

## **Fightin' Dominies and Form:**

### **Politics & Narrative in Some Modern Scottish Novels of Education**

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Most cultural criticism of Scottish education takes its “Scottishness” as the main object of concern, leaving aside primary questions of authority, knowledge and freedom<sup>1</sup> (see Johnston and Mackenzie; Harrison; Humes and Bryce). This seems curious when we consider that the revival of interest in national intellectual traditions has been stimulated largely by champions of Scottish generalism – a philosophical “broad course” of reflection on human nature and society. Students of George E. Davie might be expected to take a theoretically circumspect approach to the politics of the school, but most cultural discussion of Scottish education is oriented toward the discourse of “democratic intellectualism”, in which the purpose and methods of education are contested in mainly sociological terms (Beveridge and Turnbull 77). This is not an essay on the politics of education from the standpoint of Scottish culture and history, but a formalist inquiry into how modern Scottish literature has raised more radical, self-critical questions about education and authority than the cultural nationalist discourse seems to recognize. As I will show, structural, writerly problems about representing the authority of knowledge, and questioning the power of writing itself, have occupied postwar Scottish novelists in striking ways. In an essay situating the work of James Kelman within national literary traditions, Alan McMunnigal and Gerry Carruthers identify Patrick Doyle, the protagonist of *A Disaffection*, as “a type much dealt with in Scottish literature, a teacher within a much vaunted schools system whose professional life is in crisis” (61). I will

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<sup>1</sup> When more radical Scottish educational thinkers are acknowledged in this discourse, it is often by way of charting the progress of reform: “The current generation of teachers and headteachers would certainly disagree with the critics [Patrick Geddes, A.S. Neill, R.F. Mackenzie] and claim that modern schools are much less oppressive places where pupil achievements are celebrated and the richness of learning in all its forms is recognised and encouraged” (Humes and Bryce 115). The disparity between this (undoubted)

discuss three instances of this type, but not with a view to establishing what is peculiarly Scottish about this sub-genre – this I leave to the cultural historians. Instead, I mean to examine how a few Scottish writers have approached formal problems concerning narrative authority in dramatising the power-knowledge relations of the school.

Of course, these relations of authority extend much more broadly throughout society. At the risk of launching a supposedly radical inquiry into educational authority with a blithe appeal to the experts, the following two quotations sketch the connection between politics, education, and narrative I mean to explore. The first is by Antonio Gramsci, who notes in the Prison Notebooks that “every relation of “hegemony” is necessarily an educational relationship” (350). The second is by the Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire, who observes that “a careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally *narrative* character” (71). As a form of symbolic “educational” production, narrative fiction tends to reflect these relations of power and knowledge, perhaps most clearly in terms of narrative technique. This brief excerpt from William McIlvanney’s Docherty suggestively illustrates how the “teacher-student” narrative relationship applies not only to classroom novels. In this scene the miner Tam Docherty has asked his teenage son, Conn, to “see the sense o’ goin’ oan at the schil” (163), and Conn is struggling to convey the reasons why he bitterly hates his schoolmaster, his school, and the whole humiliating ritual of education as he knows it. Conn fails to salvage a rational argument from “the lethargy of [his] long-established attitudes” on the subject, and he is meant to: the narrator reports that Conn is “incapable ... of proving his right to [his judgments] with words”, and so obligingly expresses Conn’s authentic convictions *for him*. This is necessary because the basis of Conn’s views seem to him “so irrational as to be anonymous forces” (163). But for all that, the narrator relates,

those convictions nevertheless represented areas of real experience for Conn.

