SCOTLAND EXPECTING: GENDER AND NATIONAL IDENTITY
IN ALAN WARNER’S SCOTLAND

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This dissertation examines the constructions of gender and national identity in four of Alan Warner’s novels: *Morvern Callar, These Demented Lands, The Sopranos*, and *The Man Who Walks*. I argue that Warner uses gender identity as the basis for the examination of a Scottish national identity. He uses the metaphor of the body to represent Scotland in devolution. His pregnant females are representative of “Scotland Expecting,” a notion that suggests Scotland is expecting independence from England. I argue that this expectation also involves the search for a genuine Scottish identity that is not marred by the effects of colonization. Warner’s male characters are emasculated and represent Scotland’s mythological past. *The Man Who Walks* suggests that his female characters’ pregnancies result in stillbirths. These stillbirths represent Scotland’s inability to let go of the past in order to move towards a future independent nation.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In April 1997, nearly a year after the publication of Alan Warner’s first novel, *Morvern Callar*, one of the first online literary magazines, *Boldtype*, published an interview with Warner. In this interview Warner says, “The divide between Scotland and England has widened in the past fifteen or so years. When you don’t feel politically represented, you get angry. When you feel alienated and disenfranchised, you get angry. I think that Scotland is headed for independence; it's just a matter of time.”¹ With devolution in the air, it was not highly prophetic of Warner to believe that independence for Scotland was on the horizon. Despite Warner’s nationalistic response to Scotland’s representation in parliament, his novel was not overtly political. Since the interview, Scotland has achieved devolution, and Warner’s novels might seem no more nationalistic in nature than before. Compared to his contemporaries, some critics argue that in Warner’s novels, “nationhood is a somewhat negligible concern and characters are seen to place more importance on group identity at a lower level… than national identity.”²

While Warner’s focus might seem to be on a local rather than a national identity, what these critics fail to see is that Warner’s local is simply a microcosm for all of Scotland. His novels are existential bildungsromans, which take place mainly on Scottish soil. His heroes and heroines suffer the usual ups and downs of growing up, but Warner ends his novels before their final maturation takes place, leaving the

denouement as uncertain. This ambiguous ending symbolizes Scotland’s future. In his four novels, *Morvern Callar*, *These Demented Lands*, *The Sopranos*, and *The Man Who Walks*, Warner projects Scotland’s current condition as a nation without statehood through the metaphor of the female body. In the next four chapters, one discussing each of Warner’s novels, I argue that Warner’s use of the pregnant female represents an expecting Scotland, a nation in labor, a nation between devolution and possible independence. The pregnant females of the novels carry the unknown future of Scotland, while the males are absent or impotent and play little roles in Scotland’s future. Both sexes suffer a form of statelessness in the face of their changing gender and national identity roles brought on by the nation’s current situation and hundreds of years of colonization. Despite his hopeful prediction of Scotland’s future, Warner suggests in his last novel, *The Man Who Walks*, that the progeny of these unknown births culminates in nothing more than a repetition of the past. It is a metaphorical stillbirth, in which Scotland is maimed in its attempt for freedom.

Alan Warner examines national identity in his novels through gender roles. Most critics agree that Warner “breaks up” stereotypical gender roles with his strong female protagonists and weak, feminized males. The majority of Warner’s novels have female narrators and protagonists. In these novels, the women metaphorically usurp the male narrative. The girls in *The Sopranos* appropriate the traditional male narrative: They live lifestyles that are stereotypically lived by men. They are not unlike a female *Trainspotting*, in which a group of girlfriends spend their time getting drunk and looking for guys to have sex with, activities that were formerly associated with men only. In

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3 Leishman uses the term “break up” to discuss Warner’s examination of language, which extends to his playfulness with the instability of gender roles.
*Morvern Callar*, Morvern literally steals her dead boyfriend’s novel by publishing it under her own name. Morvern also shares the same appropriation of “masculine” activities with *The Sopranos*.

Warner does not simply reverse stereotypical gender characteristics, nor does he resort to portraying his characters as genderless or ambiguous. Rather, Warner places the power in his females while retaining their stereotypical femininity. He achieves this through a process that Madeline Kahn calls “narrative transvestism,” in which the male author places his voice in a female narrator, giving her both powers traditionally associated with males and females separately. Through this transvestism, Warner’s females become metaphorical hermaphrodites. Yet there are pitfalls in Warner’s transvestism. Because of Warner’s male presence as author, his narrative often has a voyeuristic quality, whether the voyeur is Warner, a male character, or the reader. He is often condemned for using the female voice because critics see him as placing his male gaze in what used to be a private female narrative discourse. They argue that the bathing scenes, particularly when they involve more than one girl, are realized versions of stereotypical male fantasies rather than realistic episodes. To argue that Warner is not colonizing the female discourse is nearly impossible because Warner is a male author, and despite any interpretation to the contrary, his characters exist and act because his desire makes them so. At the same time, however, it is significant to consider that Warner’s females see themselves as John Berger suggests all women do in his book, *Ways of Seeing*:

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5 Carol Anderson and Zoe Strachan are a few among the many who discuss this voyeurism.
A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself... Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another... *men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.⁶

Many women probably agree with Berger's notion that "women appear." One description, however, cannot define all women, and like any theory that generalizes a group of people, there are those that disagree. Many women find Warner's representations of females to be remarkably true to their nature, claiming that: "His familiarity with female behaviour and private ritual is frankly spooky."⁷ Warner's female protagonists' lengthy descriptions of the application of make-up and specific colors of nail varnish, accompanied with their discussions of outfits, rather than simple articles of clothing, are just a few of the "spooky" familiarities Warner exhibits. In this way, Warner's females retain their femininity, which typically connotes inferiority. Through narrative transvestism, however, they obtain power through their narratives.

Warner's feminine narrators are not the first to exhibit power through their storytelling. A tradition exists of equating power with the pen because of the history of education, which gave men the ability to read and write long before women. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the long-standing metaphor of the penis and the pen, arguing that writers, particularly male writers, traditionally "agree that a literary text is not

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only speech quite literally embodied but also power mysteriously made manifest, made flesh. In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text’s author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. Warner’s males, however, are portrayed as impotent. Thus they have lost this generative power. Because Warner’s females have questionably borrowed this traditional male narrative, it is difficult to argue that they are empowered to write their own narrative.

Yet in Warner’s novels no traditional male narratives exist because Warner portrays them as impotent. The one exception appears to be Morvern’s theft of her dead lover’s novel because he literally wrote a novel. Yet Morvern never reads the novel. Instead she appropriates the power of the telling, rather than the narrative itself. As it is, her lover is dead before the novel even begins. He is only one of many male characters in Warner’s novels who are emasculated by illness, impotence, and death. Warner’s spectrum of narratives, from his first novel to his last, moves from a solely female narrator to solely male. The return to the traditional male narrator suggests a recovery of the male narrative formerly usurped by the female, yet Warner’s males go from fruitless absence to impotent presence. Regardless of whether the reader agrees that Warner’s females appropriate the male narrative, their position is ultimately one that is privileged over his incompetent men. The women in Warner’s novels are not to blame for the feminization of men. The stage was set for this emasculation hundreds of years ago when Scotland gave itself to England.

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The history of Scotland plays an important role in the emasculation of Scottish males, which is represented in Warner’s novels, as well as those of his contemporaries. If we compare Warner to someone like Irvine Welsh, Warner’s characters seem tame. For the most part Warner’s characters do not rant about the colonization of Scotland like Welsh’s character, Mark Renton, does in *Trainspotting*:

> Fuckin failures in a country ay failures. It’s nae good blamin it oan the English fir colonizing us. Ah don’t hate the English. They’re just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can’t even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by. No. We’re ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation. Ah don’t hate the English. They just git oan wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots.⁹

Renton’s use of the word “pick” is relevant when discussing Scotland’s colonization, and Renton’s word choice is not lost on Warner, whose characters realize that their colonization was a choice. They do not overtly discuss their relationship with England as Renton does, but the nationalistic tendencies exist in their narratives.

The history of the union is significant to Warner’s novels as it leads to the contemporary Scottish identity crisis. Scotland entered into a union with England in 1707 after centuries of fighting. Directly before the union, England was afraid of Scotland making alliances with France against England. Scotland, on the other hand, needed England for financial support. Historians argue that the act of union passed because inept Scottish parliament members failed to unite against the union, a union

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they opposed. Those in favor of the union thought they were saving Scotland from financial disaster and war, yet critics and historians argue that they were simply “yes men,” possibly even bribed by or under the influence of the more “important” English parliament. Both arguments issue further blame on the Scots. A large number of Scots were against the union, and riots broke out on the day the act of union was signed; however, Scotland, unlike other colonized nations, recognizably prostituted itself to England instead of fighting.

Being Scottish in the unified Great Britain is difficult, since questions regarding identity are bound to arise. One can either assimilate or attempt to hold on to a Scottishness that existed prior to the union; however, even before the Union of 1707, Scots developed an identity crisis. With the metaphorical division of the highlands and the lowlands, Scotland fashioned a split personality. The highlands are what people have traditionally associated with Scotland: kilts, bagpipes, and misty glens. Many have tried to establish this identity as true Scottishness because the highlanders remained fairly independent for centuries from the anglicized lowlands, which were considered related to, if not synonymous with, England. Yet neither the lowlands, which were dominated by its two large cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow, nor the highlands could be said to be more Scottish than the other.

“This apparent dichotomy is at the heart of Scottish identity.”

Representations of this dual personality are seen throughout Scottish literature: Scott’s *Waverly* and R.L. Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde* are just a few. In 1919 G. Gregory Smith coined the term “Caledonian Antisyzygy,” to represent this twinning or

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combining of opposites. Over the years, writers and scholars alike have readily accepted and used the term in a struggle to represent a genuine Scottishness despite the contradiction of its meaning. Recently Kenneth Simpson explored these opposites, defining the different sides: one half associates with Englishness in order to feel accepted by his “superior” neighbors, while the other associates with extreme Scottishness, railing away at English rule and praising Scottish inventions. This definition only shows one set of binaries among the many typical representations of the “contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability.” Carl MacDougall explores Caledonian Antisyzygy in his search for a Scottish identity, arguing that this yoking of opposites “is a symptom rather than a cause…[and] in whatever form, evidences a lack of national identity, or at least, a confused national identity.” It is not difficult to see the cause behind this oxymoronic character of the Scots with a land metaphorically, and somewhat literally, divided in half, while the Union of 1707 only divided and confused the Scottish identity even more.

With the creation of Great Britain, Scots were somewhat promised equality rather than colonization; however, it was not long before Scotland saw itself below England rather than beside it. Most would agree that Scotland has spent many years defining itself against what it is not, rather than attempting to define what it is. Yet the binary opposite of Englishness did not directly predict Scottishness, and with the English empire dissolving and the achievement of devolution, Scots no longer have a clear

13 Smith 4.
14 MacDougall 11.
definition of the foe and the friend. Like any colonized country, Scotland turned in on itself, struggling with an erased identity, which occurred not only by Scotland’s assimilation into the United Kingdom, but by its own erasure of its previous history: “Instead of continuity, what Scottish culture represents, in this model, is erasure: each stage of development—or degradation—wipes out what went before it and destroys the very possibility of continuity upon which tradition is founded.” Even with the achievement of devolution in 1999, Scotland is a nation without being a state, which further confuses the idea of nationhood.

The search for a genuine Scottish identity is difficult as illustrated in MacDougall’s book *Painting the Forth Bridge*. The title of the book alone mirrors the pointlessness of this search, as the term is a colloquialism connoting a task that is perhaps never-ending or in vain. The Scots are continuously repainting the Forth Bridge; however, because of its size, once they have finished, they must begin again. Thus the painting is never truly completed. MacDougall obviously sees the search for identity represented by this arduous task. Examining the concept of nationhood in general is complicated enough without the addition of the Scottish experience, as Benedict Anderson has made clear: a nation is invariably an imagined entity. He shows that nationhood is a relatively modern concept, one that occurred along with the rise of the modern novel. Cairns Craig continues Anderson’s assertion that the printed narrative was a medium that developed the notion of nationhood. This is true particularly of Scotland, as the Scots have spent most of their lives fruitlessly searching

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for a genuine identity, and without representation in parliament, literature gives them a voice. These narratives give the individual Scot an imagined camaraderie with fellow Scots who they will, in reality, never meet. Their narratives consist of shared histories, observations, and stereotypes about themselves and others, which gives a semblance of national identity. Devolution was a crowning moment in Scottish history because the Scottish parliament was reopened after nearly three hundred years, thus making a shared experience for the Scots. It advances the theory that the Scots are working towards a statehood that works for the individual, a possible independence. With devolution, the Scottish parliament has rights regarding Scottish issues, but Westminster still makes the main decisions regarding foreign affairs and financial policies. The first referendum in 1979 failed to pass; yet the referendum of 1997 was obviously a success. Warner published his second two novels, *These Demented Lands* and *The Sopranos*, in that same year.

Devolution is significant to Warner’s novels, as it suggests a certain sense of freedom from the oppressor, yet it is a freedom that binds. On one hand, Scots share a hope for a future where they are finally represented and free of alienation; however, the future they imagine is yet to occur. Warner’s novels examine this place in between, a nation that is suspended between devolution and possible independence, a nation that is concurrently devolving and evolving. The question remains, into what? Warner’s novels suggest that in a stateless nation, Scots turn to gender identity to help explain their national identity, but previous gender roles prove to be just as unstable as the national character. They are similar to the effects of devolution, which suggest a sense of freedom for creation, yet they are bound to the past physically and mentally.

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17 Craig 32. Craig argues that the nation acts as an institution working for the individual.
Anderson and Craig’s arguments denote that national identity roles grow from shared narratives and history. For the Scots, however, past narratives and histories prove no help in a conception of a new Scotland free of colonization and mythical ghosts because we look to the past for answers to the future, and Scotland’s past remains just as unknown as its future. It has been mythologized, idealized, corrupted, or erased. Men of Scotland’s past, such as William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, have become mythologized heroes through the imaginative narrative. The truth surrounding their lives has been lost. They have, in a sense, become larger than life. The works of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns helped to create and perpetuate these myths of Scottishness. Over the past century they have been blamed for the creation of tartanry: a romanticized, heroic version of Scotland set against the highland backdrop. In his history of Scotland, Fitzroy MacLean says:

…[Scott and Burns] helped to restore to the Scots themselves the self-confidence and self-respect which the events of the past century had done so much to destroy, to dispel the unhappy feeling of inferiority and lost identity which had followed the union. In particular both writers helped to create a new, popular image of Scotland and the Scots, which though not always very closely related to reality, certainly served to put our country and nation back on the map.\textsuperscript{18}

While Scott and Burns succeeded, on one level, to draw the attention of the Scots back to the question of cultural identity, their focus was a romanticized version of Scottish historical events. As a nation constantly fighting against the oppression of England, Scottish males had certain roles to look towards for identity. One could emulate

Englishness or fight against it. William Wallace and Robert the Bruce fulfilled these roles, fighting against the English at a time when the Scots were outnumbered and untrained, which made their experiences all the more legendary in the eyes of the later generations.

With devolution achieved, these roles no longer apply as it suggests that independence is just around the corner. In addition, the crumbling British Empire makes it harder for Scots to rail against a country floundering in failure. Craig argues that, “a fictionalizing of the past… leaves the present trapped in a fog of illusion.”19 It is from inside this fog that Warner attempts his conception of a new Scotland; however, he is unable to forever leave behind the illusory past.

In many ways, Warner recognizes the fictional qualities of Scotland’s past. At the same time, he draws upon their universality for his readers. Warner’s novels are set amidst the highlands, but they are not particularly romanticized as they are in Scott’s and Burns’ works. Warner’s highlands include a multitude of foul objects, such things as garbage, irksome insects, wreckage of war, and dead bodies of humans and animals. His characters are also as far from heroic legends as possible. They are a conglomeration of paradoxes: religious and amoral, beautiful and ugly, greedy and self-sacrificing, and cynical and hopeful. Warner’s portrayal is not particularly realistic, however, as his novels consist of mass exaggerations. His illustration of small town life in Scotland also vehemently rejects the unrealistically sentimental, parochial, and nostalgic version shown in the Kailyard literature of the late nineteenth century, a literature in which rural life was favored, suggesting a return to an idealized Scottishness, in which everyone knew one another, and conflict consisted of a playful

19 Craig 14.
banter between neighbors. Many of Warner’s characters are familiar with the inhabitants in their surrounding rural communities; however, their conflicts are not romanticized and can often be catastrophic.

