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Sado-Monetarism:  
Thatcherite Subjects in Alasdair Gray and Martin Amis  
Joseph Brooker

I spoke with an American accent, and the day turned into one of the  
worst in my life.

Alasdair Gray, 'Money'<sup>1</sup>

Thatcherism was a transformative process in post-war British history.<sup>2</sup> It generated cultural reflections and responses, allegories and polemics, across different forms and media.<sup>3</sup> This essay considers two novels which emerged from Thatcherism's early years: Alasdair Gray's 1982 *Janine* and Martin Amis's *Money*.<sup>4</sup> Amis has been compared to Gray before, but Richard Todd's essay of 1990 focuses primarily on the role of the 'intrusive author' in their work, and hence deals most extensively with *Lanark* (1981), the epic novel on which Gray had worked, on and off, for over two decades.<sup>5</sup> *1982 Janine* will offer a different point of comparison, focused not around ideas of literary postmodernism but around a specific political conjuncture that Gray's book and *Money* can be seen to address.

To place Amis's novel alongside Gray's contemporaneous work can highlight aspects of both. Comparison and contrast will draw out perceptions that we might not otherwise gain. In particular, this essay seeks to explore fiction's capacity to dramatize the workings of ideology: specifically the conflicting ideological tendencies articulated by Thatcherism at the political moment into which these texts emerged. As we shall see, the phrase 'sado-monetarism' in the essay's title is borrowed from the Labour politician Denis Healey's description of Thatcher's early economic policy. In itself, of course, the phrase does not adequately describe the complex ideological appeals of Thatcherism. But it points suggestively to the intricate combinations of policy and pain, finance and desire, that both books explore. In terms of the critical study of Martin Amis's work, then, the following essay is intended both as a contribution to comparative analysis situating his work alongside other writing simultaneous with it; and as an intervention in long-running discussions about *Money's* relation to the politics of its time.

Criticism has often presented *Money* as an exemplary text of its era.<sup>6</sup> *1982 Janine* has been less insistently treated as a topical text. Its profile remains lower than *Money's*, outside specifically Scottish literary studies.<sup>7</sup> Yet a comparison of the two novels discloses strikingly direct parallels, and

crucial contrasts. Both novels were published in 1984; both were written in the early 1980s. Amis started *Money* in 1980; Gray's *Epilogue* is signed April 1983.<sup>8</sup> In a sense, then, both are literary products of Thatcher's first term, though published in the tumultuous year of 1984 after she had been returned to power. The novels are not reducible to politics, even in its broadest sense. Yet both are unusually direct about addressing the society from which they have sprung. Both deliberately take on political significance, seeking exemplary status, mediating private experience through public matters. Both intuit that society and ideology are shifting. They are responses to early Thatcherism: to a shift not yet fully grasped, rather than to an achieved stereotype. A question that arises in both novels is the nature of an emerging Thatcherite, or modern Conservative, mindset. Both texts ask what such a mind looks like, how it works, why it tends the way it does. That is one way that their private investigations are also public inquiries.

Both novels are monologues, narrated by men who are the same age as their authors at the time of publication (Gray 50, Amis 35). If both thus hint at, and undoubtedly include, autobiographical dimensions, they also maintain careful differences between author and narrator. Both texts in fact go out of their way to stress these distinctions: Amis by including a character named Martin Amis in his novel, Gray by declaring in his *Epilogue* his disagreement with his narrator's views on Scotland. The novels thus have a certain formal similarity; in both, the novelists speak at a distance, through a mask or a mouthpiece which is heavily used yet disavowed.<sup>9</sup>

Parallels are still more evident between the two stories themselves. Both protagonists are heavy drinkers, though while Gray's McLeish professes to be addicted to alcohol, Amis's John Self speaks of facing up to the difficult and painful realization that he is not an alcoholic (269). Both are uncertain of the identity of their fathers: Self learns late on that he has been deceived about this all his life, McLeish strongly suspects that his real father was his schoolmaster. Both consider their lives to be crumbling, decaying or falling apart, though in very different ways - McLeish's with quiet desperation, Self's with frantic, freewheeling consumption. Both attempt to commit suicide with an overdose of pills. Both attempts fail, and leave the protagonists in an altered state, in which some degree of recovery or redemption seems possible. Both enter dialogues with textual versions of their creators: in McLeish's case, a version of the voice of God; in Self's, a version of Martin Amis. In both cases this allows for self-conscious reflection on narrative form, and makes the novels somewhat metafictional, in what was a spreading textual tendency in British fiction in this period. At the same time, both books are profoundly referential: in an unusual combination, they manage to be ludic and fanciful,

yet to comment with peculiar force on the contemporary world. More flagrantly, they share highly sexualized mental worlds: both characters are studies of a pornographic imagination. This is central to the disturbing effect of the two novels.

### **Upman Maildike**

Amis's treatment of gender issues is notorious, and *Money* is certainly sexually explicit.<sup>10</sup> Its narrator navigates brothels and strip-clubs, and meditates on masturbation. The novel was a bold strike: a refusal of certain literary mores and standards of restraint, in favour of a deliberately yobbish and wilfully offensive treatment of gender and desire.<sup>11</sup> By the same token it was a cheeky retort to the feminist values and critiques that had gained ground in the previous decade; a naughty reassertion of masculinity.