They related to truths he had earned for himself, no matter how incapable he was of proving his right to them with words, to the fact that nothing he was taught at

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progress and the aspirations of Neill, for example, is stark: “I am trying to form minds that will question and destroy and rebuild” (Neill 102).

school took the slightest cognizance of who he was, that the fundamental premise underlying everything he was offered there was the inferiority of what he had, that the vivid spontaneity of his natural speech was something he was supposed to be ashamed of, that so many of the people who mouthed platitudes about the liberating effects of education were looking through bars at the time, that most teachers breathed hypocrisy, like tortured Christians trying to convert happy pagans, that the classroom wasn't a filter for but a refuge from reality. (163-64)

This tirade covers a familiar argument about the liberating (or not) effects of education. But I'm more interested in the narrative mode used to deliver the argument; the quotation continues:

[Conn's] indignation came in a welter of incoherent images, a mob of reasons that drowned reason, and the only expression of it all he could achieve was a dogged, sullen silence. (164)

Critics have already seized upon the ironic gap separating the message of Docherty from its make-up; here, in a passage decrying the alienation that results from having one's own way of speaking inferiorized, the character is not allowed to speak at all – worse, he is deprived of the capacity even to *think* fluently. It is as if Conn's language has been dignified at the expense of his subjectivity: without a prior grasp of rational self-awareness – of knowing *why* he thinks what he thinks – he has no hope of explaining the basis of his hatred in *any* language. It then falls to the Olympian narrator to provide the lucidity and rhetorical force the argument calls for, and the effect is of McIlvanney drawing polished thought-bubbles toward the clouded head of a puppet-character. We could probably summarize this petard-hoisting approach to Docherty by amending McIlvanney's diatribe to read “political novels” in place of “school/education”. That is: for all its ennobling intent, the “fundamental premise underlying everything [we] are offered [in the novel] is the inferiority of what [the characters] have”.

But catching the writer out is not my point. I want to examine three novels about politically out-of-step schoolteachers by way of demonstrating how their various approaches to the politics of education are reflected in formal problems about textual

authority, narratorial self-judgment and “writing power”. The teacher-protagonists in each of the three novels I’ll be discussing – Muriel Spark’s The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, George Friel’s Mr. Alfred M.A. and Kelman’s A Disaffection – are indeed revealed to be “looking through bars” when they mouth their respective platitudes about the emancipating, civilizing and repressive effects of education; it is where their authors stand in relation to those same confining bars, involved as writers in kinds of formal discipline (“breathing hypocrisy” or otherwise) that I wish to explore. These writers, and their teachers, seem guided by the form of educational reason whose procedures marry the techniques of government with the production of truth (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 184). Foucault sees the school as a clear case of the “techniques of the self” being linked to techniques for the direction of others: “[in] educational institutions, we realize that one is managing others and teaching them to manage themselves” (The Foucault Reader 369-70). I will explore how these novelists portray the *reflexive* ethical narrative in which the self-suspicious teacher examines his or her own intellect and conscience as objects of knowledge, by way of “monitoring the quality of his own ethical self-formation” (Jones 60). I will show how these teachers’ authority in the classroom, like their relative textual autonomy, is produced by “reciprocal effects” which prevent the formation of coherent political narratives – Miss Brodie is a freethinking “born Fascist” (Spark 125), Mr. Alfred finds himself defending a society he has already withdrawn from, and Patrick Doyle is an anarchist anchorite, a “Fightin’ Dominie” of the mind, but never the real world. But first, some background.

According to Dave Jones’s “Genealogy of the Urban Schoolteacher”, during a period of transition in the mid nineteenth century, following the failure of the self-regulating, utilitarian “monitorial” school system, it became necessary to cede authority to individual teachers “whose function altered from that of a mechanical instructor to one of a moral exemplar” (60). Before being invested with this new authority, the Good Teacher was subjected to monastic discipline, and taught to accept an ethic of service. “In this new training ... which aroused and heightened self-awareness, the virtues of morality and humility were consistently opposed to the corrosive vices of intellect and arrogance” (61), and schoolteachers were taught to know their place in the society they

were being trained to reform (66). Elevated from the status of overseers and technicians of the classroom “engine of instruction”, as Bentham had conceived it, urban teachers were endowed with a form of managerial authority, but also made subject to that authority: trained to worry about their own fitness for the task, and to internalize the technology of surveillance by keeping tabs on themselves from the perspective of an inspector. Foucault would say the modern teacher wields – and is subject to – a diffuse form of disciplinary authority which combines “the deployment of force [with] the establishment of truth” (*Discipline and Punish* 184). I want now to see how this self-governing authority fits into teachers’ personal ethical narratives of education, and how, in turn, these are represented formally in the novels.