Warner’s rejection of tartanry and kailyardism is not the first, but merely one in a barrage of reactionary literature that began with George Douglas Brown’s novel, *The House with the Green Shutters*, which was blatantly written in reaction to the Kailyard School. Brown’s novel contained the same environment of rural life, but turned it into a tragedy symbolic of Scotland itself. Fear of the town tyrant emasculates Brown’s men, and they are reduced to gossiping hens. Warner continues Brown’s tradition of the feminized male. While they no longer stand in the backyard swapping stories over a fence, they are sitting around the pub table telling tales. Their work exists only in their narratives. Their roles as the patriarchal breadwinners are negated by their feminization.

The emasculated male is not limited to Warner’s novels, the Scots, or this contemporary period; however, Scottish males suffer a harsher identity crisis than most. Their complacent colonization and dual personality are only capitalized upon by the events of the twentieth century, which saw the crumbling of the British Empire and the rise and fall of Scottish industrialization. Scotland had a boom of industry because of its shipyards and manufacturing of steel, particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When the necessity for these industries ended and they were replaced, Scotland suffered a harsh recession and high unemployment in the latter half of the twentieth century. With the decentralization of former skills deemed more
appropriate for men, women eventually became such a large part of the employed in Scotland that the workforce had become “feminized.”

In the *End of Masculinity*, John MacInnes argues, “Modernity systematically undermines patriarchy.” He goes on to say that the qualities of masculinity (however imagined or based on stereotypes rather than reality) that were once seen as normal are now seen as wrong: “What were once male virtues are often now viewed as masculine vices—part of the ‘crisis’ of masculinity.” When the old masculine roles are no longer accepted, men automatically search for new roles among those that are available: the feminine. This feminine role, however, is also unacceptable because femininity is traditionally associated with inferiority. MacInnes, among others, sees the emasculation of males as a particularly modern concept, although he contends that this current period of male crisis is not the first to have existed. For Scotland, the Union of 1707 is often viewed as emasculation, where “authentic Scottishness was mutilated by the union of the crowns and the union of the parliaments.” In these terms, Scotland is the stereotypical female, helpless to make her own decisions. This old emasculation is compounded by the modern feminization of employment and the rise of feminism. The result is that neither the traditional masculinity nor the new “feminized” masculinity is acceptable for the contemporary Scottish male.

Christopher Whyte examines masculinity as it is represented in modern Scottish novels. He sees this crisis devolving, in part, from the shift in focus in Scotland from the

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20 Jones 58.
22 MacInnes 55.
rural to the urban, arguing that a rural feminization was acceptable, but the urban is not: “The cultural revival in the 1920s … identified country settings as the genuine Scotland… The ‘hegemonic shift’ has meant that urban fiction in Scotland has increasingly and explicitly assumed the burden of national representation.”

Regardless of a rural or urban focus, Whyte claims these origins of representation of Scotland have always belonged to the working class. In this urban fiction the women are working and are no longer feminine, thus causing the male to lose his masculine role in relation to the feminine. This masculinity crisis does not occur as a simple coincidence with the modern notion of the nation. The two are intrinsically linked. Therefore, with the feminization of employment, the high unemployment rate, and the task of representing a nation that is “tied to a dying animal,” it is not difficult to imagine the Scottish male exhibiting both a gender and national identity crisis, as both previous roles have been jeopardized.

The result of this crisis is represented in fiction by what Whyte calls the “hard male.” The hard male basically desires to fill the traditional masculine role and fails. He usually lives in an urban setting, characterized by its harsh realism, a dodgy city (Glasgow or Edinburgh), and amoral or immoral behavior. The hard male frequently has a working class or lower-middle class background and is feminized through his role as a victim of discrimination, which often occurs through a loss of employment. He suffers a “self-doubting masculinity, one which perceive[s] itself as flawed, as lacking affirmation

26 Whyte “Masculinities,” 274.
or validation."²⁷ He is often lying down, “a hero who is incapacitated in some way,” and most often his incapacitation is self-inflicted.²⁸ The reclining male is traditionally associated with a feminine position, horizontal and not erect. This inability to become erect is, of course, also shown by the man’s metaphorical or literal impotence. James Kelman, Alasdair Gray, and William McIlvanney are Whyte’s “originators” of the hard male, whose fiction contains men who lose the things that make them “men,” mainly their jobs, families, and health or strength.

Irvine Welsh and Duncan McLean borrow from this tradition, while Warner applies it and often transcends it. His novels do not usually take place in urban areas, yet his rural settings are a conglomeration of the usual rural lifestyle interspersed with modern technology and other urban characteristics. The behavior of many of his characters is more consistent with those of an urban environment, in which their actions are morally questionable. The combination of these two binaries results in an effect that can only be described as magic realism, but it also illustrates Warner’s tendency to incorporate all of Scotland in a microcosm. His male protagonists are usually educated, yet their education is worthless in a rural setting where there are no roles for intellectuals. This education would normally be accommodating, yet it further feminizes them by its inefficacy in a land more commonly equipped for and represented by the working class. The working class males may fit in the rural setting, but they are unable to provide for their families and hold no power. Many of Warner’s men are maimed or riddled with disease. Others are figuratively and literally impotent despite desire. Even if sexual, they do not complete their prescribed role of insemination. They are ineffectual

²⁷ Whyte “Masculinities,” 279.
²⁸ Whyte “Masculinities,” 274-80.
in their employed positions, sick with disease, impotent, or dead. In a sense, they perform no functions that deem them “men.”

Scottish male authors are not alone in the emasculation of their male characters and the empowerment of their females. Several contemporary novels authored by female Scots contain similarly feminized male characters. The crucifixion of the Aircrash Investigator in Warner’s *These Demented Lands* is not unlike Colin’s mutilation in A.L. Kennedy’s *Looking for the Possible Dance*. These crucifixions are selfish and not sacrifices made for others, while the women truly sacrifice themselves, emerging stronger than the men. Most of the men in Kennedy’s novels are feminized by illness – depression or alcoholism – or they are homosexual, which is the ultimate emasculation of the Scottish male.29 Janice Galloway’s novel, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, contains a major male character who is dead before the novel ever begins, not unlike Warner’s Him in *Morvern Callar*. Both men are powerless in the dead, reclining position, yet they are both very much main characters in the novels, despite their absences. It seems a paradox, however, that Warner’s character, Morvern, is able to keep moving beyond the death of her lover, while Galloway’s is stuck in a deep and atrophied depression. These examples prove that the current masculinity crisis is not simply attributed to male Scottish authors. This predicament should prove to be favorable for women looking to assert their equality and/or authority; yet both sexes seem bound in a

29 The topic of the agent to “blame” for homosexuality in these novels, as well as any in-depth examination of homosexuality in contemporary Scottish literature is beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, Warner’s male characters stereotypically feel ashamed of their homosexual tendencies because they are representations of femininity. Whyte’s argument of self-inflicted emasculation in relation to homosexuality demands looking into, although homosexuality in Scottish novels, in general, has only recently been explored by critics. Berthold Schoene argues that Scottish literature is largely “homophobic,” while Zoe Strachan believes that contemporary authors are beginning to portray homosexuality in a more positive light. In *Everything You Need*, Kennedy portrays male homosexuals in a positive, yet somewhat stereotypical, way: they are domesticated and sensitive, maintaining both mother and fatherly roles. Kennedy’s portrayal also deserves further attention.
moment of change, unable to reconcile the past and present, in order to see the future of their nation.

Many writers say that one writes about what they know, thus male authors do not often write in the voice of the female, nor does the female author write in the voice of the male. According to Warner, however, he does know about women because he spent more time with girls as a teenager than he did with boys. Melissa Denes says:

He seems to have been places boys aren’t invited… It’s not just that Warner is good at the detail: he seems to see girls and young women as the personification of youth, of pure unadulterated life force. The epigraph to *The Sopranos* quotes from *Wuthering Heights*, ‘They do live more in earnest’ and this could be said of any one of Warner’s female characters.30

As Denes explains, this camaraderie with women is obviously not the sole explanation for Warner’s turn to the female as answer to Scotland’s future. It is his vision of women; as he states, “there’s something about their energy that I really like, a certain lack of cynicism.”31 Perhaps this is part of the reason for Warner’s revelation that Scotland’s future lies in the body of pregnant women. In this moment of a disparaged past and an uncertain future, women remain as something fresh, earnest, and positive. They bring hope of a future untouched by an unstable past.

Warner is not the first Scottish author to associate the female body with the land. In Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s *Sunset Song*, Gibbon equates his protagonist, Chris Guthrie, with the land of Scotland. The chapters are titled after the agricultural seasons:

“Ploughing,” “Drilling,” “Seed Time,” and “Harvest.” Just as this cycle of growth occurs in the land, it also occurs in Chris’s body, in which she is prepared, impregnated, and gives birth. Both Gibbon and Warner’s association of the female and the land are not solely delegated to roles of development and growth but also beauty and discovery. The landscape in Warner’s novels is as much a character as the people themselves.

Whether they travel by train, bus, or on foot, Warner’s characters give descriptions of the Scottish landscape that can only be rivaled by his sketches of the female body. Walking on foot gives a description of each small step along the bottom of a glen, which becomes synonymous with the feeling in the mouth when kissing a boy or eating potatoes. Train rides, on the other hand, explain the steps in sections of the Scottish landscape, such as the Central Belt and the border. These are equal to the length of a leg or the curve of a ponytail above a required schoolgirl’s jacket. Scottish Bluebells on the side of a hill or the sparkle in a burn is personified with the same intensity as the color of nail polish or the print on a set of a matching bra and panties. At first glance, Warner’s association of the female body and the land evokes images of colonization, but in Warner’s novels, females hold the key to the future.

Of course it takes both the male and female for conception to occur, but the pregnancies in Warner’s novels have ambiguous paternities, a symbol of Scotland’s fictionalized past. The fathers are unknown or insemination occurs in a sexual act dominated by two women. Once impregnated, the women do not rely on men for support. With Morvern Callar and The Sopranos, the pregnancies do not occur or are not fully discussed until near the novels’ ends, creating an illusion of a beginning with an ambiguous outcome. These Demented Lands takes place throughout Morvern’s
pregnancy, and she gives birth in the final chapter. Although she develops an ostensible alliance with Aircrash Investigator during the term of her pregnancy, he is not there when she gives birth, and despite knowing the sex of her baby, the reader is left with another blurred beginning. Warner's placement of these conceptions is not accidental, for they signify the instability of the current state of the Scots, where the future is unknown. These bodies that are Scotland, impregnated by an unknown father, are the symbols of an expecting Scotland.

With the achievement of devolution, Scots look forward to something happening for Scotland. It is not an expectation built merely on hope, but an anticipation of a perceived right. Warner places this duty in his females who are not educated or traditionally admirable heroines, yet they embrace a type of innocence his males fail to obtain. His women are insecure and searching for stability in a changing world. Unlike Warner’s men, however, they do not cling to a polluted past. They offer a bittersweet acceptance of their new role, which concurrently gives them freedom and binds them to their biologically prescribed function: motherhood. Perhaps Warner views women’s biological purpose as something that remains immune to humanity’s contamination of the world, which ultimately means England’s meddling with the Scots. This notion is further applied to the absence of Warner’s males in the role of procreation: if Scotland is better without England, then women are better without men.

Despite Warner’s attempts to move beyond the mythical past of Scotland, he inevitably falls prey to a similar failure as that of Scott and Burns’ in which he creates his own “myth” of Scotland. Although his novels are not traditionally magic realist fiction, it would be incorrect to dismiss the similarities. Magic realism is common in post-colonial
literature because it offers an alternative to “accepted” perceptions, and Warner is obviously not impervious to Scotland’s role as colonized. He includes odds and ends of history, legends, and other fictions to create an amalgamated present day Scotland, whose future is based, in a sense, on a mythological female, a woman not unlike the mother of Christ.

All the hope Warner places in these women’s wombs, however, is ultimately denied in his fourth novel, *The Man Who Walks*. This novel does not recant his former assertion that women carry the future of Scotland. Instead, Warner suggests that the future may be as much a failure as the past. The main male narrators of his last novel are still emasculated or absent, and the main narrator, Macushla, brings Warner’s metaphorical impotence of past males into a literal fruition. Like the males in Warner’s previous novels, Macushla is unable to obtain the spoils of masculinity—money, power, and women—despite his education and desire. At first glance, *The Man Who Walks* appears to be a novel that simply illustrates the male narrative that is absent in most of Warner’s former novels: a different perspective on the same story. Yet the novel portrays Macushla as the future Scotland because he represents the offspring born to these mythological women. His name, alone, suggests this. It is a Gaelic derivative for “my darling” or “beloved son.”

Macushla’s illegitimacy is also similar to the ambiguous pregnancies in Warner’s former novels: his mother is known, and not unlike an older version of Morvern or one of the girls from *The Sopranos*, and his father remains absent. Macushla is symbolically stillborn, a representation of the failure that Warner suggests is Scotland’s future. He is given a semblance of freedom from his everyday life, in which he simultaneously chases the past and a hopeful future. The conclusion

finds him cheated and ultimately crippled by a symbolic England in his attempt to create a future Scotland. Macushla’s sense of freedom is symbolic of devolution, as he is tied to home by obligation to his mother and employer, yet set on a task that promises to deliver freedom from his lifelong oppression.

Alan Warner’s novels are not the traditional substance of optimism; however, in his troubled allusions, a hope exists for a future Scotland, which is devoid of the alienation and deprivation felt from its colonization under England. In his examination of the contemporary position and the uncertain future of Scotland, Warner simultaneously encompasses and rejects an idealized Scotland, acknowledging the corruption and idealization of the past, yet creating those same types of misrepresentations in his own narratives. Warner holds true to this combination of opposites, the old and new, the real and magical, the hope and despair, all of which mirror the uncertainty of a present day Scotland. In this cloud of confusion, on the cusp of monumental change for a nation presently devoid of statehood, Warner offers an “existential tartanry,” a term that suggests that Scots are aware of the absurdity of their predicament, which includes representations of the mythological and essential Scot, stemming from the likes of Scott and Burns. It also suggests that his characters are obliged to overcome this crisis. Warner’s answer is supplied in the form of pregnant women, who carry the yearning for a better Scotland in their wombs. Warner casts his novels on the legend of a savior for Scotland that comes in the form of an immaculate birth. In the end, however, the birth results in nothing new or hopeful for Scotland, but in something that is as ruinous and deprived as before. Warner’s vision of a future
Scotland is merely that of a dream turned nightmare, complete with past ghosts and an unreachable future.
CHAPTER 2

“DELICIOUS EXPECTATION”: THE CONCEPTION OF MORVERN CALLAR

In an interview with Jackie Kay, a contemporary of Alan Warner’s, she was asked how long a novel will stay with the writer after it is published. Her response was, “although I’ve finished the characters and the book is published, they do tend to linger… They linger like benevolent ghosts.” Her response is poignant because it describes the effect that the character Morvern Callar leaves on the readers of Warner's first novel of the same name. Morvern Callar is a name and title that is both haunting and unfamiliar. The words do not glide easily on the tongue, and they sound utterly foreign. Yet those who have read Warner’s novel do not forget Morvern or her uncanny narrative. She lives on in the mind long after one has put down the novel.

Warner, himself, has told an interviewer that Morvern remains with him, prompting him to say, “If I’m ever stuck, I’ll think, ‘What would Morvern do?’ and it’s always the right answer.” She is a character that has arguably become Warner’s most famous. She has spawned a sequel, a movie, a soundtrack, and the avatars of young, female web bloggers around the world. She is an underground sensation, prompting critics to write of her, “…we live with the delicious expectation that she might make a reappearance in a future novel.” This quotation is significant because it centers on Morvern creating expectation. In Morvern Callar, Warner generates the semblance of a mythological being through the character of Morvern Callar, who is made up of mythic

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tartanry and harsh realities, decomposing traditional roles and disaffected youth.

