McGrath had first read excerpts from Trocchi's *Cain's Book* (Selerie 1983: 85). McGrath identifies the Beat and Existential movements as key influences, particularly the book *The Beat Scene* "which had a lot of photographs of writers reading and Kerouac and everything, and that affected us too, the style of what we did" (55). McGrath began doing jazz and poetry readings because "that was what Kerouac was doing" (55). But although

Kerouac was a crucial early catalyst for his creative growth, McGrath later expressed reservations about Kerouac's romanticism, particularly in novels like the *Dharma Bums*, and cites Charles Olson as more of an influence on his poetry: "Olson opened up things in such a way that you could express every aspect of your identity through the poem: you no longer had to put on this front.... He showed me how to follow my thought as it actually was, as opposed to how syntax had made me think it was" (Selerie 1983: 97). Nonetheless, McGrath readily acknowledged the importance of the Beats for his own writing: "They used language in a fresh and direct way. It's as simple as that" (103).

McGrath moved to London in 1962, worked odd jobs for newspapers and honed his political consciousness until he was hired as the editor for *Peace News* (Bartie and Bell 2012: 61–62). While there, he reconnected with Trocchi, whom he described as "a big link up man... It was through Alex that I met Olson, Creeley, Burroughs—writers that have meant an awful lot to me" (Selerie 1983: 85). He also became involved in Trocchi's visionary resistance network "project sigma," and its associated publication the *sigma portfolio*. At this point, Trocchi was at the center of the global avant-garde movement, and he was a key coordinator in the landmark event International Poetry Incarnation at the Albert Hall on June 11, 1965, filmed by Peter Whitehouse and released later that year as *Wholly Communion*. Trocchi was the compere, while McGrath was one of seventeen poets who read to a capacity audience of over 6,000—quite remarkable, considering that the Albert Hall had been booked only a week before due to the cancellation of another event (Morgan 2006: 411). The line-up included Ginsberg, Corso, and Ferlinghetti. As Jeff Nuttall described it in *Bomb Culture*, "the Underground was suddenly there on the surface, in open ground with a following of thousands" (Campbell and Niel 1997: 179).

When the demands of an increasingly swinging London became too much, McGrath and his family retreated to a cottage in Wales, but in 1966, Sue and Barry Miles, Jim Haynes, and John Hopkins persuaded him to become the founding editor of *International Times*, Britain's first counterculture newspaper (Horowitz 2009). Produced every two weeks, the *IT* featured a dazzling array of makers and shakers including William Burroughs, Jeff Nuttall, Germaine Greer, Allen Ginsberg, Ted Joans, Alexander Trocchi, and, of course, McGrath himself, who once again found himself right at the heart of the scene (Baird 2009). The *IT* would survive into the early 1970s, but by 1967 McGrath's heroin addiction was serious enough for him to relocate back to Glasgow. McGrath has emphasized that Trocchi never offered him heroin or encouraged him to take it (McGrath 1985: 45), but that he was attracted to it "as to a source of secret knowledge" and that he was "in awe" of Trocchi (38). Leaving London and the dangerous aura of Trocchi's St. Stephen's Street flat was a necessary move of self-preservation for McGrath, and, happily, one that enabled the radical countercultural current to flow north with him.

Once free of heroin, McGrath enrolled at Glasgow University in 1969 as a mature student, where he met the poet Tom Leonard. His first collection *My Love Stop Rain Stop* came out in 1969 with Ambit Press, and he was frequently published in magazines such as *Scottish Poetry* and *New Directions*, and in anthologies such as *Children of Albion: Poetry of the Underground*. However, it was as a playwright that McGrath made his literary reputation, and certain identifiable Beat influences are worthy of brief mention. We see, for instance, the same love of American popular culture and the refusal to observe high-low cultural binaries in *Laurel and Hardy* (1976); we see the same sympathetic attention to the socially marginal and criminal in *The Hardman* (1977); we see the same willingness to cross and fuse genres in *The Android Circuit* (1978); we see the same impulse toward confession in *The Innocent* (1979). And in terms of language, the Beat influence stayed with him throughout his career. As Selerie put it, "McGrath's special contribution to the past decade of British Theater has been a recovery of the vernacular, not in the terms of social realism or Absurdity, but in some expressionist zone in between" (Selerie 1983: 28).