### Writing Discipline

Muriel Spark’s Miss Jean Brodie has a considered understanding of her role as a teacher, and imparts her theory of education with typical forthrightness:

‘The word “education” comes from the root *e* from *ex*, out, and *duco*, I lead. It means a leading out. To me education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil’s soul. ... Now Miss Mackay has accused me of putting ideas into my girls’ heads, but in fact that is her practice and mine is quite the opposite. Never let it be said that I put ideas into your heads. What is the meaning of education, Sandy?’

‘To lead out,’ said Sandy... (36-37)

Sandy’s robotic reply is, of course, heavily ironic: Miss Brodie doesn’t just put ideas into her girls’ heads, effectively she *is* the directing “head” of the corporate “Brodie set”<sup>2</sup>: she does her pupils’ thinking for them, and perfectly embodies the well-proportioned sensibilities she hopes to instil. This unprompted vindication of Miss Brodie’s teaching methods *to the subjects of those methods* is a nice example of the reflexive manoeuvre of self-government mentioned above, by which the teacher inspects herself as an knowledge-object of which she herself is the manager – or, we could as easily say, as a character in a story of which she is also the narrator. This ritual of truth is of little

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<sup>2</sup> “Sandy looked back at her companions, and understood them as a body with Miss Brodie for the head” (30).

pedagogic value; the conclusion to Miss Brodie's demonstration is as pre-ordained as the content of her pupils' souls, and we are not surprised when she emerges from the imagined inquest justified as ever.

The lesson the Brodie set *will* take away from the episode is to do with discipline: they have learned a technique for monitoring their own righteousness, and producing their own correctness. Some of her pupils learn this lesson in do-it-yourself rectitude more readily than others, and make unexpected use of it. Miss Brodie's patrician mode of self-narration becomes a powerful sort of weapon in the inept hands of Sandy and Jenny, who grasp from Miss Brodie's incautious "embroidery" of her love history that all such stories are up for grabs, not predestined in the slightest:

This was the first time the girls had heard of Hugh's artistic leanings.

Sandy puzzled over this and took counsel with Jenny, and it came to them both that Miss Brodie was making her new love story fit the old.

Thereafter the girls listened with double ears and the rest of the class with single. (72)

From then on the girls use their position as subjects *within* the Brodie fable to foment a kind of narrative rebellion against its totality: they re-narrate Miss Brodie's mythologized love history, countering its fixity, innocently wrecking its propriety and setting a precedent, in Sandy's case, for "betraying" one kind of narrative authority with another. Their imaginative re-writing of the Brodie myth, "The Mountain Eyrie", re-casts the tragic chronicle of their teacher's love life to comic effect. The fictionalized "love correspondence" of Miss Brodie registers the utter failure of the teacher to inculcate an "innate sense" (46) of bourgeois decorum; the letters abound with bungled euphemism and groaning clichés. What they also show is that the stamp of Miss Brodie's narrative style has been deeply impressed upon the girls. They don't really appreciate what they're saying, but they know very well how it ought to sound:

If I am in a certain condition I shall place the infant in the care of a worthy shepherd and his wife, and we can discuss it calmly as platonic acquaintances... (73)

The letter concludes by congratulating Mr Lowther “warmly upon [his] sexual intercourse, as well as [his] singing” (74). This tone of rudderless, reckless propriety is the best possible mimicry of Miss Brodie’s example: what has sunk into the girls’ habits of thought is not any substantive lesson about how to behave in a moral or even “well-mannered” way, but this aura of restraint in self-presentation: the ring of correctness. Sandy in particular understands that Miss Brodie’s ceremonial confessions are about producing truths in a way that insulates her from judgment:

Sandy was fascinated by this method of making patterns with facts, and was divided between her admiration for the technique and the pressing need to prove Miss Brodie guilty of misconduct. (75)