Warner links the instability of language to that of gender and cultural identity to illustrate a constructed and fractured Scottish identity. Morvern epitomizes this identity and that of Scotland. She and her future child represent Scotland on the cusp of change, an expectant Scotland. On the eve of a possible independence for Scotland, a metaphorical second coming, Warner points to Morvern’s offspring as the hope for a better future for Scotland, but Scotland’s future remains forebodingly ambiguous, with a strong suggestion of failure.

Warner is mostly known for his playfulness with language, which often cloaks his novels’ nationalist attitudes, especially in *Morvern Callar*. Jeremy Scott argues that Warner feels “no responsibility’ to Scotland and its language,” yet his novels imply parallels between the constructs of gender and national identity and those of language. As a novel obsessed with authorship and texts, *Morvern Callar* first sets up a metaphor between the body and the text, and then deconstructs the body of text before moving onto Morvern and the body of Scotland. The body as a corporeal structure is juxtaposed to the fragile or ethereal structure of language, which Warner easily “breaks up.”

Warner uses a combination of Standard English, Scots, and personal vernacular to illustrate that language is not fixed to one category or usage. Morvern does not differentiate her language use between dialogue and narrative. In fact, like many of his contemporaries, Warner does away with the use of quotation marks to indicate dialogue, which furthers the blurring between fixed language and the intentions or

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thoughts that lie behind words. There is also a shift in Morvern’s language between the common vernacular of the Port, the demotic, and the lyrical moments that she often slips into when alone. As Scott notices: “The reader is spectator to a constant tug of war between overarching demotic discourse and an undoubtedly accomplished and beguiling hieratic tone; ie. between the prosaic and the poetic.” 38 The reader does not merely hear the switching of types of language and tones but becomes confused by the meanings that change as the language is moved around from a supposedly fixed center of meaning to a new place containing different sets of meanings. Through these combinations, Warner illustrates the instability of fixed modes of meaning, breaking up the barriers between author and the reader, lower-class and upper-class, and the communal and personal.

Besides his use of combinations of different types of language and the meanings they signify, Warner breaks up the barrier between individual words and meaning by focusing particularly on words that are used to describe the body and its actions and names of people and places. The language of Morvern’s community has a sense of fixedness. Everyone calls the steps leading down to the beach “Jacob’s ladder,” and the Kaledonian Hotel is known merely as the “Kale Onion” because of the missing “D” on the sign. Most everyone, besides Morvern, goes by nicknames, yet Warner shows the propensity of these names to change, however, just as he shows the hotel’s name changing: “Cheese, whos called Suds since he started washing.” 39 These names suggest a more genuine identity, as the names change when the person changes. Nowhere is this more relevant than with the Kale Onion. The name Kaledonian Hotel

38 Scott 9.
suggests a nicer hotel erected for upper class tourists on their visits to the Port, but as the Kale Onion, the name more accurately represents the true nature of the hotel, which is really nothing more than a few rooms above a pub inhabited mainly by working class locals. The word “kale” also mocks the Kailyard School and a consumer heritage based on tartanry. With the “D” removed from Kaledonian, however, the word for Scotland is also removed. Thus, these changing nicknames replace the intrinsic Scottishness and seem to fit only a temporary state of being. Through the use of changing names, Warner illustrates an ever changing meaning behind the symbols and our desire to place meaning in them.

The corporeal existence of place is only rivaled by that of the body, and most of Morvern’s narrative is fixed on trying to describe the body and its movements. Nearly all of the Scots Morvern uses are words used to describe a part of the body or an action: oxter – armpit, coory – to stoop, greet – to cry. Warner makes no use of a Scots dictionary for his readers, purposely leaving non-Scots to wonder or look for meaning through contextual clues. This confusion is continued through Morvern’s adherence to a “teen demotic,” typical teenage prattle or slang, which centers on the body. When they get drunk, they are becoming “mortal,” or when sexually excited, they are “rampant.” These words traditionally mean something else, illustrating their fixed lack of meaning.

Warner furthers the confusion with the inclusion of words particular to his own childhood, unknown to anyone except for Warner and his family. “Bonzo” is a word Morvern uses, a word Warner created as a child when he could not say dustbin. Morvern also makes up her own words for things that do not commonly have names:

40 Scott 13.
“burnt-smell kettle water,” “diddleypush,” and “blood-skin.” She also subverts adjectives into words that barely describe: “the colours are always greenish or goldish, no one’s quite sure.” This subversion of adjectives and her propensity for repeating words or parts of words, such as “trick-trickled,” suggests that the word alone is not enough and must be emphasized to better describe what she means, or as Thomas Strychacz argues, “Language is either inadequate to convey real things or always standing in the way of the real thing.” Warner is aware of this as he plays with the paradox of language, a tool for communicating that is false and misleading, the same communication tool that alienates Morvern from her reader. This juxtaposition of language to a corporeal body is significant. Warner juxtaposes what appears to be an unchanging, physical body to that of a language constantly changing to show the deconstruction of absolutes. Scott argues that Warner’s “motivation is less a form of nationalism than a wish to explore the viability of the demotic as narrative discourse, partly out of a hedonistic delight in its cadences.” Yet Morvern’s reliance on language (particularly Scots) to describe seemingly unchanging bodies and Warner’s metaphor of Morvern as Scotland negates this claim.

Like Scott, few critics admit that Warner’s Morvern Callar is political in nature. David Leishman states, “If Warner’s sign-posts point to a destination, it is not to Scotland’s role in or without the confused geography of the United Kingdom: Warner’s interest decidedly lies in the break-up of language, not the break-up of Britain.”

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42 Dale 18.
44 Scott 9.
45 Leishman 129.
without the metaphor that equates Morvern with Scotland, there are notions of nationalism in *Morvern Callar*, and it is difficult to dismiss the significance of the political events that rose to a head during Warner’s lifetime. With the lobbying for devolution in the latter half of the twentieth-century, Warner was not impervious to the problems surrounding Scotland as a nation without statehood. He wrote his first novel in the mid-nineties amidst the politics surrounding the referendum of 1997, following the decade of Thatcherism, in which Scotland was essentially ignored. It is not coincidence that *Morvern Callar* is set in a rural, working class port town with its heroine a young woman devoid of opportunities, a protagonist who strongly represents those who have been ignored by a British parliament. As a lower-class Scottish citizen and a woman, Morvern maintains the lowest position on the ladder of British hierarchy. John LeBlanc disagrees with critics like Scott and Leishman arguing, “Warner’s *Morvern Callar* does have a political dimension, given its focus on the problems of lower class Britain, women, and Scottish sovereignty.”

Since Scotland is not technically a post-colonial nation and because Morvern does not overtly discuss her identity as a Scottish woman, I see the ease in dismissing Morvern’s role in a post-colonial culture. Like most post-colonial literature, however, *Morvern Callar* is about national identity, albeit veiled. Scotland has endured the effects of post-colonialism, particularly with the elimination of the use of Scots. With the decline of the British Empire, Scots began to reevaluate their cultural identity. They feared a loss of their Scottishness in a world where Britishness or Englishness is favored. As I stated in the introduction, Cairns Craig sees the loss occurring through an erasure of

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Scottish history. Carl MacDougall furthers this idea and suggests that the cause of this erasure partly lies in: “The quest to make ourselves appear acceptable, to appear as urbane and refined as our neighbors,… [which has been] a perpetual feature of Scottish life since the Union of 1707.”⁴⁷ Though Warner’s nationalistic attitudes are not as strong as other writers like James Kelman’s, he continues this tradition of using literature to voice his opinions and concerns about an elusive Scottish identity. Warner purposely points to Morvern’s lack of sophistication instead of cloaking it under a veil of English acceptability.

For many years, Scottish authors have used their texts as political mouthpieces: “Denied more robust political and socioeconomic supports, the Scots have always uniquely depended on language as an emotional bulwark and a primitive act of self-definition.”⁴⁸ Now that devolution has been achieved, the question regarding the future of Scotland’s literature rises: will Scottish literature remain as political as it has been in the past? Morvern Callar seems to predict this possible paradigm shift, and the novel suggests that the shift returns to the examination of gender identity in order to help answer questions regarding national identity. Warner offers the female body as the setting for this examination in which he searches for the answer to Scotland’s statelessness and uncertain future amongst the “most ancient, most intimate, most fundamental of human relations: that of women to men.”⁴⁹

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In *Morvern Callar*, Warner conceives a binary metaphor for Scotland, in which men are Scotland’s past, and women contain Scotland’s future. Morvern’s conception, the first of Warner’s pregnancies, continues throughout his next three novels; therefore, Morvern is, in a sense, Warner’s symbolic Eve. She remains the most important and impressionable of Warner’s female characters, maintaining her existence as the narrator in half of *These Demented Lands*, and bidding mentions in his latter two novels. In the creation of this metaphor, Warner relies on a traditional device in Scottish literature: he equates Morvern’s body with the landscape of Scotland. The most famous of these associations is through Chris Guthrie in *Sunset Song* by Lewis Grassic Gibbon, in which the stages of farming the land are juxtaposed to Chris’s stages of life, in particular her giving birth. This traditional view of the female associated with the farming of the land is, however, somewhat subverted in Warner’s representation of Morvern. She represents the land, but in a different way.

The first and foremost association of Morvern with the land is her name. Morvern is a peninsula in Scotland, one that contains the Port in which Morvern lives. Morvern juxtaposes her ritualistic descriptions of what she does to and with her body to those of the port and the outlying landscape. The land of Scotland, its misty glens and burns, has come to represent Scottishness through the tourist market. Both the land and Morvern’s body are exploited for their beauty, even if the exploitation is self-inflicted. They seemingly exist to be admired, a feast for the eyes. Morvern describes the land in the same way that she describes herself, illustrating the path that the eye takes across the landscape, which is the same path that the eye takes over the curves of her body: “Flickers were coming off the loch and the massive sky seemed filled with a sparkling
dust above those hot summer hills, fattened with plants and trees. You could hear the
great falls down in the gulley. They would be spraying onto ferns there and drops would
be hanging from their tips." The description is sexually charged: the hills are breasts,
the curve of a road or train track resembles a hip or her pubic mound, the plants
become her pubic hair, and the water is urine that drips from the tips of hair. Morvern
and the land become one when she urinates and defecates on the land. She also uses
it to cook and bathe. She and Lanna cover themselves with mud from the burn, crushing
Rowan berries and heather into the mud, their faces covered with symbols of Scotland.

Catherine Claire Thomson argues that the landscape is illustrated as a “living
body” when the text is ambiguous: “I looked out at the landscape moving without any
haste to no bidding at all.” It is unclear if Morvern or the landscape is moving. The
ambiguity is deliberate because Morvern is indistinguishable from the land. Her
description of the train routes that travel across Scotland mimics that of painting her
nails, a routine action like that of a train going back and forth over Scotland. Morvern
does not associate herself with a passenger, but with the driver, whose journey goes
nowhere; it is the routine. When burying Him, Morvern follows the landscape with her
eyes, illustrating the path of the railway. Later, while riding the train, she describes the
same path, “The Complex east towards the Back Settlement with Beinn Mheadhonach
in the distance. We moved west through the pass, the Falls platform above the Turbines
Bar and towards the village beyond the power station.” On her way back from Spain,

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52 Warner 119.
Morvern describes the same path, yet going east from the power station to the village and eventually to the Falls platform. She does not paint her nails for the look but for the routine; every day she paints them, only to pick off the polish and repaint them again. Thus Morvern equates herself with the land, portraying a yearning for structure amidst chaos that both she and the land share in a time characterized by change and uncertainty.

Unlike Chris Guthrie in *Sunset Song*, however, Morvern is a model of contemporary Scotland. While she exists in a patriarchal system, subjugated in the beginning, she overcomes these circumstances, albeit in unconventional ways. She is a representation of Scotland in the new millennium, a Scotland on the crux of change.

Unlike many of his contemporaries who place their fiction in urban settings of Scotland, Warner continues Gibbon’s rural representation; however, his metaphor is not built solely upon working the land. Morvern does not mention any farming, only train drivers and those who work the shops and pubs. Thus the Port, as described by Morvern, is stagnant, just as Morvern is before her lover’s suicide, existing only to continue in a dormant subsistence. The Port is a microcosm for the whole of Scotland. The landscape seems to exist, as Morvern arguably does, to be looked at. She is not tied to the land and its seasons as Chris Guthrie is. Instead she appears transient. She is knowledgeable of the land, but in ways, she appears as a tourist, observing, even routinely, as if she is always seeing it for the first time, describing again and again the same places, as if the reader has not heard it before. It is the same path of the railway, including the Falls platform, the power station, and the village, stretching across the
Scottish landscape. We observe her watching the land, which ultimately calls attention to our observation of her body, branding us as the tourists.

Morvern's surname, like her given name, predicts her association with the land. "Callar" is derived from the Gaelic word "caller." Its meaning revolves around the idea of freshness, as "opposed to what is beginning to corrupt," without taint or decomposition.\textsuperscript{53} The freshness is usually associated with air and water. Both of Morvern's names suggest that she is the symbol of a new or fresh Scotland. When she travels to Spain, Morvern learns that the Spanish meaning of her surname connotes Morvern's silence, an erasure of Scotland's oral tradition, one that is associated with the past. Her name ties her to both her country and her escape, suggesting that Morvern is somehow definitive of Scotland wherever she goes, despite the rootlessness that she also represents. Morvern's name suggests that the men of Scotland are decomposing in their stories of the past, while Morvern remains fresh.

In opposition to Morvern, Warner's men exist as representations of an older Scotland, one that can no longer exist. These men decay in their stagnant past. Morvern symbolically destroys an older Scotland when she drops her boyfriend's corpse onto the model of his home town that he has built in the attic loft of their apartment. The model contains each building, hill, and river. Morvern allows him to crash down on the model, "His toes at the far end of the pass. His face beyond the railway line. His body crushed the hotel with its pointing-up tower at the top of the stairs. The Tree Church on the sgnurr [sharp hill] above where he lay back upon the land."\textsuperscript{54} This description illustrates his association with the land, a false land built on an idealization of Scotland.

\textsuperscript{53} "Callar," The Oxford English Dictionary, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. 1989.
\textsuperscript{54} Warner 56.
frozen in an eternal summer. Later Morvern buries his pieces alongside the mountain. When done, she says, “I yawned a big yawn. Two arms and a leg were buried on the cliff above the sycamore tree and higher up the torso and leg would be helping flower the sheets of bluebells below the dripping rocks. All across the land bits of Him were buried.” There is no differentiation between her yawn, his body, and the bluebells, except that she and the bluebells are alive while he lies dead and in pieces. His body is rendered as mere compost to a flower that is a feminine cousin of the Scottish thistle. His only role in developing Scotland exists by proxy, through Morvern.

These metaphors are complicated by the fact that Warner is a Scottish male writing in the voice of a female. The question remains as to how Morvern can represent a fresh Scotland if she is tied to the old through Warner. Warner uses Morvern through Madeline Kahn’s “narrative transvestism.” She models narrative transvestism on the structure of real-world transvestism:

A transvestite is a man who dresses temporarily and periodically as a woman. He is not a transsexual who wants to be a woman… Neither is he, generally, a homosexual. He is a heterosexual man who reaffirms his masculinity by dressing as a woman. In that dress, he does not become a woman; he becomes a man who is hiding his penis beneath his skirt.