Yet Alasdair Gray's treatment of these themes is still more disconcerting. 1982 *Janine* consists of Jock McLeish's monologue over a single night as he lies on a hotel bed in Greenock, where he has travelled for his job as an itinerant security consultant. The book's first half is heavily composed of the narrator's sexual fantasies, which are intercut with memories of his life and reflections on the world at large. It can take a while to grasp that these are fantasies; the first chapter may give the reader the impression that they are on the same ontological plane as Jock McLeish himself. But it soon becomes clear that several of the other characters, including the eponymous Janine, are products of his mind. To some extent the element of sexual fantasy here is generic and familiar. Janine is lovingly described, her clothes carefully outlined – and regularly altering as McLeish changes his mind about what most appeals. She is pictured on her way through an imaginary America, largely projected from Hollywood or televisual impressions. She and her fellow fictions engage in dialogue with each other or with mysterious businessmen or secret lovers, as though taking part in a cheap, late-night, made-for-TV erotic thriller. This world is tacky in its would-be glamour, embarrassing in its attempt to dissemble lust behind sophistication and shaky narrative. There is certainly something sordid about all this, when described outright. But there is something familiar about it too: doubtless familiar to readers of erotic fiction, and perhaps more subtly present in even the more wholesome and widespread kinds of romance or adventure narrative. Late in the novel, when McLeish makes a final return to his fantasy world, he imagines his heroine reading a story in *Vogue* which uncannily mirrors her own current fate; it is written by John Updike, or Norman Mailer, or – he finally runs the two together – Upman Maildike (*J* 320). That is one sign that

Gray considers this kind of erotic imagination to have broader currency than this obsessive narrator alone.

But McLeish's libidinal economy is more peculiar than this. The ultimate goal of his fantasies is to bring the women into captivity, to be scared, humiliated, sometimes tortured and abused. A cod-Hollywood script is kept up the whole time, but the destination of McLeish's narratives is an incredible carceral society of the mind. He eventually describes this at length, drawing no distinction between fact and fantasy as he informs the reader that he has established 'the vast multinational Forensic Research Punishment and Sexual Gratification Syndicate' (J 123), a worldwide system of harems in which thousands of women are imprisoned. They eventually embrace their status as sexual slaves, becoming 'happier and healthier than most women in the world outside' (J 121). McLeish's particular fantasies are localized versions of this crazed world-picture, in which attractive women are duped, snared, frightened and eventually made into the willing sexual prisoners of a male elite. All this is bizarre, and can become harrowing. Yet the novel cannot be written off as a freak, or as a mere indulgence of all these traits. It ultimately seeks to treat them as symptoms. 'My problem is sex', McLeish declares early on, 'or if it isn't, sex hides the problem so completely that I don't know what it is' (J 16). The exposure and exploration of 'problems' that underlie the narrator's evident obsessions is part of the novel's gradual work.

A broad similarity with *Money* is worth remarking. Amis's treatment of sexuality is not as freakish as Gray's, yet in both books something is askew in the male libido they depict; desire is dubiously entangled with something else. In the case of Jock McLeish, this other factor can most simply be called power. His imagination is frankly sadistic, though he scorns the amateurism of the Marquis de Sade (J 29); he enjoys the idea of power being exercised sexually, of sexual relations between unequal partners. He fantasizes about flagellation, a woman tearing her clothes to shreds on barbed wire, and even simply about rape. He uses the word 'rape' freely and figuratively, to signify his own episodes of degradation and defeat at the hands of others in the real world (J 69), but he is not above taking pleasure in the idea of a woman being handcuffed and physically raped (J 80). He speaks early on of desiring both 'revenge' against and 'justice' from women (J 14-16), thinking not least of his wife's abandonment of him. McLeish describes pornography as a complex narrative mode, in which suspense must be preserved, balls juggled, story arcs kept tantalizingly distinct. In a telling unification of sexuality, violence and storytelling, his metaphor for this effort is the historian narrating the course of the Second World War, maintaining different national narratives up until 'the last, huge, final bang' (J 29).

John Self has little interest in these niceties. He seems unlikely to turn down any chance of sexual gratification, however kinked or quirky. But the great source of erotic pleasure for him is in the title of his book: money. 'I don't know how to define pornography', he admits, '- but money is in the picture somewhere. There has to be money involved, at one end or the other. Money is always involved' (315). Money could be construed as a translation of power: to pay for sex is presumably to exercise a kind of temporary authority, though Amis is also interested in the transferral of guilt and humiliation between pornography's participants and spectators (47). Yet this is not the same as the way McLeish's mind revels in cruelty and entrapment. The Amisian libido is not sadistic but venal; it is the equivalent not of the repressive state apparatus but of the irresistible energy of market forces. What both lack is that quite other factor which can give sex more value - namely love, or awestruck affection for another human being. It is a lack of which they are residually, guiltily aware.<sup>12</sup>

### **Lone Gratification**

Both *Money* and *1982 Janine* link the private and the public. John Self has a tendency to align his own body with the public, physical realm, as in a memorable riff that compares his head to a city: 'A gum-and-bone ache has launched a cooperative on my upper west side. Across the park, neuralgia has rented a duplex in my fashionable east seventies. Downtown, my chin throbs with lofts of jaw-loss' (26). The fit between character and society is lightly sketched in such a passage, but he almost unmistakably bears the weight of an emergent historical moment. His name, with a flagrancy characteristic of Amis, clearly fits a dawning age of individualism and privatization, as do his pleasures - video-gaming, junk food, solo drinking, masturbation - in which, as he states with deadpan elaborateness, 'the element of lone gratification is bluntly stressed' (67). Amis has remarked that Self 'suspects' that he is a representative figure.<sup>13</sup> Of all the literary characters forged in the 1980s, he is probably the most celebrated for his representative qualities.