The sort of discipline Miss Brodie demands of her Set parallels Spark’s own “penchant for strict authorial control” (McIlvanney 189); and so a three-tier narrative structure is established in which it becomes possible for the rebelling pupils Sandy and Jenny to retaliate against the totalizing Brodie fable, in which they figure as mere puppets. But is any such reversal possible in the gap between Miss Brodie, and the author? The point of Sandy and Jenny’s rewriting of the Miss Brodie myth is to show that, in fact, she does not exercise power over her students, properly speaking; she fosters discipline, a rigorous self-regulation which relies on suspicious introspection, rather than visible force. It operates by means of anxiety: do I possess an “innate sense” of the proper distance to prop open a window (46)? Have I correctly ascertained the supremacy of Giotto over da Vinci (11)? This authority, as the girls show, is constitutively unstable: might the textual authority which the narrator holds over Miss Brodie be similarly limited, and open to the same reciprocal “betrayal”<sup>3</sup> as that between Sandy and Miss Brodie? With Sandy’s mindless rehearsal, Spark is apparently setting Miss Brodie’s well-meaning despotism up for a fall; and yet we can’t quite be sure of the distance between Spark’s own, highly orchestrated narrative style, and Miss Brodie’s “magnificently organized” cast of mind. Perhaps Spark’s God-like narrator will punish Miss Brodie for “her excessive lack of guilt”, for “the general absolution she had assumed to herself” (85) and for “electing her self to grace” (109). The perceptive Sandy

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<sup>3</sup> “If you did not betray us, it is impossible that you should have been betrayed” (126).

“smells” the hubris of Miss Brodie (109) and relishes the Calvinist prospect that it is “God’s pleasure to implant in certain people an erroneous sense of joy and salvation, so that their surprise at the end might be the nastier” (109). But then, it seems the God-like narrator is not beyond the reach of Brodie’s influence: the close resemblance of the teacher’s clipped tones and the style of the omniscient narrator is most striking in a filmic cut-away scene which conflates the truth-making voice of impartial reportage in the novel, with Miss Brodie’s own, extremely correct habits of speaking:

Miss Brodie sat in her defeat and said, ‘In the late autumn of nineteen thirty-one – are you listening Sandy?’

Sandy took her eyes from the hills.

In the late autumn of nineteen thirty-one Miss Brodie was away from school for two weeks... (56)

It seems Miss Brodie does not only put thoughts in her pupils’ heads, she is able somehow to put words into the mouth of the God-narrator. Is this a case of the narrator being “stamped” with Brodiesm in the way Sandy’s letters are, or is Spark here mimicking Miss Brodie’s overbearing preamble, by way of highlighting its officiousness? Perhaps Spark’s narrator is straightforwardly exercising power over the character – making Miss Brodie a pawn to be travestied. Or is this the teacher somehow answering back, stirring her self-regulation to rebellion, her reflexive “technique of the self” overtopping itself to challenge for narrative self-rule? If the novel is an indictment of a God-playing teacher, is the moral point that Miss Brodie has been shown to act too much like a Sparkian narrator – ordering her pupils about in a “magnificently organized” cult of personality; or is Miss Brodie instead punished for getting above her station, narrating herself into a position of *excessive self-government*, for not “knowing her place” in a textual world she should only have managed, but never ruled?

### **The Writing and the Wall**

Writing is, of course, central to what Foucault would call the “power-knowledge relations” of school. In the classroom, the register and the examination stand as emblems of a documentary regime which “places individuals in a field of surveillance and situates them in a network of writing [which] engages [pupils] in a whole mass of documents that



capture and fix them” (*Discipline and Punish* 189). The place of this coercive “power of writing” outside the classroom is at issue in George Friel’s 1972 novel *Mr Alfred M.A.*, originally entitled “The Writing on the Wall”. As critics have already noted, the novel’s interest lies not in its central action but in how it treats language and boundaries, violence and communication (Burgess 236). The school’s code of discipline is compared to a language early on, when the protagonist, himself a failed poet, muses on the place of corporal punishment in a tough urban school:

‘It’s like the language of a country,’ said Mr Alfred from his lonely corner. ‘You’ve got to speak it to be understood.’ (425)

Friel returns to this image of the classroom as a battlefield throughout his work<sup>4</sup>, and his lesson is always the impossibility of making an honorable peace. Mr Alfred describes his own writing in diplomatic terms:

He had called his poems *Negotiations for a Treaty*. He meant a treaty with the reality of philosophers, politicians, economists, scientists and businessmen. ... The poet would insist on his right to live in the independent republic of his imagination. But he would let reality be boss in its territory if it gave up all claims to invade and conquer his. If it didn’t he would organize his own resistance movement. (434-35)