While developing his own creative vision in the theater, McGrath continued to work as an editor, this time for the Scottish Art Council's magazine *Nuspeak*. Singled out by Craig Richardson as "the only Scottish art-writing development of interest in the Glasgow art scene during the mid to late 1970s" (Selerie 1983: 18), *Nuspeak* ran from 1973 to 1975. Gavin Selerie has praised the "global, open awareness" of the magazine and the diversity of its content, with articles on the Glasgow Print Studio, John McLaughlin, Stephane Grappelli, Buckminster Fuller, Jimmy Boyle, John McGrath and



Jack Kerouac (9). Moreover, McGrath occupies a special place as the founder and director of the Third Eye Center in Glasgow in 1974. Although replaced by the Center for Contemporary Arts in 2001, the Third Eye Center is still recognized as transformational to the Scottish arts. According to the CCA website, the *Guardian* newspaper described it as “a shrine to the avant-garde” that hosted such notable performers as “Allen Ginsberg, Whoopi Goldberg, John Byrne, Edwin Morgan and Kathy Acker, as well as quickly becoming the focus for Glasgow’s counter culture” (*Center for Contemporary Arts* 2016). McGrath also set up his own publishing venture, Midnight Press, which would be the first to publish Glasgow poet Tom Leonard. The work in question was *Six Glasgow Poems*, which would prove to be as revolutionary for Scottish literature as “Howl” was in America.

McGrath met Leonard at Glasgow University, where the famous poet-critic Philip Hobsbaum was then teaching, and they both became involved his writing group. McGrath credits Leonard with showing him how to write about his own place and people: “He was the first person to start writing in Glasgow dialect and not be mawkish” (Selerie 1983: 100). While at Glasgow, Leonard had the opportunity to study with Edwin Morgan, who was his tutor for a paper on William Carlos Williams (Dósa and Leonard 2004). Like Morgan and McGrath, Leonard also reacted against MacDiarmid and the Lallans movement: “The body of language was in the dictionary and not in the mouth. And it was poetry connected with specific speech acts in America in the fifties and sixties that was of particular interest to me” (Dósa and Leonard 2004). For Leonard, the difference between literary language and “the speech of a specific person” could be summed up by comparing Robert Lowell and Ginsberg or Robert Frost and William Carlos Williams (Dósa and Leonard 2004).

Leonard’s essay “The Common Breath: A Poetic Tradition” is essentially a celebration of Williams, drawing extensively from his poetry and prose in an analysis of “the politics of space on the page” which he defines as “a politics of democracy” (Leonard 2009:48). As did the Beats, he situates Williams in opposition to T. S. Eliot, quoting Williams’ famous pronouncement that *The Waste Land* was “the great catastrophe to our letters” because it “gave the poem back to the academics” and “implicitly sets out high register English as the natural carrier of high cultural value” (Williams quoted in Leonard 2009: 50). While not wanting to blindly elevate “simplistic narratives” against the poetic complexity of the first half of the twentieth century, Leonard argues that the visual and auditory elements in Williams’ poetry “take us to the basis of colonizing narrative set against a polyphonic democracy of discrete components, which the multi-voiced *Paterson* stands for” (2009: 57). This notion of “polyphonic democracy” is a crucial linkage between the subaltern Scots and the Beats; recall Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s 1958 definition of the San Francisco Renaissance: “It amounts to getting poetry back into the street where it once was, out of the classroom, out of the speech department, and—in fact—off the printed page” (quoted in Silesky 1990: 93).

Of the many writers struggling in the 1960s to divest themselves of MacDiarmid’s weighty plaid mantle, Tom Leonard was the most radical in his commitment to get poetry “off the printed page” and “back into the street.” He was unable to publish early poems in the *Glasgow University Magazine* because the printer refused to set the type; on another occasion a typesetter demanded foreign language rates (Kravitz 1999: xiv). Aside from the phonetically represented vernacular, Leonard’s is challenging in its sharp polemical edge, as in this first stanza from “GOOD STYLE”:

helluva hard tay read theez init  
 stull  
 if ye canny unnirston thim jiss clear aff then  
 gawn  
 get tay fuck ootma road

Leonard 1992: 333

This uncompromising redefinition of literary register was to have a powerful influence on the young James Kelman, who singles Leonard out as especially important for the discovery of his own voice,

because Tom was very influenced by Carlos Williams...who had consciously fought against, say, the Eliot influence, [by] wanting to make the most important thing in literature the voice—something that Eliot was totally opposed to. Because for Eliot there is *The Voice of Literature*, right? And that voice isn't of course our voice; that voice is the voice of *Radio 3*.