Alasdair Gray manages his parallel differently, but in the end it is even more overwhelming. Jock McLeish works in security systems, which he installs and inspects around Scotland's businesses and institutions. Rather as Tom Crick in Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983) needs to be a history teacher in order to fulfil that novel's inquiry into the narrative properties of the past, McLeish's job is significant, even necessary to the character's meaning. It is not only that it has brought him into the orbit of respectable Scottish brewery managers and businessmen, grouse-moor shareholders who sip whiskey together in Motherwell saloon bars and frown on any radical talk (*J* 63). It is

more centrally that the whole notion of security corresponds to the violent character of McLeish's fantasies. He has spent decades wiring businesses against intrusion, protecting managerial profits, setting up surveillance systems: the same decades in which he has hidden his slide into alcoholism, gathered a tidy income and set up the incredible scheme of sadistic pornography inside his head. The barbed-wire fences and impenetrable installations in which his imagined heroines are trapped are cruel projections from his own working life. This is made explicit in a virtuoso passage proposing that everyone sees the world through their occupation: 'To the doctor the world is a hospital, to the broker it is a stock exchange'; 'to the farmer soil and bad weather', and so on - and to Jock McLeish, the world is 'a security installation powered by the sun and only crackable by death' (J 68-9).

McLeish's business acquaintances are probably Unionists, certainly Conservatives, and in Gray's terms they keep Scotland safe for Westminster government and multinational corporations. McLeish has fallen in with them and become one of their kind, though more a sycophantic supplicant than a member of the capitalist court. He is a kind of lowlands Underground Man, teeming with secret frustrations and resentments. One of the secrets he has kept from many acquaintances is that he considers himself a political Conservative. His former lover Sontag assumes that he is on the Left as his father was (J 61), and even the brewery boss he drinks with suspects him of being "'a bit of a bolshie'" (J 64). But at various points in the first half of the book, he justifies his allegiance - not least on the page marked 'WHY I'M A TORY':

[In] Britain almost everyone of my income group is Conservative, especially if their fathers were trade unionists. Not that I have totally rejected [my father's] Marxist ideas. The notion that all politics is class warfare is clearly correct. Every intelligent Tory knows that politics is a matter of people with a lot of money combining to manage people with very little, though of course they must deny it in public to mislead the opposition. The bit of Marx that I reject is the prophetic bit. He thought that the poorly paid would eventually organise themselves and overpower the moneyed people. I'm sure they won't, and I'm not going to join a gang of losers. This is selfish of me and probably wicked, but like everyone else I would rather be thought wicked than stupid. A man with money in the bank who speaks out for the poorly paid always sounds stupid or a hypocrite. (J 61-2)

These politics are consciously convenient, a superstructure obediently following the base of economic self-interest. They are implicitly violent and antagonistic, siding with affluent against poor; but this motive is doubly cynical in being concealed, like McLeish's politics as a whole. They are a politics of scepticism and disillusion, rather than hope: the prospect of working-class emancipation is rejected, so the canny Conservative sides with history's winners. They are even conscious of their own immorality, with a kind of Machiavellian cackle. In Gray's portrait, the right-winger is not someone who sincerely pursues different values from the left's, but one who is aware of his own hypocrisy, selfishness and collusion with a corrupt system.

The implication of McLeish's monologue is that Conservatism is a thoroughly reactive, negative formation: a series of consciously cruel negations, somewhat analogous to his sexual fantasies. Like that fantasy world, Conservatism here is a defence mechanism; and the geopolitical meaning of 'defence' is also brought into play, as McLeish orates on the nuclear state of modern Scotland. Scotland, he reflects, is 'wired for war'; the British government has cynically placed all its nuclear weapons and potential targets as far from London as possible, and banked on the loss of the Clydeside region in the event of a tactical strike (*J* 134-6). With reflections like this, we might seem to be in the territory of the political Left to which Alasdair Gray belongs. But McLeish reverts to the fact that 'Scotland has been fucked and I am one of the fuckers who fucked her and I REFUSE TO FEEL BITTER OR GUILTY ABOUT THIS' (*J* 137). 'The militarization and depression of Scotland', he insists, 'has been good for the security business'; he also manages to find deeply cynical reasons to celebrate cuts in health and education, greater unemployment and rising crime. 'A smart Tory', he insists, 'does not believe this is, or can be, a pleasant world for most folk' (*J* 137).

The former Labour Chancellor Denis Healey described Thatcherite economic policy in the early 1980s as 'sado-monetarism'. By this, writes John Campbell, he meant the combination of reduced public spending, higher indirect taxation and lower borrowing which resulted in unemployment figures near three million during the recession of Thatcher's first term.<sup>14</sup> Healey himself has recalled that he originally used the term 'punk monetarism' for Thatcher's 'comic-strip syllogisms', until his children complained that the comparison was unfair to the youth subculture.<sup>15</sup> In our context, what is suggestive about 'sado-monetarism' is the implied connection between policy and pain: as though with the New Right's advent in power, brutality could openly be viewed as a political and economic virtue. As one sceptic said during this recession, which cost so many jobs in manufacturing



industry, the monetarists' problem 'was that they could not make up their mind whether the squeals from British industry were a good thing or not'.<sup>16</sup> Thatcher at this hour was apt to cast herself as a nurse dispensing medicine as necessary as it was unpleasant. 'Which is the better nurse?', she asked in one interview:

The one who smothers the patient with sympathy and says 'Never mind, dear, there, there, you just lie back and I'll bring you all your meals ... I'll look after you'. Or the nurse who says 'Now, come on, shake out of it ... It's time you put your feet on the ground and took a few steps ...' Which do you think is the better nurse? The one who says come on, you can do it. That's me.<sup>17</sup>

The analogous message from the government and its think-tanks was that pain – in the form of lost jobs, shrunken or abandoned industries, damaged families and weakened communities – was a precondition of progress. That analysis of the period is now orthodox among the British political class. Gray's novel mischievously, frighteningly posits an alternative: not only that the political infliction of suffering was a strategy of the strong against the weak, but that the thought of the Right and the desire to inflict pain might be intimately, pathologically linked.