Many female readers believe Warner hides his penis very well; however, it is not a matter of whether Morvern is realistic or not, but what Warner has to gain by placing his

55 Warner 96.
57 Kahn 13.
narrative in her. The simple answer is that Morvern is merely a realization of Warner’s desires and that Warner engages in an act of voyeurism, where he or the reader acts as an observer of moments previously delegated as intimately female. Since transvestism is only temporary, he is not “trapped in the devalued female realm.” Kahn’s answer to the benefit behind narrative transvestism is an exploitation of the instability of gender categories. This “costume,” according to Kahn, illustrates society’s requirement of a gender identity, while it simultaneously shows the inability of the narrator to fit into either categories. Although the position of the narrator is unnatural or affected, it calls to mind the constructed and false nature of gender identity in general, and how gender identity is adaptable and fluid. Warner obviously agrees with this instability, which is illustrated in his playfulness with language. As seen throughout Morvern Callar, the two are inextricably tied together. However, the complex answer behind Warner’s narrative transvestism remains tethered to the complexities of Scottish identity and the contemporary statelessness of Scotland. The contemporary Scottish male exists in a male identity crisis; thus, his traditional patriarchal power is waning or has been obliterated. The novel’s narrative suggests that as the author, Warner no longer has the masculine power of procreation with his metaphorical penis, the pen, unless he wears the mask of the original biological procreator, the female. Warner’s response to this crisis lies with his combination of these constructs. He creates a deity in the female body, consciously relying on traditional constructs of femininity, yet he gives her the appropriated power of the male narrative. The result is Morvern Callar, an ideal and mythic woman, and the only being with the strength and ability to carry the future of

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58 Kahn asserts that the purpose of narrative transvestism is not about realism but what the male author can gain from his masquerade as a female narrator.
59 Kahn 6.
Scotland to its fruition. However, in *Morvern Callar*, Warner is insistent in his ambiguity of what Scotland’s outcome will be. By deliberately setting up constructs that he simultaneously deconstructs, Warner’s hope for the future foretells an outcome that is perhaps unwelcome.

Warner’s deconstruction of gender identities mirrors his deconstruction of national identities. It is not enough that Warner’s characters are Scottish; they must also be either male or female. Kahn argues that men place their narratives in a female voice to “protect a threatened masculinity or maleness.”60 This fitly describes the contemporary Scottish male, whose current emasculation is a result of years of colonization and the modern demise of patriarchal power. With the union of 1707, Scotland basically prostituted itself, joining England for financial reasons, unlike the English who feared the outbreak of war between the two. The union, accompanied with the modern feminization of employment and the rise of feminism, has left the Scottish man questioning his masculinity. Previously accepted models of masculinity have been deemed unacceptable by a culturally aware Scottish society working towards equality for both sexes. The alternative model, a womanly male, negates the traditional model of maleness, which leaves the male emasculated. Neither model seems to fit. Warner portrays the Scottish male as a symbol of old Scotland, where myths of manhood are no longer acceptable. In terms of gender and the body, the Scottish male cannot “get it up” or become erect, leaving him impotent, absent, and perhaps unneeded in the creation of a new Scotland.

The evidence of this emasculation emerges in the male characters in *Morvern Callar*. Most of the men are caricatures of Scotsmen, drunken storytellers. Several of

60 Kahn 27-8.
them are disfigured because of accidents during drunken episodes, illustrating their own roles in their failures as men. Most are flat characters who exist solely as beings to observe Morvern, except the two that fail as her creator and partner in creation.

The closest we come to parentage for Morvern in Morvern Callar is her foster father. He appears to be the strongest of the male characters; however, his position as the working class victim denotes him as the emasculated “hard male” that Christopher Whyte claims is rampant in contemporary Scottish literature. Red Hanna fits Whyte’s stereotype perfectly. His job as train driver is symbolic of his position in life. He continually moves horizontally, never arriving at a higher station. Red Hanna is fired for drinking on the last day of his job before retirement. He claims to be a “victim of injustice and discrimination on a class basis,” unable to support his family aptly even before losing his job. His attempt to give Morvern £20.00 for her trip to Spain appears pathetic, as it is nothing compared to the thousands of pounds that she has already procured on her own. He is impotent as a father, more so because he is not Morvern’s true father, a fact that she emphasizes through her insistence on calling him her “foster father.” Red Hanna’s affair with Lanna gives the impression that he is able to obtain one spoil of masculinity; however, Lanna’s age, her propensity to have sex with nearly anyone, and her relationship to Morvern make her merely a consolation prize rather than a trophy won because of his manly status.

Red Hanna is symbolically replaced when Morvern leaves home to live with her lover, an older man who can support her better than her foster father. On one hand,

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62 Whyte 274-5.
63 Whyte 274.
Morvern’s lover has all the rewards of a true “man.” He has the girl and the money. Yet he is the most emasculated male in *Morvern Callar*. He is dead before the novel begins, and Morvern asserts her power by withholding this knowledge from everyone. Because of his relationship to Morvern, he should, even in absence, maintain a presence; however, his absence does not alert anyone. Morvern fills the space left behind with her own narrative. He remains nameless throughout Morvern’s narrative, which further illustrates his lack of importance. She takes great pains to tell us that Lanna says his name, but she hides it from the reader; he is simply Him. Him’s difference from the other men in the Port lies in the opportunities available to him to move up from the rural, working class of the Port. His parents are affluent, leaving him enough money that he does not have to work. Yet he fails Morvern as a man. Even with opportunities unimaginable to Morvern, he squanders his life. In a town built for a working class lifestyle, Him’s education is ineffectual, which further emasculates him. He has no role to fill in the Port, and his role as Morvern’s lover is also incompetent. When he betrays Morvern with Lanna, he is found to be metaphorically impotent. Even in this traditionally masculine role of a man with several sex partners, he fails. He does not impregnate Lanna with his semen. In fact she drinks it from a condom, making it doubly ineffective in its primary purpose: to impregnate. Thus Him contradicts the implications of his own nickname. The capitalization of the pronoun gives Him the god-like quality of creation, yet he cannot even serve his human quality of reproduction. His suicide is the ultimate emasculation, as it is self-inflicted, causes his absence, and puts him in an eternal position of remaining horizontal—not erect.\(^{64}\) His use of a large meat cleaver to cut his throat symbolizes his attempt to be manly, yet the meat cleaver nearly cuts off his hand,

\(^{64}\) Whyte 279.
the hand that would normally hold the phallic pen. His suicide note reads, “AS LONG AS I’M NOT LOST IN SILENCE.” In this one wish to be a published author after death, he symbolically castrates himself, leaving room for Morvern to usurp his position as progenitor and storyteller, forever silencing him, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest by the traditional association of the penis and the pen. Ironically Morvern achieves her voice when he loses his to death. The complexities of Morvern’s narrative run deep because of the several layers of authorship in the novel: Warner’s, Him’s, and Morvern’s.

It is not difficult to discern that Warner patterns Him’s life after his own. Both grow up to parents who owned a hotel near the Port or Oban. Both are writers and have a love of a wide, eclectic mix of obscure and avant-garde music. Before publishing their novels, both can only wish for posthumous fame through their writing. Like Him, who is afraid to publish his novel, Warner kept Morvern Callar in a box in his room for a year. Warner metaphorically kills himself when Him commits suicide, essentially handing the pen to Morvern Callar. Him’s suicide note suggests as much, “I WAS ALWAYS LOOKING FOR PEACE BUT HERE, YOU TAKE IT INSTEAD.” Morvern usurps Him’s life literally and metaphorically. She uses the money that he leaves behind to live the life he is afraid to lead. She publishes his novel under her name, essentially claiming his progeny as her own, destroying his only attempt at procreation. The effects of this are paradoxical. On one hand Morvern becomes the narrator of her own life. Yet Morvern’s

65 Warner 87.
67 Denes.
68 Warner 87.
narrative is one of appropriation, which arguably makes it inferior. In addition to Morvern’s borrowed narrative, Warner is ultimately the author and her creator. With the death of his symbolic self, however, Warner attempts to transcend the role as author, murdering himself in the narrative instead of remaining the silent author whose name is simply on the cover of the book.

Then what does Morvern have that Warner or Him do not, except a vagina and a womb? The answer lies in Kahn’s assertion that the female created by the male narrative transvestite is ultimately one that is better than any female that exists in reality. She is, essentially, a paradox containing the “best” of both gender characteristics. In the novel, the reader sees Warner’s belief surrounding the fallibility of the Scottish male. Morvern Callar is not a feminist novel at its core, however, because it suggests that procreation is her sole purpose, the pain of childbirth being women’s punishment from god for their thirst for knowledge. Warner’s females are not punished for acquiring knowledge. In fact, most of them, especially Morvern, are generally uneducated. As shown through Him, though, education in Warner’s Scotland is fruitless and emasculating. Thus Morvern need not acquire one. What Warner creates instead is a being that is extremely womanly: a creature that exudes a stereotypical femininity associated with what men desire, a beautiful and openly sexual woman.

Morvern spends most of her narrative describing what she is doing to and with her body, a body that is female in every way. Morvern’s time is spent making her body more “feminine.” She constantly shaves her legs, applies moisturizer, styles her hair,  

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69 Education as ineffectual is illustrated to a much larger degree in Warner’s later novels, The Sopranos and The Man Who Walks. The girls in The Sopranos are further along in high school, but their intellects do not reflect this. The Man Who Walks is very well-read, but he is similar to Him, whose intelligence is ineffectual.
puts on jewelry, and paints her lips and nails with make up and nail polish. She never neglects to tell the reader what she is wearing, particularly when it reveals the sexy parts of her body. These moments provoke the criticism that Morvern is merely a creation of sexual male desire. Because of these tactile descriptions and her sexual activities, critics deem Morvern promiscuous; however, she is not particularly a sexual being. Although the reader learns about her sexual exploits, we are not usually given routinely sexual descriptions. For the most part, Morvern conceals these moments. Her character is sensory, addicted to the texture of the touch, smell, look, and sound of the world around her rather than the sexual. She describes these corporeal characteristics in order to avoid her emotions. This narrative style contradicts her femininity.

Morvern’s descriptions of the way things are or how they occur fits the “heroic code,” a narrative style most often associated with the traditional masculine quality of “emotional restraint.”\(^{70}\) As discussed by Philip Young, the heroic code is a term created in response to Ernest Hemingway’s narrative style and the assertion that he wanted to write about the events that lead to emotions, rather than emotions themselves.\(^{71}\) He suggests that describing the events rather than an “intellectualization of experience” leads to a true moment, the “real thing,” not diluted, changed, or warped by time or the complexities of the perceptive mind. Morvern calls attention to her own narrative aesthetic when she mentions the publishers’ habit of discussing, rather than telling a story. Their discussions end with more questions rather than answers. They are unlike the oral tradition Morvern is used to, where stories end with punch lines. Her taciturn nature leaves her silent unless she is required to speak, which is directly the opposite of

\(^{70}\) Strychacz 141.

\(^{71}\) Philip Young, *Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Rinehart, 1952) 151.
their critical discussions on literature and life. The heroic code also dictates that one must maintain “grace under pressure.” This narrative aesthetic connotes the “feminine trouble of speaking too much.” Morvern avoids her femininity in this way, exhibiting extreme grace when faced with catastrophic events, such as Him’s death and the burying of his body. It is not ironic that the most womanly woman speaks with this same male-centered narrative style, as Morvern is both the mythical perfect female and a reflection of Warner, himself. With Warner’s symbolic death occurring before the novel begins, his attributes are passed onto Morvern as assuredly as she steals Him’s novel and life. Morvern has the ability to live with a freedom and independence that was formerly reserved for men. Him’s money gives her this freedom. Morvern and Him, and ultimately Warner, in Kahn’s words, “emerge as aspects of one character, each owing his or her continued life or power to the other.” By appropriating Him’s life and narrative, Morvern lives the life she desires rather than the one that has been placed before her.

With Warner’s combination of a womanly woman and manly man in one being, it is easy to assume Warner believes the perfect being is an androgynous one, and many critics have likened this to Morvern’s affiliation with the rave culture of the late eighties and early nineties, in which “Gender dissolves on the dance floor.” Critics are often distracted by her seemingly amoral, hip disaffection, bunching Warner into an assembly of contemporary artists intent on portraying the grandiosity of the rave and the androgyny it implies. While this appears to be true when Morvern discusses her

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72 Strychacz 160.
73 Kahn 31. Kahn discusses this aspect in regards to Clarissa and Lovelace in Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa.
indifference to the sex of the bodies touching her on the dance floor, her narrative does not dismiss the sexual differences. She never lets the reader forget her femaleness: “…you could feel how high up your legs the skirt might be with the pounding-pounding of hardcore all around you… You felt the whole side of a face lay against my bare back, between shoulder blades…I put my fingers on the cheeks to feel its maleness: bit beard.”\(^7^5\) With a revealing skirt juxtaposed to a bearded face, the division of the sexes remains intact. For Morvern, the rave acts as a form of escapism from her oppressive life.

The music that leads to this escape is one of the only forms of identity that Morvern allows the reader to see of herself, her chosen identity. The DJ at the raves appears as the originator of Morvern’s escape, but his music remains insignificant in light of Morvern’s own compilations for her dismemberment and burying of Him’s body. Some argue that Morvern appropriates Him’s music along with his novel; however, Morvern insists on informing the reader that much of the music is her own. Immediately after Him’s death, Morvern walks to the phonebox to inform the authorities of his suicide, listening to “He Loved Him Madly” by Miles Davis. She says, “I felt the cassette moving next to one pinkie, and it was that bit where the trumpet comes in for the second time: I walked right past the phonebox. It was the feeling the music gave that made me.”\(^7^6\) She listens to this same song on her return to the Port, a fact that potentially symbolizes Him’s authority over her narrative.\(^7^7\) Yet it pays homage to the beginning of her new life. After all, it is the song that keeps her from calling the police, an act that would have impeded her from appropriating Him’s life. Ultimately Morvern does not

\(^7^5\) Warner 215.
\(^7^6\) Warner 6.
\(^7^7\) Jones 65.
symbolize androgyny but a combination of both male and female affinities, polarized and yet together. Her identity, illustrated through her music, is symbolic of this combination. Morvern places songs that are uniquely hers on the same tape with those that are specifically Him's. The tape remains a combination of paradoxes that do not mesh to form androgyny. This amalgamation of binary opposites resembles the matter of magic realism.

Magic realism has not been attributed to Morvern Callar although it exists as a device commonly used in post-colonial literature. Magic realism is usually associated with Latin-American fiction, yet it has become an apparatus used “in cultures situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions… encoding in it, perhaps, a concept of resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems.” Scotland may not be the first to come to mind when thinking of the edges of literary traditions; however, for many years, Scottish literature remained indistinct from British literature, lost in a system that privileged English over Scottish. In Morvern Callar, Warner weaves a narrative that is remarkably realistic in its description of routines and daily activities, such as eating, bathing, or loading a cart with potatoes. Yet Warner’s magical elements lie somewhere in between fantasy and realism. They are things that could realistically happen but are so horrific, bizarre, or awe-inspiring that they appear dreamlike. Warner’s elements of fantasy include surrealistic descriptions of Morvern watching ants carry her broken nail across the ground and a beach being built on top of a garbage dump. Her description of the raves in Spain is likened by LeBlanc to a “Celtic shaman going beyond the everyday world to what Celtic mythology refers to as the Otherworld.

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and the Underworld.”  

These occurrences in Spain are fantastical; however, Morvern experiences similar moments in her mundane life in Scotland. Soon after Morvern and Lanna’s “fertility dance,” she describes a magical moment, in which she and Lanna jump into the river together:

We hit water. Coldness punched my chest and there was a boom. Lanna pulled her hand away. I opened my eyes and saw:

Bubbles, the copperishness of the water with big bars of sun going through and through. I surfaced beside Lanna. The wave our splash caused was cupping against the cliff and sherbety bubbles were tickling my thighs.

This moment with Lanna evokes the image of another world, an underwater world, one that exists separately from the every day world on land. The magical and the mundane are not delegated solely to Scotland or Spain, as both elements exist in each country. They are separate, and yet together. Perhaps the most fantastic moments of Morvern Callar turn up in dreams or stories. Couris Jean’s tale of how she is struck dumb for four years resembles that of an ancient fairy tale:

… then out the water in front of me in that bluey light, up rose the great white horse moving its head from side to side as it came over the sand towards me and more horses came bursting out the water, rearing up onto the beach, a dozen horses, two dozen horses running in front of me and

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79 LeBlanc 149.
80 Warner 107.
splashing drops of salty water on my face while two score more horses came out the sea, running in front of me and running behind me. Through her story, Couris Jean represents a mythical being, the symbol of a Celtic goddess, in which her ability to speak (first in Gaelic, then English) is restored to her by love through marriage and childbirth.