McLean 1995: 105

And here again the Beats emerge, with Kelman noting the importance of American literature, and “Kerouac and people” (McLean 1995: 104), not only in their embracing of ordinary life as a literary subject, but also in their forthright use of their own language:

They don't have to fight their way through this big paper bag of English Literature of How Do You Talk. We actually have to discover how to talk before we're allowed to write about subjects, and then we think it's surprising we can't write about certain subjects because we don't have the right voice!

McLean 1995: 112

The dilemma articulated here strongly recalls David Daiches's statement on the linguistic inhibitions facing the Scottish writer at the 1961 Edinburgh Writers' Festival. Kelman would solve it by radically reducing, as Kerouac had done before him, the distance between the literary and the personal self:

He was meaning to cut out this drinking and driving carry on altogether. Alison occasionally commented on it...She was dead right. Maybe the tomato juice would meet her approval! He sipped at it while the barmaid was getting his change from the till. It was really fucking virulent tasting stuff and he grued.

Kelman 1999: 2

In this third person narrative, we see frequent examples of free indirect thought that capture the voice of the main character Patrick Doyle (“Maybe the tomato juice would meet her approval!”), but we also find many instances of Scots idiom and dialect in the narrative voice proper: “It was really fucking virulent tasting stuff and he grued.” The porousness of this narrative voice owes much to Kerouac, whose style fused a sophisticated literary register with street idiom and his own particular French Canadian patois. Kelman's use of the ambient Glasgow vernacular was game-changing because it was not limited to the speech and thoughts of individual characters, but pervaded the narrative as a whole. His approach was controversial. James Wood, one of the judges for the Booker Prize in 1994, reports on the contentious discussion that preceded Kelman's victory for *How Late It Was, How Late*:

For most of us judges, the prize gave recognition to a significant and consistently challenging writer, whose experiments with vernacular speech and internal monologue had produced some of the most stubbornly interesting work in recent British fiction...To others on the panel, his novel was monotonous, unpunctuated, and foulmouthed. One of the judges marched out of the room, promising to denounce the decision to the media.

Wood 2014

It is Kelman who is most cited as an inspiration by those “Edinburgh Beats” with which we began this discussion, and to whom we now return with a much clearer sense of their Beat ancestry. As Duncan McLean said of Kelman: “When *The Bus Conductor Hines* came out in 1984, it just blew my mind [...] It was the voice. For the first time I was reading a book about the world I lived in. I didn't know literature could do that” (Downer 1996: 42). McLean's comment recalls Pynchon's acknowledgment of the importance of “Kerouac and the Beats” in showing him “how at least two very different kinds of English could be allowed to exist in fiction. Allowed! It was actually OK to write like this!” (Pynchon 1984: xv). McLean is also very forthright about the importance of Welsh for their group:

Irvine's phonetic representation of speech was a real novelty back then, except for the small number of really keen folk who had read Tom Leonard. I know, of course, that people all over the world had experimented with phonetic representation for years—not least Scott, Hogg and various less worthy Scottish writers. But no one had done it for Edinburgh speech, and no one had done it at length in Scotland for decades.

quoted in Munro 2013: 116

The younger subaltern Scots may be cagey, or even dismissive, about the older Beats, but when Welsh said bluntly in an interview: “Language is living and evolving. Writers shouldn't be fucking curators” (quoted in Munro 2013: 90), he articulated exactly their breakthrough position in 1950s America. And if we dig a little deeper into Welsh's biography and influences, the Beat genealogy becomes quite explicit. In 1981, for instance, Welsh, then aged 23, took a trip to the United States that included sojourns in both New York and Los Angeles, with a cross-country bus trip in between. He repeated the experience in 1983 (Munro 2013: 47–48). Welsh claims that he initially began to write because “I was bored on this long bus journey from New York to Los Angeles” (Downer 1996). The impetus for such a journey is revealed in a letter Welsh wrote to his friend John Munro upon his return: “I won't bore you with my stateside experiences and my coast-to-coast Kerouacisms, it's over now and it's very painful to be back in this shitty country with its poxy weather” (Munro 2013: 47). Several of Welsh's teenage friends would recall the importance of William Burroughs to him (Munro 2013: 86), and much later Welsh would acknowledge Burroughs as “an exceptional figure, a writer who was, even in the extremes of addiction, often able to produce substantial, publishable output” (quoted Munro 2013: 71). Welsh's combination of savage realism and mordant surrealism places him unequivocally in the Burroughs's vein. And although Welsh's friend and biographer Munro argues that, more than literary heroes, “His holy trinity, all of whom would influence his writing, were Iggy, Bowie and Lou Reed” (Munro 2013: 40), those three rock icons were directly nourished by the Beats.