### **Ideological Penetration**

Perhaps McLeish is all too conveniently cynical a right-winger, the rhetorical product of a socialist writer. The fictional strategy is, in a sense, wickedly unreasonable: there is no suggestion that Conservatives might have sincerely held principles of their own, whether those of Burke, Oakeshott or Milton Friedman. But the book remains a bold foray across the barricades, into the psychological terrain of the political Right. In a sense it shares this crucial feature with *Money*. Both novels are inside jobs, running commentaries from within the heads of men who serve the emergent social order. John Self is a different kind of servant, his life racy rather than respectable; he is involved in the culture industries – first advertising, now film – rather than McLeish's dogged technological defence of business and wealth. But the contrast only makes them a more suggestive, representative pairing. In their contrasting ways, the novels connect with questions that were very topical. Where do all these Tories come from? Who is supporting Thatcherism; who perceives it to be in their interests? What makes its footsoldiers tick?

The advent and long success of New Labour occluded and muted these questions. By the 2000s, we were more likely to hear pundits asking how to

persuade a mass of people to reduce their carbon footprint. But at the moment of these novels, this inquiry appeared urgent and challenging. Commentators on the Left were divided between the restatement of traditional Labour resources – ‘one more heave’, around the traditional base of the Labour movement – and the inquiry into new political possibilities, which might be necessities. Eric Hobsbawm’s essays ‘The Forward March of Labour Halted?’ (1978) and ‘Labour’s Lost Millions’ (1983), printed in *Marxism Today*, were incisive, much-cited analyses of the gradual erosion of the party’s electoral base. By 1983 Hobsbawm argued keenly against the pursuit of purity, proposing both that Labour might need to ‘lead a broad front of other parties’ and that it needed to start from the electorate’s desires rather than the party’s.<sup>18</sup>

In the ongoing debate, the kinds of questions posed above were most consistently investigated by Stuart Hall. Hall saw that the terms of political trade had been changing, with the waning of the post-war settlement and the arrival of a new socio-economic model. He insisted that ideological attitudes could not be simplistically read off from class positions. He argued instead that an ideological struggle was underway, in which the political Right was implanting a new common sense into British society. Ideas that would have been outrageous a decade earlier were now increasingly taken for granted as necessities. Hall believed that Thatcherism was making itself hegemonic, less in policy detail or reasoned argument than in the realm of attitudes and feelings. In 1981, the year of John Self’s adventures, Hall proposed that the New Right’s ‘ideological penetration into society’ was ‘very profound’:

It has shifted the parameters of common sense. It has pioneered a considerable swing towards authoritarian populism and reactionary ideas. [...] [The Right] actually do believe that you have to struggle to implant the notion of the market; and that, if you talk about it well enough, effectively and persuasively enough, you can touch people’s understanding of how they live and work, and make a new kind of sense about what’s wrong with society and what to do about it.<sup>19</sup>

Six years later, Hall insisted afresh that ‘What Thatcherism as an ideology does, is to address the fears, the anxieties, the lost identities, of a people. It invites us to think about politics in images. It is addressed to our collective fantasies, to Britain as an imagined community, a social imaginary’.<sup>20</sup>

Part of the interest of Jock McLeish and John Self is that they speak for this new kind of sense, and live through versions of these images and fantasies. We need not see the novelists as programmatically pursuing the

same analytical agenda. Of the two, Alasdair Gray had stronger ties with the political Left, not least with a culture of dissident writers like James Kelman and Liz Lochhead, and his fiction makes unabashedly direct political statements and analyses. Amis saw himself as loosely on the Left; he had worked at the *New Statesman* in the 1970s alongside the more vociferously committed Christopher Hitchens and James Fenton.<sup>21</sup> But he would never have subscribed to such an earnestly committed project as Gray's. *Money* is a black comedy and a stylistic tour de force before it is a sustained political statement. Yet Amis has always been interested in tracking the contemporary: in making fiction that, as he would later put it, describes 'the *Zeitgeist* and human evolution, particularly of consciousness', and shows us 'how the typical rhythms of the thought of human beings are developing'.<sup>22</sup> For all its formal fireworks, therefore, his book is also a dedicated attempt to describe a newly visible kind of social agent, his environment and attitudes.

Ideology courses through the two characters in very different ways. In McLeish's case, brutalist modern Conservatism is voiced with great self-consciousness. John Self, by contrast, lacks full self-awareness, though the novel he narrates has plenty of its own. In a sense he corresponds more closely to what Hall is pursuing: ideology's hidden hand, its invisible infiltration of the unsuspecting subject. We have observed in detail the self-defensive basis of McLeish's reactionary positions. What about John Self's?

He cannot exactly be described as a spokesman for the New Right, partly because when he opens his mouth he is a poor spokesman for anything. The novel's central formal conceit is that, though the author lends Self's inner monologue his own crackling eloquence, the character's own powers of speech and reflection are limited. But Self's smouldering resentment against the cultured and those of more elevated class origin is highly pertinent to the present inquiry, for here Amis limns a social attitude and movement closely associated with Thatcherism's claim to be overturning traditional hierarchies and entrenched elites. Self is consciously a plebeian interloper into the precincts of privilege, declaring: 'As a rule, I hate people who are the beneficiaries of a university education. [...] And you hate me, don't you. Yes you do. Because I'm the new kind, the kind who has money but can never use it for anything but ugliness. To which I say: You never let us in, not really. You might have thought you let us in, but you never did. You just gave us some money' (57-8).