Couris Jean’s fable resembles those found in the Kailyard School and the myths perpetuated by authorial figures, such as Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns. Both were attempts at reclaiming a Scotland lost to colonization, but both have suffered a backlash of criticism for their false depiction of Scotland and its people. In a sense, Burns and Scott were myth makers, thus Warner’s use of magic realism seems just as disadvantageous for creating a literature that reflects a genuine Scotland. Warner appears aware, however, of these implications in his own myth making. Warner’s inclusion of the seemingly magical and realistic creates a world that embodies all of Scotland, its truths and myths. This draws attention to Scotland’s past, corrupted by colonization and idealization. Warner simultaneously accepts and rejects this past through his use of magic realism, suggesting that myths, however untrue, are invariably a part of the culture since they do exist, even if only in the mind. However, Warner subverts the traditional myth, turning fairy tales upside down into darker, dirtier versions of themselves. Couris Jean’s tale of love restoring her voice ends with her penniless and debilitated by old age. The story of her once young body that feels the wind and spray of the sea is reduced to one of her crawling across the floor to the toilet before her death. When Morvern meets Couris Jean, it is clear that her bleak life suggests

81 Warner 42.
Morvern’s possible future, and yet Morvern learns from Couris Jean’s life. She lives as Couris Jean cannot, embracing her sexuality and voice.

Warner juxtaposes a harsh reality to a fantastical memory, blurring the lines between an existent Scotland and one that could be. The tale spurs Morvern to have a dream in which she replaces Couris Jean, and the horses become a reverse version of the mythical centaur with horse heads attached to men’s bodies. Once again, Warner subverts the myth: the traditional centaur, a wild and lusty being, becomes emasculated in Morvern’s dream. In Freudian terms, the horse represents the sexual drive, and the salty water that hits Couris Jean in the face suggests the spray of semen. Thus in Morvern’s dream, the horses lose their sexuality. Their powerful animal bodies are replaced by those of weak men, and their missing hands connote their own castration. The dream is significant as it is the only dream that Morvern ever narrates, let alone mentions. Morvern’s replacement of Couris Jean in the dream, along with their silences and similar descriptive words (bluey), connotes that Morvern is a newer version of Couris Jean’s mythical goddess. Morvern often mirrors Couris Jean’s nakedness on the beach, particularly when she camps near the burn and when she goes night swimming in Spain. Couris Jean is struck dumb by the sexuality of the horses, while Morvern castrates them and appropriates their ability to speak. The end of the novel does not provide us with Morvern’s fate, as we do not know if she will replicate Couris Jean’s end. We only know that she carries a child in her womb, a possible savior of Scotland. This exaltation of Morvern and her future child illustrates Warner’s ultimate feat of magic realism, yet it also suggests that the mythology of Scotland’s past can perhaps do nothing for its future.
Linking Morvern to Jackie Kay’s use of the word “benevolent” and Warner’s assertion that Morvern always does the right thing contradicts the usual descriptions of Morvern as amoral and hedonistic. Yet there is something in Morvern that symbolizes the divine. She is an amalgamation of a number of deities. There are several references to Morvern’s angelic face, although her angelic qualities are similar to the old man’s in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s “The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings.” His old age, damaged and dirty wings, and unintelligible dialect make him an unlikely angel, and he is immediately dismissed as a true angel, just as Morvern is easily rejected as divine because of her amorality. Warner depicts Morvern defecating, engaging in sexual acts with several people, and dismembering her dead lover’s body. In this way, Morvern remains ultimately human and animalistic, ill-fitted to traditional ideas regarding divine creatures.

Warner, however, does not adhere to tradition, nor does his deity represent merely one religion or belief. According to John LeBlanc, the depiction of Morvern finding her boyfriend’s body resembles the Celtic goddess Morrighan who appears over the dead body of a hero or king, ready to scavenge like a crow. LeBlanc also associates Morvern’s journeys with druidic rites, claiming that her position as a foster child forces her “to wonder from place to place throughout her entire life.” Just as Morvern fits these elements of Celtic mythology, she is likewise associated with many Christian aspects. The references to the raves and her journey throughout Spain reiterate Morvern’s rootlessness. The word “rave,” which is an old Scottish version of the word

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82 LeBlanc gives a greater description of Morvern’s comparisons with the Celtic goddesses Morrighan and Morgen, as well as with Celtic shamans, 146-7. His source is Caitlin Matthews’ *The Elements of the Celtic Tradition* (Rockport, Mass.: Element, 1991).
“rove” or “rover” suggests that of wandering.\(^{83}\) In this instance, Morvern is perhaps a symbol of the wandering Jew, punished for his lack of passion for Christ’s suffering and forced to wander earth until the second coming. This reading suggests Morvern is being punished for her emotional restraint, and her punishment is the same as Eve’s: the pain of childbirth. At the end of the novel, Morvern returns from her adventures with “the child of the raves.”\(^{84}\)

Morvern’s association with multiple spiritual beings is overshadowed by the imagery of her as a Virgin Mary. Him’s suicide letter suggests Morvern’s association with the Virgin: “KEEP YOUR CONSCIENCE IMMACULATE.”\(^{85}\) Morvern’s equality with the land seems contrary to her rootlessness; however, her status as an orphan furthers the metaphor of her divinity, connoting her conception as seemingly immaculate. Mary’s Immaculate Conception refers to her own conception, and not that of her son’s, as she was filled with the grace of God, freeing her from original sin that afflicts all mankind. Morvern’s rootlessness renders her free of the sins of old Scotland. Her isolation from the world in which she lives renders her metaphorically untainted and uncorrupted by life. She is also equated with Scotland through her vision of the burning bush, which is the symbol for the Church of Scotland. When Morvern flees the tourisy rave scene, the first thing she sees is the procession of the Virgin Mary. She compares herself to the model Virgin, noticing that she is the same height and just as pale as Morvern is on her arrival to Spain. The next morning she looks for the Virgin’s face to mirror her own, “looking up at us from the seabed below.”\(^{86}\)

\(^{84}\) Warner 242.
\(^{85}\) Warner 87.
\(^{86}\) Warner 165.
Morvern is not literally a virgin; however, the ambiguity of her child’s paternity likens Morvern’s offspring to a Christ-like figure. Although Morvern engages in several sexual acts during the novel, she never distinctly describes her vagina being penetrated by a penis. When she sacrifices herself to the “disciples,” John and Paul, she only tells us, “I let them do anything to me and tried to make each as satisfied as I could.”\(^{87}\) This sexual act occurs at Christmas, and Morvern often listens to, “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” However, these disciples are not the fathers. When they have gone to sleep, Morvern notices, “The dark sky above the port was empty of any little star.”\(^ {88}\) Besides the lack of a North Star, the presence of Lanna makes the act impure. In fact, most of Morvern’s sexual acts embody an image of masturbation. With the disciples, it is Lanna who excites Morvern. The vision of one of each of their breasts cupped in the boy’s hands gives Morvern masturbation material later in the novel, “I let my hair touch the floor just as I made it happen, remembering.”\(^ {89}\)

The only other act of sex occurs with the boy from room 1022. The grief over his mother’s death somewhat equates him with Morvern. When she describes their lovemaking, she only describes the way she feels: the hair on her back or the wetness of her vagina. The boy in 1022 has disappeared by morning, giving him a mystical quality; yet, he is not the father. Morvern associates the used condom with blood, suggesting menstruation: a doubly failed pregnancy. She also throws the used condom into the night sky, watching the semen spill out: “It sparkled for split seconds and some separated then it slowly floated down into the darkness.”\(^ {90}\) There is a hint that his

\(^{87}\) Warner 28.
\(^{88}\) Warner 28.
\(^{89}\) Warner 51.
\(^{90}\) Warner 143.
semen will produce a likeness of the North Star, yet it dies. The child’s father remains unknown to the reader. Her pregnancy does not occur until years after these sexual acts, making all of them irrelevant; however, the images surrounding each suggest the possibility that Morvern then denies. Each scene literally or metaphorically suggests that she only makes love to versions of herself, implying that Morvern is, in a sense, both mother and father.

Morvern’s numerous descriptions of swimming and bathing are symbolic of her baptizing herself again and again. These performances of her own baptism render her both the mother and the creator, once again emphasizing her role as the subject and author of her own narrative and the epitome of the ideal being. John LeBlanc says Warner paradoxically intertwines “Celtic sensibility and the electronic age,” two ages that share matriarchal characters. He sees this budding matriarchy, this “return of the goddess,” caused by the fact that “patriarchal paradigms… have become dysfunctional.” Thus there appears a hope for Morvern and for Scotland. She returns home to the island where her foster mother is buried; the land is on the verge of giving birth to a new Scotland, which occurs simultaneously with Morvern’s insemination, forming the semblance of a matriarchal trinity. Jason Cowley relates this suggestion of hope with a quotation from Walt Whitman’s preface to Leaves of Grass, “America is the greatest poem,” suggesting that Warner and his contemporaries must feel the same way about Scotland: “that their contemporary Scotland is a huge open continent of discovery, a place to be reclaimed and revitalized. Nothing is outside our remit, they

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91 LeBlanc 146.
92 LeBlanc 146
seem to say, nothing is too decayed, dirty or marginal." Warner’s combination of these binaries in Morvern is ideal, yet, as Kahn suggests, this narrative transvestism and the paradoxical qualities that it contains are only temporary. This “pastiche of wildly contrasting cultural elements,” as LeBlanc calls it, projects a feeling that along with patriarchy, this, too, will become dysfunctional. This amalgamation of opposites standing on the verge of change is reminiscent of the gyre in W.B. Yeats' poem, “The Second Coming”: “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold.” Morvern’s return to Scotland with a child of unknown paternity culminates in a scene that remains ambiguous in its suggestion of the coming of a Christ-like figure and further echoes Yeats:

That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? 

Despite this hope, Warner’s evoking of Yeats’ poem gives an ominous suggestion that Morvern’s child could be that of a beast, rather than a savior, suggesting that a new Scotland will inevitably fail to rise as an emancipated state once more.

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95 Yeats.
CHAPTER 3
A SAVIOR IS BORN: GESTATION IN THESE DEMENTED LANDS

The Scots take pride in their many inventions and discoveries. The telephone, steamship, and penicillin are only a few among their many creations. After hundreds of years of colonization and a subsequent loss of identity, however, the Scots seem unable to reinvent or create a Scottish national identity. In his novels, Alan Warner discusses this loss and the inevitable attempt at reclamation through an examination of gender identity. Morvern Callar presents the conception of a possible future Scottish identity, and his second novel, These Demented Lands, imparts the gestation and birth of it. At the end of Morvern Callar, we find Morvern back in Scotland and pregnant with the “child of the raves.” It is the end of winter and the beginning of spring as Morvern sets out for the island of Mull, where she will develop and give birth to her child, the future of Scotland. These Demented Lands spans this period of gestation, which marks what attributes and elements will make up the future Scotland. With the birth of Scotland’s potential savior, Morvern brings hope to a new Scotland. Yet Warner weaves a web of future hope mixed with past despair. As Morvern crosses the land of her ambiguous ancestry to her symbolic Bethlehem, she travels through a vortex of texts resonating with allusions to the past. Although the history of Scotland is made up of myths, half-truths, and an idealization of Scottishness, These Demented Lands suggests that a Scottish identity cannot exist without a past, however fallible or false it proves to be. Warner continues from Morvern Callar his combination of paradoxes and binaries, in which life and death, myth and reality, love and war, past and future, empirical rule and simple, pastoral life are channeled into Morvern’s unborn child.
through her narrative. All of this leads up to the birth of Morvern’s child, on the eve of a millennium at the edge of the world, where humanity is judged for its inability to let go of the past, and is doomed to suffer a future that is no better than the past.

Alan Warner uses areas of Scotland as a microcosm for the whole of Scotland. Nowhere is this done to a greater degree than on the island of Mull in These Demented Lands. Morvern’s return to Mull is bittersweet. She must travel near her hometown of the Port and through her former lover’s hometown, but she cannot stay in either, as both are symbolic of her former life under a patriarchal system. At the end of Morvern Callar, Morvern stops at the Tree Church on her way to Mull, a symbolic visitation of Him’s grave. Him may have been her one chance at true love, as Morvern suggests in These Demented Lands, yet it is through her appropriation of Him’s failed life that Morvern has come to this situation. Thus, she cannot stay in his hometown as it would suggest that he maintains some control over her future and the child that she carries. Neither does Morvern return to the Port, where her foster father lives. Her ties to him have always been arbitrary, as Red Hanna was never literally her father. Morvern, on the other hand, does have ties to Mull, the island on which Morvern’s foster mother lies buried. In Morvern Callar, Morvern often mentions the vision of Mull in the distance, “constantly confronted by her foster mother’s absence.” In fact, the memory of her foster mother’s funeral is one of very few memories that Morvern relates to the reader. Her only other mother figure, Couris Jean, is also dead before the end of Morvern Callar. Sophy Dale asserts that Morvern’s actions in Morvern Callar suggest “a long for the maternal, both a mourning for her own mother(s) and an intimation of her own motherhood, yet to come

in the book’s story. This lends more weight to Warner’s suggestion that Morvern’s pregnancy is a deliberate choice—a desire to become the mother she has lacked herself.97

Morvern’s return to this particular island somewhat confirms Dale’s statement, particularly because Morvern chooses the place next to her foster mother’s grave to reside, despite the dangers it potentially holds. The setting of the island as both the birthplace for Morvern’s child and burial place of her mother gives the illusion that the island is a symbol of a matriarchy. Yet it signifies both her isolation and a tie to her mother. In this way, Morvern’s choice of the island lies in its paradoxical significance as both foreign and familiar. The island remains remote and linked to the past, particularly with the devastation of the Highland Clearances. Mull’s later inhabitants were able to capitalize on the fishing industry until the railroad in Oban drew away many of Mull’s fisherman. It is a land subsisting on its rurality and tourism although Mull remains merely a stopping place for tourists on their way to the Isle of Iona. In this way, Mull is caught up in a history it cannot escape, simultaneously idealized and traumatized by it. Mull exists today as a place seemingly tucked away from the modern world. Yet Warner’s Mull is also urbanized with its raves, satellites, and airstrips. The island’s duality suggests that neither the urban cities nor the rural countryside of Scotland can alone give birth to the future. As in Morvern Callar, Warner again alludes to W.B. Yeats’ “The Second Coming,” implying the center cannot hold, that it is the margin that brings forth the new millennium. It is on the edge of this margin that Morvern chooses to make her nest.

97 Dale 60-1. Dale argues that Morvern’s swimming at dawn with the young girls in order to see the statue of the Virgin’s burned face is proof of her desire.
This change in landscape in which Morvern walks also represents a change in Morvern, herself. Her role as mother in *These Demented Lands* is also contradictory. It is both binding and rewarding. She is reduced to the domestic female sphere and her biological function as mother. As a mother, she shelves her former hedonistic role in order to supply a place of security, comfort, and protection for her unborn child. Her first motherly act occurs at the very beginning of the novel on the ferry crossing to the island when she saves the little blonde girl, an act more selfless than any we have seen Morvern do before, especially since the girl’s added weight nearly drowns Morvern. When juxtaposed with the opening of *Morvern Callar*, in which she leaves the body of her lover to decay on their scullery floor, *These Demented Lands* suggests a change in Morvern. Her maternal role is demonstrated over and over as she travels across the island to the Drome Hotel—her future Bethlehem. She trips in the darkness, afraid for the life inside her: “I swore in fright and clamped my arms over tum-tum; I curled, twisted head and looked into the face of the Devil.” Morvern quickly realizes that it is not the Devil, but a cow; however, Morvern’s concern is for her child rather than for herself. She carries the kitbag in front of her belly and later insists on tying her jumper around her waist, as if these items will protect her child from the “devious” male vultures that inhabit the island. Morvern’s nesting place lies next to her foster mother’s grave, one in which we know from *Morvern Callar*, contains money that Morvern desperately needs. Previously we would expect Morvern to salvage the money from the grave, yet Morvern leaves the grave untouched, even thwarting John Brotherhood of his own plans to rob the grave by lying to him, a dangerous act for someone intent on staying alive.

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The history of Mull negates Morvern’s desire to birth her child in a matriarchal setting. As the stopping place on the way to Iona, Mull consequently incorporates the image of a male-dominated society. Iona is known as the birthplace of Christianity since Saint Columba reintroduced Christianity to Scotland in the middle ages. He founded a monastic center of worship and learning on Iona that became the destination of pilgrimages in the years to come. The history of Saint Columba and his male-dominated group of followers is not lost on Warner, who places Morvern’s nesting ground near the center of this patriarchy. Warner’s male-dominated society on Mull is suggestive of Columba and his men; however, Warner’s society is a crude version of the original.