The angelic figure who seems to provide a link between Mr Alfred’s private utopia and the bleak reality of his job is Rose Weipers, a girl pupil for whom he develops a dubious affection. The questionable arrangement by which Rose fetches the teacher’s lunch and sits in his lap in exchange for a kiss on the forehead and a weekly half-crown comes to light through an anonymous letter to the head teacher. It is described as “a rambling piece of vernacular prose without punctuation. Some words were badly misspelled. But the errors were so uncommon they seemed to arise from the writer’s desire to support anonymity by bogus solecisms” (503). The letter’s accusations of “indesent praktises” (505) are baseless, but when Mr Alfred is questioned “he felt guilty enough of what he was charged with”.

There came into his mind the Gospel text that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his

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<sup>4</sup> See, in particular, the story “A Friend of Humanity” in the collection of that title.

heart. He didn't like that text. He thought it unfair. But he knew how he had often looked on Rose. So the anonymous letter could claim the support of the Gospel for what it said about him. (509)

These two pieces of writing – one malicious, counterfeit, and profane, the other divine, true, and sacrosanct – have the effect of a sort of textual pincer movement, and force Mr Alfred into open confrontation with a world of threatening signs.

The battle takes place over the public writing of graffiti, a form of inscrutable language in the novel which does not communicate so much as simply occupy public space, laying claim to territory in the same way Mr Alfred's hoard of quotations lays claim to his own education. The mysterious "YA BASS" signs, unlike Mr Alfred's endless allusions<sup>5</sup>, function not by dialogic reference to other writing, but declare their origins through insistent self-reference: the author's name is often all that differentiates one sign from the next. They are essentially untraceable signatures, whereas Mr Alfred is endlessly citing other writers, referring across the chasm of his own failure. In the novel's hallucinatory climax, Mr Alfred is conquered by the demonic figure of "Tod", a self-publicising anarchist *graffito* who Mr Alfred elliptically calls Coriolanus (564), referring to that traitor's yearning to "stand / As if a man were author of himself" (5.3.36-7), and who appears exactly opposed to the bureaucratic "power of writing" Mr Alfred enforces. The first act of Tod's revolutionary "Action Group" has been to scatter the library catalogues, to undo the "documentary regime" on which relational literary authority depends. This figure of immensely destructive, anarchic power of writing seems to cry out for the civilizing linguistic discipline Mr Alfred represents – but Tod's unaccountable place in the text makes him as slippery and ubiquitous as his graffiti, and thus beyond the reach of a narrative power which operates by compulsory visibility. Not even the omniscient third-person narrator – who has for a single instant been a visible "I" itself (478) – can "capture and fix" the place of Tod in the sea of quotations Mr Alfred

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<sup>5</sup> Friel shares Mr Alfred's penchant for allusion: the teacher's affection for Rose Weipers strongly recalls the figure of Rose La Touche, an adolescent girl John Ruskin tutored and mentored "before deluding himself that she ought to be his wife. Rose fled in horror from the proposal, triggering first in her, and then in the spurned Ruskin, a violent mental collapse" (Schama 236). See also Bell's *Ruskin*. Likewise, an intimation of Mr Alfred M.A.'s essentially Arnoldian approach to education – he too is a civilizing inspector-apostle – is contained in his name.

gushes forth, like an exploded card-catalogue. Friel's own smugly allusive, endlessly punning style is at stake here, too, and the novel's conclusion is haunted by the prospect of communicative breakdown following the loss of a shared literary heritage. Tod exults in his success: "You're all on the way out. All you literary bastards. It's the end of the printed word. Everything's a scribble now" (568). There can be no self-governing republic of the imagination without an orderly and well-stocked cultural commonwealth to draw upon. As he descends into hysterical ravings Mr Alfred faces the prospect of total defeat in the war of culture versus anarchy, and places the blame squarely on the undisciplined, "child-dominated" school:

Taught them language. And the profit on it is. Caliban shall be his own master. ... What the inspectors want. Do-it-yourself poetry. Mathew Arnold was an inspector too. What would he say now? (580)

Literature is Mr Alfred's "refuge from reality", and hence the writing isn't just *on* the wall, as in the novel's original, cautionary title, it *is* the wall. Confusing the authority of knowledge with his own, professional authority (see Freire 73), Mr Alfred's education makes up the protective "bars" which shield him from a menacing, lawless society which has forsaken the civilizing power of the word.