Self declares his membership of a new class fraction or socio-economic vanguard: 'the new kind', the moneyed and uncultured, those who have grabbed power without needing to go through the class rituals of an older elite. There is a clear sociological difference here from the older Jock McLeish,

who though of working-class origin is the product of a scholarship to technical school, and who remains quietly courteous amid the captains of industry he serves. Later Self describes the advertising company in which he is a partner, Carburton, Linex and Self. It is run by men like him: vulgar, coarse, misogynistic, abusive, talentless, irresponsible tax-evaders who are debasing the standards of public culture. Terry Linex, Self reflects, is 'one of the new princes, an improviser of genius' (83). When they go out to eat they sing 'We are the Champions' after forcing an elderly man to vacate their table. Self observes the discomfort of the middle-aged couple at the next table. 'No', he unashamedly announces, 'the rest of the meal isn't going to be much fun for those two, I'm afraid. I suppose it must have been cool for people like them in places like this before people like us started coming here also. But we're here to stay. *You* try getting us out...' (82). That last threat resounds, in retrospect, as a declaration of the longevity of Thatcherite rule, as well as the more local intransigence of the ad-men. These are among the book's most explicit reflections on early Thatcherism. They make the phenomenon distasteful – yet in a disquieting manner, for in allying the New Right with a new model of classlessness and social fluidity, they challenge the reader's principled disapproval as a defensive snobbery.<sup>23</sup> This was an effective rhetorical strategy for Thatcherism itself: a way, for instance, of dismissing those who opposed the sale of council houses. Amis's parvenu is grabbing what he has been too long denied, and he will not be refused: he will just shove more money out until he gets what he wants.

Self's defining trait is his capacity for consumption. In cheerfully ludicrous passages, Amis has him eat dozens of burgers and hot dogs for breakfast, along with a six-pack of beer; order multiple pots of coffee from room service; splash cash on new suits and lurid fancy goods as though his life depends on it. The book hurtles past on the force of the style he borrows from his author, and that movement is also the force of Self's desire, his lust not just for flesh and sexual gratification but for junk food, alcohol, possessions. He is well aware of this perpetual motion, and it scares him. In a repeated motif, he compares himself to a fast train:

At sickening speed I have roared and clattered, I have rocketed through my time, breaking all the limits, time limits, speed limits, city limits, jumping lights and cutting corners, guzzling gas and burning rubber, staring through the foul screen with my fist on the horn. I am that fleeing train that goes steaming past you in the night. Though travelling nowhere I have hurtled with blind purpose to the very end of my time. I have lived headlong at a desperate rhythm. (311-2)

Here, in a sense, is Self's most eloquent exemplification of what Amis calls the time's typical rhythms. Jock McLeish proclaims himself a Conservative because he is reluctant to give up what he has; because his life has twisted into a curdled mess of repressed resentments; because he has become moulded by the ideas of security and defence. Self's headlong career could not be more different. If he exemplifies the coming times, it is in his recklessness, his unstoppable, unguarded flight. Yet both figures, for all their exaggerations, are suggestive sketches of Thatcherism's appeal. As numerous commentators have observed, Thatcherism was a contradictory phenomenon: a compound of tradition and modernization, order and deregulation, jingoism and globalization. The Grantham values of thrift and sobriety to which Thatcher herself always reverted were not those that her administrations instilled in British society. As her biographer John Campbell puts it: she 'presided over and celebrated a culture of rampant materialism – "fun, greed and money" – fundamentally at odds with her own values which were essentially conservative, old-fashioned and puritanical. She believed in thrift, yet encouraged record indebtedness'.<sup>24</sup> Thus Stuart Hall perceived the contradictory strength of 'an ideology which is not coherent, which speaks in our ear with the voice of freewheeling, utilitarian, market-man, and in the other ear with the voice of respectable, bourgeois, patriarchal man'.<sup>25</sup> For all the partial parallels between the two fictional protagonists, then, they are most revealing in their divergence: a contrast which points to a contradictory political formation.

In both cases, apparent success is founded on damage and weakness. The servants of the new Conservatism are winners, rich men who laugh at the poor and downtrodden; but they are also guilty, wracked by pains and ghosts. Hall's image of ideology whispering in the subject's ear is peculiarly apt here. John Self repeatedly talks of voices in his head: 'I feel invaded, duped, fucked around. I hear strange voices and speak in strange tongues. I get thoughts that are way over my head. I feel violated' (66). 'I sometimes think I am controlled by someone', he worries, over 250 pages later: 'Some space invader is invading my inner space, some fucking joker' (300). These are partly sly nods at Amis's own uncanny manipulation of his unquiet creation; they are also typical of Self's troubled soul, haunted by inchoate feelings of shame and fear. His chief manipulator within the novel regularly makes abusive telephone calls to him, reminding him of the suffering he has caused others. For all his ostentatious success, Self has 'the sense that everything is ulterior': a joke being staged at his expense. It is: the devious plot unfolds to strip him of his money and send him back whence he came. But along the

way this creates a sense that he shares with Jock McLeish: that he is not control of his own actions.

Both men, obscurely or consciously, know themselves to be pawns in the games of others. Self's life is being elaborately manipulated by his associate Fielding Goodney. McLeish's manipulation is more mundane: he is conscious of being, in a recurring word, an 'instrument' in the hands of his employers. He has become, he admits late on, 'a character in a script written by National Security. That script governed my main movements, and therefore my emotions. [...] I made myself completely predictable so that the firm could predict me' (J 333). His very fantasies, he sees, are projections from this predicament. Over the years the story of female entrapment has become more elaborate: 'I did not notice that this was the story of my own life. I avoided doing so by insisting on the *femaleness* of the main character. [...] My fancies keep reliving that moment of torture for Janine because I have never fully faced it in my own life' (J 193-4). The sadistic imagination, then, has also been a veiled masochism. McLeish's imaginary vengeances on women are not really expressions of power, but adaptations of the manipulations with which the world has rendered him powerless. This transferral of violence is the complex final stroke in the fictional anatomy of Thatcherism's psychic appeals.