Morvern’s destination of Mull appears contradictory to her desire to protect the creature growing in her womb because the island is inhabited by a cornucopia of scheming men who rule the island with their greed and lust. Besides Morvern, the island offers no other significant female characters. Those that exist remain flat characters, subservient to the men who lead or employ them. The foremost of these devious men is John Brotherhood, a man commonly called Satan or the Devil, a symbolic opponent against Morvern’s divinity. The isolation of Mull facilitates Brotherhood’s ruling of the island, invoking a sense of lawlessness and danger. Tales of his maliciousness meet Morvern’s ears many times over before she gets to the Drome Hotel, which is often called his “lair.” The inhabitants of the island tolerate Brotherhood’s cruelty because of his money, which gives him power, particularly in this land lacking in wealth or law. The other men on the island exist as his lackeys, in one form or another, his “brotherhood” of men. His name paradoxically evokes the image of the brotherhood of Christianity and the group of disorderly men that Brotherhood leads. With Brotherhood as ruler, the
island appears as a microcosm of humanity: a combination of the imperial ruler, his subjects, the tourists, and the salvagers. These men seem to oppose Warner’s previous portrayal of men as ineffectual and feminized; yet Morvern’s arrival sheds light on the truth of their patriarchal system, a fallacy which exists as an attempt to reclaim their lost masculinity.

John Brotherhood’s overabundance of cruelty implies a notion of self-defense. He learns and inherits his “kingdom” from his father, who now lays crippled and rotting because of AIDS. John’s familial inheritance connotes a distorted version of John 3.16, which describes the lord giving up his only son, suggesting John will ascend to his father’s role, a role that ends in destruction. Both have tried to appropriate a British identity, making money on the ravaging of the land during war. Brotherhood attempts to reclaim his Scottish identity, yet only when it is beneficial as a tourist device. He uses the “quaint” Scottish word “lass” to entertain his hotel guests, yet he fails in this attempt: “The word [is] said in that false way of those who have lost the accent and try to reclaim it.”99 His failure as a man leaves him bent on destroying those whom he finds inferior, particularly women. Like Satan, he uses deception and words for weapons. Morvern remains undaunted by Brotherhood’s attempt to destroy her, ironically using her taciturn nature, a stereotypical male characteristic, against his linguistic efforts. When hearing his tales of treachery, Morvern belittles him, “That’s no so naughty; just being first to do it in Toytown.”100 He banishes her to the caravan, insisting that Morvern play the role of the domesticated woman in order to repay her debts to him; however, she manages to first ensnare him with her beauty, using her body as ammunition, in order to get what

99 Warner 67.
100 Warner 41.
she wants. Even when Morvern seemingly loses to him because of her lack of money, and is banished to the female sphere of cooking and cleaning, he does not truly control Morvern. She bides her time in a semblance of hell in order to protect her unborn child, which lies growing and maturing in her womb. Brotherhood’s ultimate desire is to play father to Morvern’s child. He tells her, “… when you think back to your times here you can think of me, playing happy families… I can imagine our wedding night.” This sacred role is denied to him as it is to any of the male characters in Warner's novel. Morvern emasculates him with his own choice of weapon: words, “Just go rampant on me if you want but it’ll be from behind; my rear-end out, with me curled on my side and, though I doubt it, if there’s anything down there in the piston department you'll be going real easy.” Morvern follows this with the regulation that he must wear at least two condoms. She denies her seemingly inferior position by making demands and reducing him to homosexual or animalistic sexual positions, suggesting he is the one diseased, like his father. Her words crack his masculine guise, showing that Morvern is a better player in his masculine game of words, while she simultaneously fills the role as the ultimate not-man: mother. In the end, Morvern is the cunning one, using his greed to facilitate the destruction of his kingdom and his own death. Morvern remains the paradoxical embodiment of feminine motherhood and masculine strength and cunning.

The other men on Mull are not a threat to Morvern’s child; however, their devious natures give the impression that they are a patriarchal superpower to be reckoned with and will rise up at Brotherhood’s demise. Like their ostensible leader, though, these men eventually defeat themselves. They are, in a sense, merely pawns in a battle

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101 Warner 176-7.
between Brotherhood and Morvern. Chef MacBeth only exists to do Brotherhood’s bidding. MacBeth is not allowed to pilot a real plane and is reduced to flying a toy plane. Like his namesake, he is undone at the request of others. The forester no longer plants trees but drags them up for money, negating his purpose. The newlyweds are cuckolded by Brotherhood, blind to his devious nature and distracted by Morvern. Even Brotherhood’s father is undone by his own sexual deviancy.

In These Demented Lands, Brotherhood and his brethren suffer a different type of masculinity crisis than the men in Morvern Callar. They are all scavengers of some sort, giving rise to a traditional characteristic of post-colonial societies, one in which the colonized become the colonizer. The men on Mull fight amongst each other, forgetting to hate their real enemy. In this way, they are merely playing out a prescribed role, trying to assert their manhood and ultimately failing at it. Their core failings as men, however, lie in their inability to let go of the past.

Knifegrinder tells Morvern, “youre a hunter and scavenger like the rest that come here from all ends of the galaxy.” He is only one of the men on Mull who exists on rummaged remains of the past. The student cattledrovers use a fifteenth-century map of the island, while the forester relies on his horse, Charlie, for the removal of a forest. These are more than eccentric characters; their preoccupation with the past lies deeper than the physical objects that tie them to it. As Scotsmen they are faced with an extinct notion of manhood built on mythic or idealized figures of the past. The rebellious Scottish warrior fighting against the English no longer has a place to exist, especially with the achievement of devolution and the deterioration of the British Empire. The Scottish farmer, once idealized in Kailyard literature, is a vanishing role in a modern

103 Warner 47.
Scotland, and the newer, hard urban male is unacceptable in a society struggling for equality against the patriarchy of the past. In a position of statelessness, literally and metaphorically, the men of Mull hold on to salvaged relics. The fifteenth-century map of Mull signifies a Scotland prior to the union with England. The forester’s horse, Charlie, refuses to give up his old role from the mainland, consistently eluding the forester. The horse’s name suggests the elusive kingship of Bonnie Prince Charlie, and the failure of his final Jacobean uprising. The Devil’s Advocate’s sole purpose is discrediting the canonization of past saints, saints that are no longer remembered or called upon. The Argonaut’s home is a collection of salvage; his “golden fleece” the scavenged propeller of Alpha Whiskey, a plane that crashed ten years prior to the time of the novel. Its importance is noted by no one except the Aircrash Investigator, whose obsession with the wreckage is his sole purpose for survival. Despite his illegitimate position as an investigator, he lives on the island under this guise, staying in the room once inhabited by the Alpha Whiskey pilot. He lives in the past, searching for the reason for the crash, the reason for his own failure as a man. He is a ghost without a name, walking the island under arbitrary signs: “the Aircrash Investigator, or the Failed Screenwriter, or the Man From The Department of Transport.”

He is always walking, never getting anywhere. Morvern first mentions him through his description of a road sign that is damaged. This sign suggests that Scotland is “full of broken signs,” and these men, particularly Aircrash Investigator, are also broken signs.

The men of These Demented Lands further Warner’s emasculation of the Scottish male and his lack of role in the future, stemming from his inability to let go of

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104 Warner 16.
the past. Carl MacDougall describes this use of the past as a “convenient retreat from the present,” a common failure of the Scots, who look to myths and representations of Scottishness that are rooted in a past that does not reflect contemporary Scotland. Morvern remains the symbol of a fresh Scotland on a crux of change, juxtaposed to these deteriorating men of Scotland’s past. Her arrival on the island creates an upheaval amongst the men, as she resembles a statue of a deity, existing to be looked at and admired despite her eventual domesticated position as a maid and cook. Her destination of this island is paradoxical since it exists in a past tense, while Morvern carries the future in her. Once again, Warner relies on the cohabitation of binaries. The greatest of these binaries lies in the splitting of the narrative between Morvern’s new Scotland and the Aircrash Investigator’s obsession with the past.

Morvern is not the sole narrator of These Demented Lands, which is a vital difference from Morvern Callar, since her appropriation of the male narrative bestows upon her a power, a power that she maintains through the absence and death of the male. Her narrative aesthetic is also much changed, containing a semblance of her emotional restraint, but also including some explanations of her feelings. This change suggests Morvern has receded into the traditional female role, in which she talks too much; however, this is not entirely true. While we know more about how Morvern feels, she still focuses on the description of the world around her, but her illustrious subject is no longer her singular self. She tries to explain “The Indifferent Feeling” and “The Rudder Feeling,” but her descriptions of the feelings are descriptions of other people or an object in the midst of what she believes is the same feeling:

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You see The Indifferent Feeling mostly in… middle-aged guys who live not pretending anymore. They come in, a wee-bit-overweight guy, grey hairs here and there, money in the pockets but no concessions to fashion—in other words to women. He needs a new jacket so he finds one that fits, throws it on the counter by the till. The assistant tells him the jacket comes in three other colours; the man shrugs … not even looking at the assistant girl who is young, dead pretty and… carefully dressed—cause that still has meaning. She’s got lies she can still believe in, but our friend, well that shrug shows it all.107

In this quotation, Morvern illustrates her feelings by describing others. She still seems to believe in the inability of words to portray the “real thing,” but her descriptions are slightly deeper, engaging the reader in characters more similar to ourselves. Prior to These Demented Lands, it is likely that Morvern would have denied the reader any definition of “The Indifferent Feeling.” David Leishman says, “Language is still something with which Morvern has to battle to convey meaning, but her perception of the nature of the struggle has been honed.”108

Despite these changes, Morvern still remains distant from the reader, which gives her narrative a paradoxical mood; it is both familiar and foreign. This new semblance of accessibility to her narrative is done so through her gradual use of others as subjects and her attempts at being grammatically correct when she uses quotation marks and says things such as, “jacket’s… jackets’: do you need these comma

107 Warner 12-3.
108 Leishman 116.
things??”

In this way, Morvern appears a more responsible and observant narrator and writer. Her transformation is consistent with the end of *Morvern Callar* where we see her scribbling in her notebook. Leishman believes that Morvern’s breaking with English and speaking solely in Spanish for several years is what allows her to “return to it with a less intimidated attitude.” While this may be true, it appears that her roving about the world appears to have been supplemented with an education or at least a reading list to accompany her music. Her many references include post-modernism; the Greek mythological characters, Icarus and Prometheus; and the novels *Pincher Martin* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Morvern’s inclusion of the detailed speech made by Brotherhood, yet spoken by the cattledrover leader, demonstrates that Morvern has the ability to write a “standard” literary narrative complete with feelings and dramatic emphasis, yet she chooses her own style, a style that she has not yet perfected. In this sense, Warner demonstrates that Morvern has made the appropriated male narrative into her own. The criticisms of her former narrative, which lingered voyeuristically on her own body, no longer exist. We are no longer simply watching Morvern, but we are traveling with her on her journey of motherhood. Morvern’s journey is interrupted by the Aircrash Investigator’s narrative, which both negates and supplements Morvern’s newfound denial of her sensuality.

The role of Warner as the voyeur is replaced by the Aircrash Investigator in many ways. The Aircrash Investigator’s narrative allows the reader to observe Morvern in a way that is similar to her descriptions of her self in *Morvern Callar*. He notices her breath in the air, the wideness of her eyes, and the polish on her nails. His narrative

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109 Warner 5.
110 Leishman 123.
makes up nearly half of the novel, which consists of two separate texts of Morvern’s manuscript, two of the Aircrash Investigator’s, and a letter Morvern writes to her foster father. Aircrash Investigator’s narrative is unlike Morvern’s in the way that he uses standardized literary techniques, such as metaphors or similes for description: “Her legs were like long splashes from a bucket,” while Morvern’s narrative is still fairly straightforward. Morvern rarely uses metaphors and often still relies on her own creation of vague adjectives: pinkish. She simply entitles her sections, “First Night,” “Second Night,” and “Third Night,” while Aircrash Investigator supplies dates for his sections. He also interjects his narrative with thoughts written in italics. This distinction from the other parts of his narrative implies that these thoughts are deeper and more in earnest: “I hope she stands up to you, hope she is worthy, her only defence might be her virtue. If she has any.” Yet they still exist as if written for others to read, public thoughts that only hint at what is underneath. At first, he and his manuscript appear to be a standard narrative juxtaposed to Morvern’s “non-standard” one, but as the novel progresses, the differences diminish. The dates he supplies for his manuscript sections are arbitrarily assigned, making them just as ambiguous as Morvern’s assignments. When his or Morvern’s narrative is interrupted, the other’s picks up at the point it was left off.

On closer inspection, both narrators are intent on describing the landscape and events rather than analyzing the emotions that result. The differences in their narratives exist, but they are subtle. Aircrash Investigator takes Warner’s place, often explaining how he and the other men in the room stare at Morvern as she walks into the room; however, his purpose as narrator is not simply as voyeur. With the presence of the

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111 Warner 115.
112 Warner 101
Aircrash Investigator, Warner asserts his authority over Morvern’s narrative, yet Aircrash Investigator’s narrative is ultimately two-fold: one that illustrates the fear and doubt Scottish men feel about the loss of their masculinity and one that supplements Morvern’s narrative.

Aircrash Investigator, while present and alive, does not differ greatly from the character of Him, and consequently Warner, in Morvern Callar. He exists as the most emasculated of the males on Mull. Like Him, Aircrash Investigator remains nameless throughout the novel, or exists under a number of arbitrarily assigned names. He mentions being ill several times, and though he feels stirred by his passion for Morvern, he is impotent in wooing her, admitting that he has given up on achieving the objects of his affection: “Now a longing I thought I’d conquered years before slapped into me, as if it were a sheet blown on a vast beach.”113 Brotherhood holds him at his mercy and reduces him to an inferior employee, yet his emasculation is self-inflicted. Unlike many of the other men, Aircrash Investigator seems disappointed yet resigned to his emasculation, ordering dessert specifically before Morvern despite his knowledge that it is a stereotypical feminine thing to do. It is so feminine in fact, that even Morvern chooses not to have dessert. His job as the investigator of the plane crash is a fiction he has created that renders him penniless and ineffectual against Brotherhood. He continues the charade despite everyone’s knowledge of his lie. He mentions the possibility of having a “ruptured rectum,” which signifies his feminization at the hands of the “manlier” Brotherhood. Aircrash Investigator’s obsession with the plane crash results in his symbolic crucifixion, in which the propeller of Alpha Whisky is tied across his back and a jellyfish represents his crown of thorns. The plane references an old Scotland.

113 Warner 85.
governed by the symbol of the aggressive male and the whisky that is both his downfall and a cultural icon of his land. Aircrash Investigator carries old Scotland on his back, saturated and branded, punishment for his inability to let go. When Morvern shows up, he immediately recognizes her as a symbol contradictory to his own: “The moment she appeared on that skyline she was a threat to me and my cause.” Morvern’s newness emphasizes his illness and emasculation, yet it is Morvern that rescues him and ultimately chooses him as a mate.