### **Being fenced in by the teachers**

The last teacher I want to mention has a much higher opinion of what he would probably rather call the "non-hierarchical classroom", but a much more pessimistic sense of his part in the repressive, policing function of school. Patrick Doyle is a lad o' pairs turned Fightin' Dominie, who maintains a slender hope that he can have a liberating effect on his pupils, if only he weren't handcuffed by awareness of his complicity in their suppression. If Miss Brodie does not recognize her involvement in social control, Patrick sees very little else – he does not look *through* bars so much as directly and fixedly *at* them. The following passage shows him indulging his taste for bluff self-censure:

P for Patrick Doyle Esquire, a single man, a bachelor; a chap with little or no responsibilities. A teacher who has become totally sickened, absolutely scunnered. A guy who is all too aware of the malevolent nature of his

influence. He is the tool of a dictatorship government. A fellow who receives a greater than average wage for the business of fencing in the children of the suppressed poor. (67)

This self-portrait is narrated in the idiom of objective bureaucratic authority – as if Patrick were filing a report on himself as a schools inspector, from inside another layer of Bentham’s monitorial machine. Patrick’s surveillance of his own ethical formation has malfunctioned: with brutal – if somewhat ostentatious – honesty, he finds himself guilty of Conn’s second charge, of “breathing hypocrisy”. Patrick does not quite repent this sin, but does conclude that he has no business setting an example for children. Or rather, that the only thing he *is* qualified, and indeed obliged to teach children is this very technique of unforgiving self-criticism. Like Miss Brodie, it is important for Patrick to objectify this confessional knowledge, to make an informative “pattern of facts” with it. He actually drills his first-year students in his corruption, and has them recite their parents’ stupidity in entrusting them to his care:

Now, all of yous, all you wee first-yearers, cause that’s what you are, wee first-yearers. You are here being fenced in by us the teachers at the behest of the government in explicit simulation of your parents viz. the suppressed poor.

Repeat after me: We are being fenced in by the teachers

We are being fenced in by the teachers

[...]

in explicit simulation of our fucking parents the silly bastards

Laughter.

Good, good, but cut out that laughing. You’re here to be treated as young would-be adults under terms that are constant to us all; constant to us all. Okay then that last bit: viz. the suppressed poor!

viz. the suppressed poor!

Cheering. (25)

This regimented harangue calls its own structure into question, and the sermonic lecture crumbles into comic irony. But inside the teacher’s own head, holding to a standard of honest self-criticism has more unsettling implications. Eating dinner with his parents,

Patrick is unable to stop examining himself, searching out hidden motivations. He sees all things through a veil of detached suspicion:

How is it all contained? The heads craned over the plates, the three people eating, this man and woman and man, while within the limits of each an intense caterwaul. We are alone! We are isolate beings! The good Lord alone

Fucking bastards

And of course Patrick, going in for a bath to avoid being alone with his da.

Pardon?

And of course Patrick, going in for a bath to avoid being alone with his da.

Is that possible?

Fucking right it is ye kidding! (114)

That “Pardon?” makes us doubt whether this questioning is strictly internal to Patrick’s mind, or whether he’s addressing some inquisitorial third-person narrator. The mixed form allows Patrick to examine himself in the very way he would examine a pupil. During the same meal he examines his dinner:

The fish was a dead animal. It had lain there upon the plate open for inspection, eager to impress s/he who is about to partake. Just please devour me. I’m as good as the next thing you’ll catch. [...] I’m a good wee fish. Courageous and heroic. Its body sliced open for examination by the education authority. Give it a tick. A plus. Five out of ten. Fine for a Glasgow table but don’t send it south to the posher restaurants of England. (114)