### **1952-1982**

Where *Money* is a headlong hurtle, *1982 Janine* is a book of two halves. It hinges on McLeish's unsuccessful suicide bid, after which he seeks a new way forward by finding a way back. The book's very long twelfth chapter is an account of the few months in 1953 when he thinks the course of his life was set. Specifically, he left a loving relationship with an innocent girl, Denny, and found himself railroaded into an ultimately unhappy marriage with another young woman, Helen. This is a radical departure from what we have experienced so far. The carceral fantasies are gone, until a late reprise in the closing chapters. The juggling of narrative lines and the interspersion of materials from different periods of memory are also replaced by something startlingly simple: a largely linear narrative.

This section carries immense power and pathos. Among other things, it is extraordinary in its meditation on what might have been, as McLeish constructs alternative courses of action at critical points, which could have led to a better life. It is also causally linked to the book's first half. McLeish's habitual dependence on sadistic sexual fantasy is not just a projection from his professional career but also a response to the plight he now describes. It is a substitute for the sexual gratification he lacks since leaving Denny and

losing Helen's affection; it is a kind of mental weapon against womankind, whose entanglements with McLeish are central to his downfall; in its cruelty, violence and shiny depthlessness, it is also a refusal of the flood of desperate emotion that his story naturally prompts. It is thoroughly symptomatic, a defence mechanism which only deflects or delays despair and death.

It might seem that the book's second half retreats from the political to the private realm. It is true that it shows McLeish's later politics to be the product of personal tragedy, and that this story is outlined in such detail that it refuses to be the mere by-product of a political situation. When McLeish roundly declares that 'POLITICS WILL NOT LET ME ALONE. Everything I know, everything I am has been permitted or buggered up by some sort of political arrangement' (J 231-2), he provides grist to the mill of those critics keen to find national allegory inscribed in Scottish literature, but he may be protesting too much.<sup>26</sup> Yet the effect of Chapter 12 is still not a depoliticization, for McLeish draws a parallel between the two narratives of decline. We are invited to ask what went wrong, not only in relation to McLeish's own life, but in broader historical terms: with Scotland, with Britain, with the world. If there were any doubt about this, the point is wryly made on 'Gray's Table of Contents', in which McLeish's lengthy personal narrative is logged as 'FROM THE CAGE TO THE TRAP: or: *How I Reached and Lost Three Crowded Months of Glorious Life: or: How I Became Perfect, Married Two Wives Then Embraced Cowardice: or: Scotland 1952-1982*' (J 9).

McLeish's tale locates turning points within a very precise period in 1953. There is no doubt that he sees that crucial period as one that could still harbour social, as well as personal, hope. The exact location of this now lost political virtue is not quite clear. The reforming Labour government of 1945 is debated by McLeish's father and his more sceptical and revolutionary comrade, Old Red. Where the former idealistically declares that Attlee has achieved a peaceful socialist revolution, the latter sees the post-war settlement as a compromise through which vested interests hung onto their power (J 141-2). Alasdair Gray is politically canny enough to articulate such views; yet his portrait of the post-war era nonetheless suggests a deep nostalgia for a moment of as yet undefeated virtue. When in summer 1953 McLeish and his theatrical friends travel from Glasgow to Edinburgh to stage their play, Gray unleashes a litany of the not yet happened. Events like 'the coming of the motorways, the dismantling of the rail system, the ringroads slicing up the cities', and 'the discovery that North Sea oil benefited hardly anyone in Britain but the shareholders': 'all this', reflects McLeish, though partly conceivable, had not been conceived' (J 230). He further reflects that the public realm was a sparer, clearer place:

We had no commercial radio or television, no shopping centres, leisure centres, arts centres; nothing but the B.B.C. and shops and public baths and theatres. Oh, Britain was a primitive country in those days, primitive but in working order. We had come through a war, built a welfare state, had full employment and were still the richest country in the world after the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R. and Switzerland. (*J* 231)

The vision is puritanical: a primitive Britain, less crowded with advertising and commerce, was a more virtuous place and still bore promise. Liam McIlvanney comments that for Gray, post-war Britain has remained an ideal: his fiction meditates on the fall between 'the Britain of full employment and free school milk and the Britain of Thatcher and Polaris'.<sup>27</sup> This decline parallels, and in part has shaped, the smaller fate of Jock McLeish. The New Right is certainly a factor to conjure with, in such a narrative; but it is not to be too narrowly conceived. What is at stake is the long-term betrayal, fading or exhaustion of those post-war socialist and social democratic hopes. Trying to pinpoint a moment when it all went wrong – for himself, Scotland and the world – McLeish records that 'There was no one point after which things got worse but my last spasm of scientific, social delight was in 1969': the moment of the moon landings (*J* 310). They seemed potentially utopian but yielded only a vision of airless barrenness, which leads McLeish into a caustic peroration on humanity's poisoning of all it touches.