Aircrash Investigator, though emasculated, represents another side of Morvern. Their narratives are ultimately one narrative. Just as Warner created Morvern as an amalgamation of himself and the ultimate female through his narrative transvestism in Morvern Callar, Aircrash Investigator exists as a symbolic Warner and Him. Morvern mentions several times that his name is something like “Warmer,” and like Warner, in real life, Aircrash Investigator becomes a train driver at the end of the novel. Both arrive on the island in a similar way, with little money, obtaining touristy clothes from the Boat Chandler’s. Both are equal scavengers of Brotherhood’s hotel and become a pair banished to the employee caravan. When they prepare to go to the “Drag Party” as a couple, Morvern makes him shave his legs, a favorite ritual of her own, which none of the others in drag bother to do. He, at the same time, discusses her nail varnish and the testing of foundation shades on the wrist, intimate female subjects that he is unlikely, as a man, to know or chat about. He tells her, “…you want to show me you and I are the same, you’ve come to reveal the truth.” It is his “Indifference” that attracts her an indifference not unlike Him’s indifference for his own life. Despite their pairing, Aircrash

\[114\] Warner 79.  
\[115\] Warner 129.
Investigator always remains an emasculated male, inferior to Morvern and her goal of childbirth. She removes the propeller from his back, saving his life, but denying him the aspiring role of martyr. She enables the sunken wreckage of Alpha Whiskey to be exhumed from the ocean, bringing his quest to completion. Yet he remains as ineffectual in his presence as Him does in his absence. He will not drive a real train but the toy train at the zoo. Reminiscent of Him’s failure as a writer and fascination with his model train, Morvern recalls Aircrash Investigator typing his reports on a toy typewriter, and she often calls him “the failed writer.” He is not much different from Chef MacBeth and his toy plane, or any of the other men in “Toytown,” always playing, never being. Aircrash Investigator identifies his own role: “My mouth: one day a glut of dark blood will jerk up into my throat and finish my latest babbling, mid-sentence. I will rake and spit out a clot only to have another one rise up in me, like a birth.” His birth, however, is that of blood and death, an aborted fetus, ending his ability to generate. It is Morvern that finishes the narrative with her letter, and she remains the sole creator.

Aircrash Investigator, Him, and Warner remain emasculated men in Morvern’s life, failing as progenitors. Morvern remains both mother and author of the “greatest story every told,” that of the birth of the savior. In the nativity that Morvern’s narrative implies, Aircrash Investigator is simply a Joseph, a passive stand-in father, merely human and at the mercy of the divine. Morvern arrives on the island like a deity springing forth from a watery womb. People gasp when they see her. The forester compares meeting her with a poetic moment: “…a girl in woods at darkness looking as divine as you… Divine!!!!… Come striding out of the dark East with some water stars

116 Warner 115.
over your shoulder.” Many ask the question, “Where on earth did you come from?” The significance of the expression resonates in the word “earth,” suggesting Morvern is not of this earth. She knows everything that is to happen, as if it is preordained and has been told to her by an angel. Morvern’s pilgrimage to Mull is reminiscent of the pilgrimages to Iona, the “womb” of Christianity, and likens her to the Virgin Mary. Morvern travels a rough road, and like Mary, she wearily arrives at a place not fit for the birth of a savior. Morvern gives birth at the very beginning of a new millennium, in a Volvo trunk full of hay, underneath a symbolic North Star, which is literally “Nam the Dam hovering overhead.” The three men who accompany the birth are not your typical wise men. The Devil’s Advocate follows the North Star to see the birth of a new saint or savior. The forester delivers Morvern’s child, finally helping bring new life into the world, which is the purpose of his occupation. Up until the birth, he negates his occupation as a forester by tearing down the trees on Mull rather than planting them. Argonauth, the final wise man, observes the treasure more precious than his propeller or Golden Fleece: Morvern’s child. All three wise men fulfill their duties with the birth of the savior, while Brotherhood dies, and his kingdom burns to the ground. The symbolic battle between good and evil is done and good has won. The men still fail as creators, trying to grasp a power only given to the divine, to Morvern. Morvern refers to each of these men as an Icarus character, coming too close to the sun, or a Prometheus, who desires to give birth to man and fails. They are mere observers of Morvern’s ability to create.

\[117\] Warner 38.  
\[118\] Warner 105.  
\[119\] Warner 212.
Just as Morvern appropriated Him’s life in *Morvern Callar*, she appropriates another male text in *These Demented Lands*: the nativity. The narrative transvestism in *These Demented Lands* is complicated by the inclusion of both Morvern and the Aircrash Investigator’s narratives. It is perhaps a novel more obsessed with texts than *Morvern Callar* and equally, if not more, complex. On one level, Warner has killed himself in the prequel, yet he appears again through Aircrash Investigator. The correlation is done so subtly, however, that one could easily dismiss Warner’s presence altogether. In fact, Warner’s narrative transvestism is remarkably like those novels of the eighteenth-century, epistolary novels written by men through female voices. The structure of *These Demented Lands* suggests that an editor has found two separate manuscripts and a letter, most likely written as journal entries, and published them exactly as they were found: “Rather than a slick ‘cut and paste’ job redolent of simple word-processing, the spurious editor’s note is here to reveal the text has been roughly handled and only reconstituted through ‘tearing and gluing.’” There are several notes where the editor interrupts the narrative, not to explain or pass judgment on the author as is the case in many of the novels of the eighteenth-century, but to describe the actual corporeal journal, where pages have been glued in or words are too incoherent to be transcribed. The letter, the last of the texts, appears as a letter to Morvern’s foster father, and it remarkably sums up both texts. It also includes several letters in itself; however, they are so outlandish or random that they appear a possible contrivance, done so to hurt her father rather than to depict events that occurred in reality. By posing

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120 Madeline Kahn, *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*, Reading Women Writing (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991). Kahn discusses Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson in particular, although most novels at the time were written in the epistolary style.

121 Leishman 115.
as the printer of the book, Warner achieves the role of an “amanuensis,… [who] leads us to suspend our awareness of the author outside of the text in favor of the authority of the letter writers inside the text. By absenting himself, he heightens the intensity of our reading experience.”¹²² This intimacy of correspondence involves us in Morvern’s and Aircrash Investigator’s “self-invention.”¹²³ The power of the first-person narrator forms a “pact with the reader,” taking us into the writer’s confidence, causing us to accept the story without question.¹²⁴ Because there is no forward by the author or introduction regarding the condition in which the manuscripts were found, the reader tends to dismiss Warner’s role as the primary author and editor of both manuscripts, the letter, the posters, and signs.

Morvern’s continuous references to William Golding’s Pincher Martin, which suggests that Morvern dies on the ferry crossing at the beginning of the novel, contradicts Warner’s amanuensis role. Golding’s novel features the character Pincher Martin, a man who dies at the beginning of the novel but does not know he has died. Neither does the reader realize this until the end of the novel, when we find his existence has been in his own mind. Pincher finds himself stranded on a rock awaiting saving, yet we find that all that he believes to be happening is actually in his mind: fragments remembered from his former life. Because of his greed and refusal to let go of life, Pincher is banished to purgatory. The rock itself resembles a tooth that previously caused him pain. Morvern mentions this tooth lying in the ocean near the mainland, recognizing its semblance to the island of Mull. Although the reference to the

¹²² Kahn 152-3. Kahn discusses Richardson posing as Clarissa’s “scribbling” amanuensis or the printer of the book, Clarissa.
¹²³ Kahn 153. Kahn suggests that “epistolary self-invention” is the result of Richardson’s posings.
¹²⁴ MacDougall 26-7.
rock, among others, are clues that Pincher has died, most readers dismiss their significance, believing *Pincher Martin* to be a novel illustrating man’s will to survive. At the same time, they dismiss the sinful qualities that exist in Pincher, reducing them to those of all of mankind. Warner’s reference to this novel is not the only reason to believe Morvern might have died in the beginning of *These Demented Lands*. As she and the Grainger girl sink into the waters, Morvern says, “I was sorry for our death,” and as they resurface she notices, “Bruised-blue sky above was now dark though I was fairly positive there was still a little light when we’d gone under.”¹²⁵ Even later, Morvern tells the forester, “I’ve kicked myself free the earth long ago... I don’t count.”¹²⁶ The ferry that sinks below Morvern is named *Psalm 23*, perhaps the most famous verse of the bible spoken before one’s death. The suggestion is more than just a question of whether or not Morvern is dead; it also questions her morality.

Before Morvern’s pregnancy in *Morvern Callar*, Morvern can easily be described as a character not unlike that of Pincher. She has a lust for life, living hedonistically or amorally, and like Pincher, we find ourselves hard put to blame her after we discover the harshness of her life, which consists of great loss and alienation. Like Pincher, Morvern is a thief, “pinching” or stealing from Him. The angel or the Lord, himself, who comes to judge Pincher before his “second” death, is not unlike the little Grainger girl that Morvern saves. Both are versions of Pincher or Morvern’s own faces with one injured eye, suggesting their blindness to their own sins. The little girl appears again near the end of *These Demented Lands* on a video looking at Morvern, claiming, “It was

¹²⁵ Warner 6.  
¹²⁶ Warner 39.
her who saved me but she’s not nice.”

It appears as a final judgment on Morvern before her giving birth, before she is carried away from her Bethlehem in a coffin. It is significant that the Argonaut, known as the body finder on the island, speaks to Morvern of her own death. She attempts to shoot him, a refusal to believe that resembles Pincher’s refusal to be destroyed at his own death. Yet Morvern is ultimately not the murderous sinner that Pincher is. Her greed is for the life of her child and not her own. Unlike Pincher, who loses his first name Christopher, Morvern remains the “Christ-bearer” of Scotland.

Warner never negates the suggestion that Morvern is dead, unless one considers the narrative to be truly a set of manuscripts found and published, in which case, Morvern could not have written after her death. In his later novel, The Man Who Walks, the narrator mentions Morvern’s death: “It was always said she was the best bit of real writer that ever rose above these bogs and a hot-buttered looker of a girl too that ended up and got her tender bits shared out and devoured down among the crabs and fishes.”

Looking in These Demented Lands alone, however, there is no secure evidence. If one is to believe these suggestions and the narrator in Warner’s later novel in conjunction with this epistolary style, the novel then draws more attention to Warner’s role as the author, illustrating that Morvern and Aircrash Investigator are merely disguises of his authority.

This authority rejects his own metaphor as women giving birth to a future Scotland, when it is actually Warner, himself, that is doing so. The question then rises as to how Warner sees women as the key to a future, independent Scotland and a national Scottish identity if he is the ultimate progenitor of the narrative.

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127 Warner 200.
129 Kahn 153.
As usual, Warner does not deal in absolutes, but in a twinning of opposites not unlike the stereotypical Scottish consciousness, which consists of the “Siamese twins of the Scottish psyche: resolve and despair.”¹³⁰ In order to believe what Warner suggests in his novels, and in particular These Demented Lands, we must look at Warner’s choice of narrative transvestism. Since Warner cannot change his gender in real life, he does so through his narrative. It is only through his disguise as Morvern that a future Scotland is possible, which is understandable when we see that he believes women to generally lack cynicism. They continue to walk towards a destination, no matter how desolate the lands, and living life to the fullest. Alternately, his men, including the character of himself, remain powerless, inadequate, and walking in circles. True, the men of These Demented Lands have been upgraded from their absences in Morvern Callar, but only to passive helpmates at most. Warner presents a kind of nightmarish version of the nativity, in which Morvern, her wise men, Joseph, and even the North Star are sinister versions of the originals. His appropriation and revision of the nativity suggests that myths indeed include a key to our existence, yet they are ultimately unstable at representing the truth of our histories. His inclusion of opposites gives rise to the idea that a future Scotland and the identity of its people cannot exist without these past myths and false histories. The setting is apocalyptic, at the end of a millennium, on an island characterized by the primal urges of its inhabitants. It suggests the end of the world, rather than a beginning, a day of condemnation, rather than redemption for the Scottish. Tom Adair writes of These Demented Lands, “[It is] a generation rediscovering, reinventing their native place, what we are witnessing is a tradition in evolution, accruing evidence, staging a rally, bringing hope… of something lasting and

substantial." As post-colonial theorists have suggested, however, it is difficult to assume that post-colonial countries can reinvent themselves, having not known for so long who they were to begin with, if ever an identity existed. Thus, there is the notion that one must leave behind the false identities, those that exist solely as a result of colonization and do not ring true to one's true notion of self. *These Demented Lands* does not quite answer this question of reinvention versus creation. The divinity does give birth to a female child, which furthers Warner's suggestion that the future savior of Scotland comes in the guise of a woman. His projection for the future, however, is not altogether "something lasting and substantial," as Tom Adair suggests. Instead, Warner shows the gestation of the female savior taking place during Morvern's habitation on Mull. This gestation is the period of development for Morvern's child and consequently the future of Scotland, thus everything that occurs on the island serves as food for the future, which not only includes the myths of the past and the sins of the Scots, but also the despair of those defeated at Culloden. Morvern's stay on the island is not unlike the symbolic purgatory that existed after the Highland Clearances. Neither she nor her child can escape the past.

Despite giving the reader a notion of hope, Warner ultimately gives us a future too embedded in the past to move towards an independent Scotland or a proper Scottish identity. It is an identity and a future that revels in its suffering rather than letting the suffering go, suggesting that we will always be looking for an independent Scotland that does not exist. MacDougall argues that "if identity is to become a recognisable part of our national life, it will have to be educated into our consciousness and into the

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131 Adair 66.
consciousness of successive generations, as surely as it has been educated out.”\textsuperscript{132} In *These Demented Lands*, there can be no successors born to men who “dream of the nuclear explosion when they make love and secretly crave the destruction of their own children.”\textsuperscript{133} It is a future that is dead before it has life to truly begin, just as Morvern dies before she has a chance to give birth. Warner equates Morvern giving birth with Scotland’s devolution, perhaps just another of many false hopes and starts. Through her narrative, Morvern, like Pincher Martin, refuses death, which at least gives us hope that if Morvern has failed, perhaps another female deity will rise in her place.

\textsuperscript{132} MacDougal 196.  
\textsuperscript{133} Warner 57.
CHAPTER 4
THE EM(BODY)MENT OF EXPECTATION IN THE SOPRANOS

Alan Warner’s The Sopranos is a novel about great expectations, the expectations of a group of catholic school girls and their leaders on their way to Edinburgh for a choir competition, yet the expectations of the girls and those of their choir leaders are two different things. As the blurb on the back of the Jonathan Cape paperback edition of the novel says, “… after the fifth bottle of alco-pop up the back of the bus it’s clear all is not going to go to plan, for anyone.” Warner evokes several meanings of the word expecting. His characters not only believe that something will occur, but they also demand it as a perceived right. Warner’s most significant use of expectation, though, is that of pregnancy. The pregnant body in Warner’s The Sopranos is not just a single female body, but a body of young girls, as he, once again, relies on the metaphor of the body and the land of Scotland. This group of young girls operates as a single entity in the same way that their many voices make a single voice in their choir or the people of a nation make up the body politic. They are independent, yet working as one body. Just as Scotland expects a changing nation with the achievement of devolution, these girls also anticipate their lives will change. They are the youth who carry the hope for tomorrow. The notion of Morvern Caller’s expectations as the woman to birth a savior of Scotland, is made fully obvious through these girls in Warner’s third novel, which takes place in a time period prior to Morvern Callar. The plans, or expectations, of the girls are not dissimilar to those of Scotland, a nation just on the verge of devolution at the time the novel was written and published. The girls have a history and the potential to do well; they have the voices of angels, yet their desires and

hopes will inevitably be unrealized. Once again, Warner explores gender and national identity roles and relies on the metaphor of pregnancy in his feminine heroines as an expecting Scotland. At first *The Sopranos* gives the illusion of an expecting Scotland coming to fruition because of the youth of its heroines; however, it is the negative connotation of expectation that looms over the narrative; the expectation that is disappointed.

At first glance *The Sopranos* does not seem to fit in an obvious grouping of Alan Warner’s other three novels, *Morvern Callar*, *These Demented Lands*, and *The Man Who Walks*, all of which are mainly first person narratives set around one or two isolated characters. It is not just the setting of Oban and its usual cast of characters that confirms *The Sopranos* place among Warner’s other novels, but the time in which the novel takes place warrants its importance among the loosely bound trilogy. Despite the ambiguity of Morvern’s death in *These Demented Lands*, Warner confirms her death in *The Man Who Walks*. Whether or not Morvern actually lives or dies, we never hear from her again, thus her quest to birth the future of Scotland seems a failed effort.

Warner takes a step back in *The Sopranos* to a time before our knowledge of Morvern and before her lover has committed suicide. In fact Him is a possible snogging partner for Manda, until Michelle tells her, “He’s spoken for. Bit of a quiet case, he lives wi yon Morvern from the Superstore, used to live up the Scheme.”\(^{135}\) This very small detail is perhaps one of the most important in the novel’s as it implies that with this group of girls, the hope for Scotland’s future is again restored.