The 2015 BBC radio documentary “Burroughs at 100” was idiosyncratically presented by Iggy Pop, whose admiration for Burroughs and affinity with his vision is nowhere more evident than in the lyrics for “Lust for Life,” which draw directly on *The Ticket That Exploded* (“Here comes Johnny Yen again/With the liquor and drugs/And the flesh machine”). Meanwhile, when Bowie met Burroughs in 1974, he told him, “I was studying Tibetan Buddhism when I was quite young, again influenced by Kerouac [...] I got to the point where I wanted to become a novice monk and about two weeks before I was actually going to take those steps, I broke up and went out on the streets and got drunk and never looked back” –to which Burroughs replies, “Just like Kerouac” (Copetas 1999: 199). Lou Reed, meanwhile, said that “William Burroughs was the person who broke the door down. When I read Burroughs, it changed my vision of what you could write” (Reed 1999: 222), and that Ginsberg's poetry “was so American and so straightforward, so astute, and he had such a recognizable voice. Modern rock lyrics would be inconceivable without the work of Allen Ginsberg” (Reed 1999: 278). And while Welsh distanced himself from what he considered Trocchi's romanticizing of the heroin addict as outsider, note that one of his Edinburgh rave club readings was titled ‘Invisible Insurrection’ (Munro 2013: 151)—the title of Trocchi's famous 1961 essay, and that the existential tapeworm that invades the narrative in Welsh's *Filth* (1998) has a predecessor in Trocchi's early piece “Tapeworm.”

The Scottish National Portrait Gallery houses a painting by Sandy Moffat called *Poets' Pub*. Although painted in 1980, it depicts an earlier moment in Scotland's culture featuring eight of the most important writers of that time, including Hugh MacDiarmid, Sorley MacLean, Sidney Goodsir Smith, and Edwin Morgan (Moffat 1980). Described by Robyn Marsack as “an icon of Scottish literary culture” (Marsack 2009: 156), the painting evokes the famous Milne's Bar in Edinburgh, frequent haunt of Hugh MacDiarmid and many other intellectuals and artists, including the painter himself. According to Marsack, Moffat was at least partly inspired by the unfortunate result of Scotland's 1979 devolution referendum, and in gathering together those writers he considered crucial to Scotland's “artistic conscience,” (quoted in Marsack 2009: 156), he sought to remind the public of the political

energy and commitment of that time. Moffat was also inspired by the 1962 International Writers' Conference (Bartie & Bell 220), and names Trocchi, Ginsberg, and Kerouac as "the free spirits that we wanted to emulate" (Bartie & Bell 2012: 222). However, as Kristen Stirling has pointed out "The maleness of the assembled company is inescapable, and in it we may read the maleness of the Scottish literary community. There are no women in the foreground of the picture, but blurred and indistinct female figures may be distinguished, appropriately enough, on its margins" (Stirling 2008: 35).

A future "icon of Scottish literary culture" might well be Richard Avedon's 1995 photograph of the next generation of Scottish writers in a Glasgow pub, published in *The New Yorker* along with Alan Taylor's short commentary "Showcase: Scottish Efflorescence." Like the Downer article in the *New York Times*, this piece was prompted by the success of Welsh's *Trainspotting*. Even prior to James Kelman winning the Booker Prize in 1994, says Taylor, "there was a general feeling in the United Kingdom that the action had moved north." Eleven writers are clustered together in the dark, moody interior, including Irvine Welsh, Alasdair Gray, Duncan McLean, and Alan Warner, as well as three women: A. L. Kennedy, Janice Galloway, and Kathleen Jamie (Taylor 1995: 97). Alan Warner has specifically emphasized the centrality of pub culture to the ethos of his group: "My entire generation of writers—and an older one such as James Kelman and Tom Leonard's—came unabashedly from 'bars and pubs' in Edinburgh and Glasgow... We were all readers, and liked music of all sorts and books of all sorts. The pub remained absolutely central to that writing culture" (Munro 2013:101–102). But Warner points out that this was not an exclusively male ritual, recalling the regularity of editor Charlotte Ross, painter Rosie Savin, and writer Laura Hird at those gatherings (Munro 2013: 102). Nonetheless, a certain gender imbalance is apparent in the Scottish "chemical generation" of the 1990s as was also evident in the American Beat generation of the 1950s, and this genealogy reflects that imbalance, about which a few words are now in order.