Margaret Thatcher would be a sign of how bad things have become since then, but not the prime cause of decline. When McLeish names her as guilty of 'playing along with the Stock Exchange and cutting taxation and the public healing, teaching and life-saving services', he mentions Harold Wilson in the same breath (*J* 130). There is, then, a shrewd sense of perspective in Gray's post-war vision: already middle-aged when the Thatcher revolution began, he was not about to see it as the beginning of all vices, only as the more logical and systematic extension of existing problems. Thatcher herself noted, only two months into power, that Denis Healey had been more of a monetarist than he would like to admit.<sup>28</sup>

### **Down Tools**

Both novels end with unlikely bids for redemption. The two protagonists, having failed in their suicide attempts, quit their careers, start again from the bottom and feel that they have been granted a second chance. John Self is poorer – so much so that a passer-by tips a coin into his cap – but free of the machinations of others that have driven him through the book. Jock McLeish,



too, upon writing a letter of resignation to his employers, suddenly feels free. He has worked through his history of repressed misery, and has cast aside its political correlatives to rediscover the optimism of his father. He movingly declares that 'the Famous Few have no power now but the power to threaten and destroy and history is what we all make, everywhere, each moment of our lives, whether we notice it or not' (J 340). John Self has merely picked himself up and started again. He has not really shifted his values, though he has seen through money itself: 'If we all downed tools and joined hands for ten minutes and stopped believing in money, then money would no longer exist'. But he immediately adds: 'We never will, of course. [...] You just can't kick it, that junk, even if you want to. You can't get the money monkey off your back' (384).

The younger author is the sceptic, unwilling to take utopian proposals too seriously. Gray by contrast is the ageing idealist, who suggests that the lost hopes of a better nation could come again, starting from the sudden renewal of an individual life. As Conservatism built its hegemony through the 1980s, panic and despair were understandable reactions from its opponents. But Stuart Hall in particular maintained that people were not simply Thatcherites, to be written off as foes: they were all compounds, multiple identities, sites of competing interests, mixtures of the old and the new. Gray's narrator is precisely such a figure: his warped desires have occluded a buried set of alternative political memories and desires, which gain sudden utopian fulfilment at the end of Gray's book. If we see the making of a New Right subject, we also see his breaking and renewal. In the author's Epilogue, Gray calmly notes that while Scotland's resources have often been wasted, 'even bad human states are not everlasting' (J 345). It takes a deal of faith to believe that McLeish can turn his own life around, and really begin to work as though a better nation has just begun. But the nation – or better, the world – still has more time on its side than one man can.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Alasdair Gray, 'Money', in *Mavis Belfrage: A Romantic Novel, with Five Shorter Tales* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), pp.136-45 (p.145).

<sup>2</sup> I say 'process', but just what kind of entity Thatcherism was, or is, is a question that bears some nuance. We can plausibly call Thatcherism an ideology, an economic policy, a movement, a significant wing of the modern Conservative Party, or an early British avatar of the phenomenon – later widespread and much discussed – known as neo-liberalism. None of these terms are mutually exclusive. I have here preferred 'process' to, say, 'ideology' because the latter does not appear to do justice to

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Thatcherism's tangible transformative effect upon institutions and physical landscapes. I have offered an account of some of the effects of Thatcherism on British politics, society and culture in *Literature of the 1980s: After the Watershed* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp.2-33.

<sup>3</sup> A recent collection that seeks to explore the range of such responses is Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho (eds), *Thatcher and After: Margaret Thatcher and Her Afterlife in Contemporary Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Closer to the 1980s themselves, a pioneering collection was Lester D. Friedman (ed), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: UCL Press, 1993; second edition London and New York: Wallflower, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Alasdair Gray, *1982 Janine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), and Martin Amis, *Money* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984). References to *Money* will henceforth be given parenthetically in the text. References to *1982 Janine* will be given parenthetically with the distinguishing letter J.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Todd, 'The Intrusive Author in British Postmodernist Fiction: The Cases of Alasdair Gray and Martin Amis', in *Exploring Postmodernism* ed. by Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1987), pp.123-37.

<sup>6</sup> An early instance was Laura L. Doan, "'Sexy Greedy Is the Late Eighties": Power Systems in Amis's *Money* and Churchill's *Serious Money*', *The Minnesota Review: A Journal of Committed Writing*, 34-35 (Spring 1990), 69-80. More recently see James J. Miracky, 'Hope Lost or Hyped Lust? Gendered Representations of 1980s Britain in Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way* and Martin Amis's *Money*', *Critique* 44:2 (Winter 2003), 136-143, and Jon Begley, 'Satirizing the Carnival of Postmodern Capitalism: the Transatlantic and Dialogic Structure of Martin Amis's *Money*', *Contemporary Literature* 45:1 (2004), 79-105.

<sup>7</sup> Several earlier critical voices can be mentioned. Stephen Bernstein's *Alasdair Gray* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999) highlights literary precursors; it is also distinctive in proposing a significant synchrony between Jock McLeish's redemption and 1982's Glasgow Hillhead byelection (pp.80-81). Gavin Miller's *Alasdair Gray: The Fiction of Communion* (Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2005) reads Jock McLeish alongside R.D. Laing and Proust, in a study attempting to shift Gray from a postmodernist frame and back to Scottish traditions. In the collection *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, edited by Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), a number of contributors (notably Marshall Walker, Randall Stevenson, Edwin Morgan, Christopher Harvie and S.J. Boyd) touch on *1982 Janine*. Elsewhere, Berthold Schöne-Harwood's work on the novel in *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from 'Frankenstein' to the New Man* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) seeks to connect the book's concerns with gendered and national identity, in the course of an extended rereading of masculinity in fiction. Finally, in Phil Moores' edited volume *Alasdair Gray: Critical Appreciations and a Bibliography* (Boston Spa & London: The British Library, 2002), the English comic novelist Jonathan Coe (in '1994, Janine', pp.59-66) celebrates the novel's confessional courage and 'radical good sense' (p.63), contrasting it with a fashionable London literature of the period that includes Martin Amis's *Money* (p.60). Coe has elsewhere explicitly opined that *1982 Janine*, rather than *Money*, best 'captured the essence of that decade': 'Jonathan Coe recalls the 1980s', *Guardian*, 26 May 2007, *Weekend* section, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> On the writing of *Money* see Amis in interview with John Haffenden (1985), reprinted in Nicolas Tredell (ed), *The Fiction of Martin Amis* (Cambridge: Icon, 2000), pp.61-66 (p.61). For a brief account of the writing of *1982 Janine* see Bruce Charlton,

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'The Story So Far', in Crawford and Nairn (eds), *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, edited by Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn, pp.10-21 (p.16).