We see the extent to which Patrick has internalized the teacher’s “marks out of ten” power of writing, power of ticking. In the novel’s endgame Patrick, like Mr Alfred, finds himself pursued by police in surreal circumstances. He imagines his own status as an object of surveillance to affirm his guilt, thereby freeing him from the duty of self-inspection:

There was a pair of polis across the street who needless to report were observing him quite openly and frankly and not giving a fuck about who was noticing ... They had appeared at the very thought of insurrection ... The polis watching him now in a serious and suspicious manner. About to give chase. Catch the bastard, there he goes. He had started running now instead of later once they were gone and that was daft and really stupid because they would worry as to his veracity or something after that ... daft, fucking daft, but too late, if he was to pause to see what they were doing because them taking that as the sign of guilt, of criminality, of his being suspicious, a suspicious being ... Yes Doyle is dangerous, dangerous to himself. He is dangerous to himself and thus to the weans he teaches on that daily basis. (336-7)

The novel's despairing coda, "Ah fuck off, fuck off" (337) is not directed at the police, but at the unrelenting, self-policing mindset of the teacher. Exhausted by his own doubleness, Patrick's "last words" evoke Joseph K. lying in the quarry, almost relieved after another police-chase (Kafka 126-7) to at last be sentenced, if not judged. This double-barreled imprecation is also directed at the reader: whereas K.'s dying self-accusation "Like a dog!" is uttered "as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him" (Kafka 128), Doyle demands that the curtain fall before he does, and that we shut the book unable to know whether his story exceeds Kelman's narrative. His final "technique of the self" is a revolt against the forces, textual as well as political, which pervert his knowledge - and self-knowledge - to managerial ends.

### **Conclusion: Freedom and Form**

In a famous passage from *Émile*, Rousseau councils the wise teacher to "let [the pupil] always think he is master while you are really master. There is no subjection so complete as that which preserves the forms of freedom; it is thus that the will itself is taken captive" (Rousseau 100). In their structured allocation of knowledge and authority within limited "forms of freedom", such educational relationships are both political and narratological in ways Gramsci and Freire would surely recognize. These novels

demonstrate three Scottish writers' keen awareness of how the precepts of "educational reason", and the textual procedures by which it is justified and practiced, work to "capture and fix" not only pupils, but teachers as well. Muriel Spark allows Miss Brodie to narrate herself into the position of a secular God before allowing a dissenting pupil to expose her hubris: but perhaps she does so because the teacher has risen above her station, like a pupil who talks back, testing the limits of the teacher's authority. If Miss Brodie is an emblem of domination in the guise of freedom, the figment of "Tod" represents illiteracy and barbarism posturing as "cultural revolution" (565) for George Friel. Mr Alfred grasps that there can be no private self-narration without a dialogic public code to support its transactions, and fears that philistine social atomism threatens the collective fund of cultural signs on which every "independent republic" of the mind invisibly depends. Fearful, defensive and bewildered, Mr Alfred sees his students through gaps in a garrison wall, savages bent on destroying what they cannot possess. Patrick Doyle advocates a more existential sort of discipline, and attempts to implant in his pupils a subjectivity which takes itself as the first object of doubt. He hates himself for "performing the fencing-in job on behalf of a society he purports to detest," but his example of remorseless self-suspicion internalizes these very procedures of control-by-inspection. Though his libertarian posture would be the most baldly opposed to Rousseau's doctrine, it is Kelman's character who seems the most thoroughly traduced by an illusion he apprehends, but cannot evade. His efforts to resist and unmask the disciplinary regime end up expanding its sphere, tightening its grip, and destroying his own freedoms. Patrick Doyle, the great demystifier, seems to be "looking through bars" even before he opens his eyes.

According to the educational historian James Scotland, one of the distinguishing features of the Scottish tradition is a kind of formalism, "a stress on verbalism, on the magical powers of words" which can be traced to the national system's Presbyterian inspiration (Scotland 266). Another characteristic impulse is militant educational democracy (265), which makes the school "a battleground of political principle" (266). By attention to the formal dimension of how educational thinking is transmitted *within* Scottish culture in these novels, I hope to have shown how a few modern writers raise

radical questions about education, authority and knowledge in ways germane to both of these traditions, if not to the conventional discourse of nationalist intellectualism.



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