In "Mark Renton's Bairs: Identity and Language in the Post-*Trainspotting* Novel," Kristin Innes argues that "The much fêted new visibility of Scottish culture, which coincides with the working-class male's literary enfranchisement, appears to be won at the expense of women, gay men, and ethnic minorities whose voices are silenced by the new literature's blatant misogyny, homophobia, and racism" (Innes 2007: 303). Strong words, and perhaps overly negative given the novels that appeared in the early 2000s by Scottish women such as Laura Hird, Alison Miller, and Zoë Strachan. But in terms of the lineage traced here between the American Beats and the subaltern Scots, the connections are most visible between the male writers such as Trocchi, Morgan, McGrath, Leonard, and Kelman, and the diffusion of their influence is most palpable in Welsh, MacLean, and Warner. Hird, who was first inspired to write by hearing Welsh read, is probably the closest to him in the rawness of her language and content. But another strand of the Beat genealogy is the poet and playwright Liz Lochhead, who was one of the first women to break into the very male world of Scottish poetry in the early 70s. Mentored by Edwin Morgan, whom she met at a reading organized by Tom McGrath, Lochhead was associated with Philip Hobsbaum's famous writing group, which included Tom Leonard, James Kelman, and Alasdair Gray (SRB).

Lochhead counts amongst her formative influences the Liverpool poets Adrian Henri, Brian Patten, and Roger McGough, for the revelation that "you must say this stuff out loud, that was what it was for" (SRB 2011). The Liverpool Poets, once graced by a visit from Ginsberg in 1965, strongly identified with the Beats in their demotic impulse and performative practice. In fact, Adrian Henri dedicated "Mrs Albion You've Got a Lovely Daughter" to Allen Ginsberg (Henri, McGough, and Patten 1967: 55), while his "Last Will and Testament" includes as item 3: "I hereby appoint Wm. Burroughs my literary executor, instructing him to cut up my collected works and distribute them through the public lavatories of the world" (13). Like the Liverpool Poets, Lochhead's poetry is generally praised for its vigor and accessibility; Carol Ann Duffy describes it as a "warm broth of quirky rhythms, streetwise speech patterns, showbiz pizzazz, tender lyricism and Scots" (Crown 2016). Lochhead's own comment that "You're stuck writing something until you go, 'To hell with it, I'll tell the truth'" (Crown 2016) inadvertently evokes Kerouac's *ars poetica*: "If you don't stick to what

you first thought, and to the words the thought brought, what's the sense of bothering with it anyway, what's the sense of foisting your little lies on others...?" (Kerouac 1993: 174). Once we start looking, we can see the Beat legacy even in writers who do not themselves proclaim it.

The camaraderie, the pub culture, and the numerous small presses and magazines that nurtured the writing are all broad connections between the subaltern Scots and the Beats. But the much more intrinsic connection is language, and the breaching of the divide between the ivory tower and the street. Kelman, asked to comment on the new generation of writers, emphasized their "much more self-confident use of language. As a kind of very general point, amongst younger writers there's a greater freedom of language than there may have been, let's say forty years or fifty years ago" (Toremans 2003). That greater freedom of language had its beginnings in the demotic thrust generated by the Beats in the 1950s, and since then the genealogy of Beat in Scotland has formed multiple layers and trajectories. The key figures in this transnational exchange were Alexander Trocchi, Edwin Morgan, and Tom McGrath, but others, such as novelist Jeff Torrington, also absorbed the Beat ethos and passed it along. If subaltern now seems main stream, with *T2 Trainspotting* (2017) in the theaters, we must keep in mind that there remain many cultural fronts where liberated language might be actively deployed. In the conclusion of his 2012 keynote address at the EWWC, Welsh left his audience with a twofold "call to arms":

Firstly, let's have a look around, it's a big world, and if bits of it move you, don't be afraid to write about it. Second, be bold, and proud of who are and where you come from. Express your culture, your concerns and those of your community and the voices within it, however movable a feast that is. Because if you don't, the chances are that it might not be around in the future. So do what Trocchi and MacDiarmid would do: don't get obsessed with histories and legacies or markets and 'rules', just hit those keys and see what happens.

Welsh 2012

Assuredly, had any of the Beat generation been in the audience, they would have been applauding.

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