<sup>9</sup> In Gray's case, this ambiguous relation between author and character naturally extends to the narrator's pornographic imagination. S.J. Boyd quotes Gray's admission in an interview to argue that 'It is quite clear that Gray, like Jock, enjoys his fantasies': see 'Black Arts: 1982 *Janine* and *Something Leather*', in Crawford and Nairn (eds), *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, pp.108-123 (p.113).

<sup>10</sup> Amis has drawn ire, disbelief and sometimes admiration, through the four decades of his published career, for his statements about and fictional representations of women, sexuality and feminism. This has persisted well into the twenty-first century, with Amis's round of publicity for his novel *The Pregnant Widow* (2010) offering numerous pronouncements about the ambiguous fruits of the women's movement and the sexual revolution. One of the sharpest critiques of Amis's gender politics appears in Adam Mars-Jones's essay 'Venus Envy', occasioned in particular by Amis's short story collection *Einstein's Monsters* (1987): see Adam Mars-Jones, *Blind Bitter Happiness* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), pp.128-41, 152-6. Indeed Mars-Jones was apparently the first critical voice to compare Amis's work and *1982 Janine* (pp.153-5), in terms specifically of contemporary masculinity rather than those of the present essay. Other significant feminist essays on Amis have included Emma Parker, 'Money Makes the Man: Gender and Sexuality in Martin Amis's *Money*', in Gavin Keulks (ed.), *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 55-70, and Nicky Marsh, 'Taking the Maggie: Money, Sovereignty, and Masculinity in British Fiction of the Eighties', *Modern Fiction Studies* 53.4 (2007): 845-66. See also Brian Finney's summary in *Martin Amis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp.139-46, and the essays by Cathryn Setz and Kaye Mitchell in the present volume.

<sup>11</sup> To be sure, the evident offensiveness of John Self's own monologue does not exhaust this issue. To grasp the full meaning of *Money*'s engagement with ideas about gender and sexuality also requires consideration of the levels of irony involved, the complex relation and uncertain distance established between author and narrator, and the status of comedy. I have sought to explore these nuances in my essay 'License is Given: *Money* and the Menace of Comedy', *Critical Engagements* 3:2 (Autumn/Winter 2009), 73-90.

<sup>12</sup> In McLeish's case the awareness is intense, because – unlike John Self – he can still describe memories of sexual intercourse with extraordinary tenderness: *1982 Janine*, pp.209-10.

<sup>13</sup> Amis with Haffenden, reprinted in Tredell (ed), *The Fiction of Martin Amis*, p.62.

<sup>14</sup> John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher: Volume Two, The Iron Lady* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), p.83.

<sup>15</sup> Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), p.491.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Campbell, *Iron Lady*, p.79.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Thatcher, interview, 28 November 1980, quoted in Campbell, *Iron Lady*, p.87.

<sup>18</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?', *Marxism Today* (September 1978), 279-86, and 'Labour's Lost Millions', *Marxism Today* (October 1983), 7-13; quotation from 'Labour's Lost Millions', 13. For a variety of subsequent contributions to this debate see James Curran (ed), *The Future of the Left* (Cambridge: Polity and New Socialist, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road To Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988).

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<sup>20</sup> Hall, *Hard Road*, p.167.

<sup>21</sup> For glimpses of this milieu see Martin Amis, *Experience: A Memoir* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), pp.254-5, and Neil Powell, *Amis & Son* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2008), pp.318-9; more extensive accounts feature Clive James, *The North Face of Soho: Unreliable Memoirs Volume 4* (London: Picador, 2006), and Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22* (New York: Atlantic, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Martin Amis in interview with Jonathan Noakes, in Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes, *Martin Amis: The Essential Guide* (London: Vintage, 2003), pp.12-26 (p.17).

<sup>23</sup> 'Whatever else she did', Amis would later write about the complexities and rigidities of the British class structure, 'Margaret Thatcher helped weaken all that. Mrs Thatcher, with her Cecils, with her Normans, with her Keiths' (*Experience*, p.24).

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, *Iron Lady*, p.250.

<sup>25</sup> Hall, *Hard Road*, pp.165-6. On the contradictions of Thatcherism see also, for instance, David Edgar, 'Bitter Harvest', in Curran (ed), *The Future of the Left*, pp.39-57; Alan Allport, 'Mrs Thatcher's Liberties', in Stanislao Pugliese (ed), *The Political Legacy of Margaret Thatcher* (London: Politico's, 2003), pp.29-40; and Raphael Samuel, 'Mrs Thatcher and Victorian Values', in *Island Stories – Unravelling Britain: Theatres of Memory, Volume II* (London: Verso, 1998), pp.330-348 (p.343).

<sup>26</sup> Liam McIlvanney, for instance, takes McLeish's lament as representative of Scottish post-war fiction: see 'The Politics of Narrative in the Post-war Scottish Novel', in Zachary Leader (ed), *On Modern British Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.181-208.

<sup>27</sup> McIlvanney, 'The Politics of Narrative', p.199.

<sup>28</sup> Campbell, *Iron Lady*, p.51.