*The Sopranos* is akin to a prequel of *Morvern Callar*. By going back in time, the readers of *The Sopranos* have technically not yet encountered Morvern’s sufferings or

\(^{135}\) Warner 270.
hardships, nor her failure. Neither have the sopranos experienced this loss, not yet been held up to a standard of divinity, nor do they live in isolation. They appear to have that unbridled optimism and lack of cynicism so scarce in Morvern. They do live, perhaps “in more earnest,” as the epigraph to the novel suggests, un tarnished by the symbols and mythological heroes of Scotland’s past. One could say that they represent what MacDougall speaks of when he defines a contemporary view of Scottish identity, one that is not “perceived or defined in any narrow way,” as he believes Scotland has begun to “strip away the symbols and build on those things that are indigenous.” With Warner’s metaphorical time travel, he presents a new body for the incubation of Scotland’s future, a plural body with more possibilities for success.

Like Morvern, the sopranos are a symbol of the land. Yet, there are differences between this body of girls and the lone body of Morvern. While they, for the most part, suffer the same financial difficulties and lack of prospects for a future life in the Port, they have much more than Morvern, beginning with their births. The majority of the girls have their parents, or at least one of them, and siblings. Most importantly, however, they have each other. Despite the social hierarchy of the town, they have all carved out a niche for themselves in the Port, and the thing that binds them together is their attendance at Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and, of course, their high-pitched voices. They have not had to quit school in order to work a dead-end job, and while they may not have enough money to do as they please, they are not burdened with paying rent and bills. They have not yet found love, which has so far saved them the heartache of

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losing it. These differences suggest that their bodies are not damaged, nor are they tied to the past, as Morvern inevitably is through her love of Him.

As characters, the sopranos are more accessible to the reader than Morvern. They lack her taciturnity and emotional restraint. If anything, they represent the stereotypical teenage girls we experience in our daily lives: inseparable from their friends and obsessed with boys, music, clothes, drinking, and smoking. It is through this more realistic and familiar portrayal that the reader feels a kinship with these girls. We do not hold them at arm’s length as we do Morvern, unsure of her feelings and thoughts. It strikes the reader that once again, “Warner’s bravura ear for hormonal banter is the kind of thing that makes critics spout about how the writing is ‘as though someone had hidden microphones on actual teenage girls’ persons.’”

While these girls differ greatly from our previous heroine, they share many of her characteristics. The girls contain the same binaries that we find in Morvern. They exhibit both extreme girlishness and a superiority over the emasculated Scottish male.

The sopranos are a group of girls who attend a Catholic girls’ school and are joined by their age and ability to sing. In some ways, they are mere caricatures of young girls wearing shortened tartan school skirts, discussing Wonderbras and Bon Jovi, and maintaining their status as the cool kids at school. As he does with Morvern, Warner gives us detailed descriptions of the girls’ obsessions with clothes and make-up, down to the color and shape of a neckline, never allowing us to forget the teenage desire to be both accepted and an individual: a tongue ring separates and colored shoe laces conjoin. Despite their status as a group, hierarchies still exist among the sopranos.

based on several subjects: length of legs, sexual exploits, ability to sing, and money. Most of these trifle-based rules remain unspoken, implying the usual “social, familial, and sexual discomfort”\textsuperscript{138} that we have come to label “teenage angst.”

Yet for all this girlishness, these girls travel in packs, not unlike wolves devouring that which lies in their tracks: men, alcohol, and food. “Indeed, as they make their way through the day, they fuck and fight, strike poses and crack wise with all the tuffness of any handful of boy heroes, as unsensible and unsentimental as they wanna be.”\textsuperscript{139}

Although young and subject to their parents and the nuns’ rules, the girls are the true rulers of their lives, doing as they please. Despite Sister Condron’s warnings, they dress how they want. They curse, drink, smoke, and make out with guys. They get into The Mantrap despite being underage. Even in Edinburgh, they continue to light Sambuca shots in their mouths and use the pub’s phone despite the disapproving bartenders.

Joshua Clover does not believe that Warner portrays the sopranos as positive, strong-willed females. He says they are

not real girls so much as a boyish dream to that effect, party-hearty gal-pals urgent to get played when the party’s over. For all their spunk, the sexualized babes are without fail submissive to the core: one fantasizes only about guys coming in her face, another’s mortal wish is to be tied up. Even the coolest of the crowd, who spends the story troping dykeward, ends up the bottom to a posh classmate’s top.\textsuperscript{140}

Clover fails to realize the power behind these girls’ desires for dyke-hood, bondage, and “come” in their faces. These negative associations are based on the polarity of gender

\textsuperscript{138} Clover.
\textsuperscript{139} Clover.
\textsuperscript{140} Clover.
differences that do not take into account Warner’s purpose behind his narrative transvestism. Each girl in the sopranos represents a female who is better than any realistic human individual. Just like Morvern, they encompass the best of both gender traits; they contain extreme girlishness and autonomy. Through Warner’s narrative transvestism, they transcend the traditional division between gender roles, paradoxically accepting and rejecting them. They do not possess both qualities in a way that makes them androgynous. In a way they are symbolic hermaphrodites who seem unafraid of their binary traits. As we have seen, Warner relies heavily on the traditional metaphors of penis and the pen in his obsession with texts and authorship. Christopher Whyte says, “Presumably the concept of a genderless imagination would prove deeply disturbing because it would destroy the link between textual power and social power attributed to possessors of a penis.”\textsuperscript{141} The girls, however, are not genderless, but rather \textit{genderfull}. It is this amalgamation of traits that gives the sopranos the power to give birth to the future of Scotland against the ineffectual males of the novel.

The men in \textit{The Sopranos} are portrayed somewhat differently than those in \textit{Morvern Callar} or \textit{These Demented Lands}. In \textit{The Sopranos} we see the men through the eyes of several girls and their range of perspectives. Morvern’s perspective is, of course, solitary and usually one of indifference. The only male perspective we encounter up to \textit{The Sopranos} is the Aircrash Investigator’s, which is distorted by his own lack of self-esteem. As a group, however, the sopranos see the boys in a way that is similar to Morvern’s. They are objects, rather than subjects, mere opportunities to raise a girl’s status among her friends, rather than opportunities to love. Their views represent the reversal of the traditional male gaze, in which the female is reduced to a

body rather than a thinking and feeling human being. Giving handjobs and blowjobs raises a girl’s “coolness” in the group. In this way, they have usurped the male narrative and reversed the traditional double-standard, in which a girl who has many sexual encounters is considered a whore, while the boy with the same number of feats becomes a hero. Their numerous discussions of their sexual feats ape the stereotypical masculine sexual tale, all the while dehumanizing them. Warner has symbolically given them the penis—the pen—to play with as they choose.

These men embody Warner’s stereotypical emasculated male through absence, death, or impotence. As with Warner’s other novels, the sopranos are not solely to blame for the feminization of the men. Theirs is a self-inflicted emasculation. Manda’s father makes so little money that he is reduced to a slave to his “poor Cleopatra,” bathing in her dirty bathwater, while Chelle’s dad is completely absent, having drowned in the ocean. The two boys they pick up in Edinburgh only exist as nicknames, Velcro Suit and The Divorcee. Velcro Suit symbolically castrates himself when he nearly chops off his toe trying to impress the girls. Before the accident his penis is erect and pointing towards the girls, but it becomes soft and the accident occurs as they laugh at him. The Divorcee cries from a locked bathroom door, yearning for his ex-wife and the security of a marsupial animal’s pouch. Kylah runs the boys’ band that she sings for, demanding them to change their name from Thunderpup to Lemonfinger, a name linked to a girl’s masturbation story. She, in fact, takes the boys’ penises from them, canceling any necessity for them at all. Exceptions might appear in the characters of Danny—the stutterer, Stephen, Ian Dickinson, and Father Arduli. On closer examination, however, each of these men are just as ineffectual as the others.

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142 Warner 90.
Danny’s ability to fool the girls into believing he is a shy, stuttering fool does not negate the fact that he eventually receives nothing from his relationship with the sopranos, except a couple of articles of clothing, and not even their sexy knickers at that. In the end, his theft of their school clothes causes them little trouble. One could even say that he serves as a catalyst to the girls’ epiphanies that Our Lady is not as important as what they choose with their lives outside of school. Stephen receives the spoils of manlihood when he has sex with Orla, yet he is ultimately just an object to Orla, who wants to have sex before she dies. His voluntary bidding to Orla’s every whim and preternatural inferiority to the man who owns the bird that he cares for is increased when he loses the bird after lovemaking. This loss reduces him to a symbolic flaccid penis only rivaled by the literally impotent, dying sailor that Orla tries to have sex with in the hospital. The bird’s name, Onan, furthers Stephen’s ineffectiveness, suggesting that he, too, has merely spilled his seed on the ground rather than impregnating Orla. Of all these men, Father Arduli is the only character with power. Arduli, however, is the most emasculated of them all. His role in the Catholic church demands his celibacy, and the manly spoils that he is able to retain come from his inferior relationship to John Brotherhood, who provides him with whisky and cigars. As we know from *These Demented Lands*, Brotherhood does not give without first receiving, which suggests that Arduli is simply another of Brotherhood’s pawns rather than the pawn of the Lord. In every way, Arduli is a failure. His celibacy is paralleled by his role as a failed writer, and he knows the Port is doomed to fail without an influx of tourism. His desire to create a false miracle in order to save the Port is evidence of his failure as a father in all sense of the word. He only desires a miracle so that he can be in the spotlight and receive the
money that it brings. His position is perhaps the most ironic as he is unable to truly
father any creations, whether they be a following of the lord, a manuscript, or children.
Ian Dickinson remains the one male procreator, who has sex with many of the girls, and
impregnates at least one, perhaps living up to his surname. Despite Ian’s ability to
procreate, he is completely absent from the novel altogether, which automatically places
him in an effeminate position.

There are several pregnancies in the novel, mostly with unknown and absent
fathers. Yet it is Kay’s pregnancy that resembles Morvern’s. Similar to Morvern, she is
the equivalent deity of contradictions, the “Real Thing,” illustrated by Fionnula’s phrase,
“the realness of Kay.”\textsuperscript{143} Her reputation as a rich and beautiful prefect suggests that she
is the last person anyone would expect to become pregnant. Her doubly unexpected
pregnancy occurs during a threesome with Ian and Manda’s sister, Catriona. Kay’s story
of conception revolves around her and Catriona, almost completely dismissing Ian’s
presence. This threesome and Kay’s rejection of Ian renders Kay’s pregnancy
ambiguous. Her pregnancy is not quite the immaculate conception that we see with
Morvern, yet it is a modernized, realistic version of the traditional story and not unlike
artificial insemination with a sperm donor. Towards the beginning of the novel, Kay’s
pregnancy is foreshadowed when the girls discuss pregnancy: “A few cassandras of
laughter tremelled along the wall.”\textsuperscript{144} The mention of Cassandra, who had the gift of
prophecy, alludes to the divine nature of Kay’s insemination, not to mention her ethereal
beauty that traps men, only comparable to Morvern’s. This reference to Cassandra
suggests that both Morvern’s and Kay’s pregnancies will ultimately fail to bring about a

\textsuperscript{143} Warner 237.
\textsuperscript{144} Warner 5.
future Scotland, just as Cassandra’s prophecies were unheeded, and thus failed as warnings. Besides Ian’s actual sperm impregnating Kay, Warner implies that if Kay decides to have the child, she and Fionnula will raise the child together, without the aid of its absent, ambiguous father. Once again, Warner disallows his men a substantial role in the symbolic creation of a new Scotland.

Ultimately, the boys are merely stand-ins for what the sopranos cannot do for themselves, or at least not at first. The males remain phallic symbols rather than realistic humans with penises, ready to be usurped rather than taken inside the girls, suggesting that it is the power of the penis to create rather than the men who have them. As they are in Morvern Caller and These Demented Lands, the men are impotent in their role as procreator. Manda’s desire for “come” in her face is discovered through a masturbation scene, and when she describes an actual sexual encounter with a male, he is remarkably absent. Only his semen exists in the tale, useless on her chest as she sees it steaming in the moonlight. Nearly every sexual encounter in The Sopranos is told to the reader after it has occurred rather than during, and the men are always absent from the tale. Manda has sex with the bouncer from The Mantrap, but it is merely an act to make Fionnula jealous, an attempt at proving herself just as sexual. Despite Chell’s, Kylah’s, and Michelle’s reluctance to join Manda in the bedroom, it is ultimately Fionnula who Manda imagines having sex with. Kay and Fionnula’s relationship realizes the sopranos’ desires. Perhaps the men that the sopranos are with have not yet figured out how to satisfy women. Either way, it is only through masturbation or homosexual relationships that the girls quench their sexual thirst.

145 Warner 129.
Kay and Fionnula’s homosexual relationship is often described as the quintessential erotic male dream: one that embodies “an exceptionally clichéd male fantasy—not only lesbian, but Catholic, and schoolgirls as well!!” This realized desire paired with the other sexual exploits of the sopranos facilitates criticism of Warner’s ability to write realistic female characters. This criticism dismisses the girls’ transcendence of stereotypical sexual and gender roles. Fionnula explains her desire best when she claims it is the beauty of a person that excites her regardless of their specific sex or gender. At the same time that Kay has fallen in love with Fionnula, she claims that she loves the feel of a penis inside of her. These comments fit the couple well, as they both simultaneously reject and accept traditional sexual roles. The novel is not a homosexual novel, nor a representation of “lesbian chic,” but rather, once again, Warner is denying any role to the Scottish male in the creation of a future Scotland. It is through Warner’s narrative transvestism that these girls inhabit an almost mythological place amongst the population of the Port. Clover’s assertion that Fionnula “ends up the bottom to a posh classmate’s top,” fails to realize that female homosexuality does not have any top or bottom, and despite Kay’s parent’s money, Fionnula is technically “the cooler,” the one who allows Kay entrance into the elitist sopranos. The Sopranos illustrates the “arbitrary nature of sexual definition—the extent to which our sexualities are shaped by a larger social discourse.” Nothing is black and white. Clover does not look past the traditional sexual definitions, going so far as to

147 Strachan.  
148 Clover.  
insinuate that these girls are, in a sense, providing oral pleasure to Warner, himself: “he’s a thirtysomething male author who casts his voice into the mouths of much younger girls.” Although Warner uses these girls to voice his own ideas, it is not for his pleasure, but for his lack of efficacy in the use of his own voice.

To believe that The Sopranos is not a novel about the search for Scottish identity and the expectations of a devolved Scotland is to miss the most important aspects of Warner’s sexual symbols. While he illustrates the instability of language, he shows how “sexuality isn’t clear cut.” nor is gender or national identity, especially in contemporary Scotland. The setting of The Sopranos is again in his microcosmic Port that the girls’ bodies also represent, a more varied representation than Morvern’s. Warner’s use of the all-girls school, its impotent father and masculine nuns, gives the impression of a matriarchal society. The literal port is a harbor for incoming ships and submarines, a symbolic vagina to “the rip of the submarine’s length.” Yet, the submarine and its men are ineffectual: the submarine only brings the body of a dead sailor; while stiff, it remains unable to inseminate the sopranos. Even the statue of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour stares rampantly—sexually excited in Warner’s vernacular—out towards the submarine, “offertory fingers appealing, though only ever receiving a tiny curlicue of sparrow’s dropping.” She receives feces rather than sexual satisfaction, a notion that suggests Scotland receives only waste instead of satisfaction. Warner’s use of sexual symbolism is not done to berate Scottish men, who he portrays as metaphorically impotent in the face of a changing Scotland. Nor is it an

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150 Clover.
151 Strachan.
152 Warner 248.
153 Warner 4.
encouragement for these Scotsmen to “get it up” and make babies. In a way, Warner is urging Scotland to “get it up,” using the crisis of the Scottish male to parallel the greater uncertainty surrounding a Scottish national identity.

Thus, as a Scotsman, Warner, himself, remains figuratively impotent in the search for a genuine national identity and the creation of a future independent Scotland. Warner does through the sopranos what he cannot do himself. As MacDougall explains, a Scottish national identity has eluded the Scots for some time as they have continuously searched “for a hero, the man with the big idea who could show us the way forward, someone who could do for us what we seem to be incapable of doing for ourselves.” In Warner’s case, however, the “man with the big idea” is not a man at all but a woman, or a possible group of women, from Morvern to each of the sopranos. Warner’s own myth-making falls into what MacDougall calls a stereotypical Scottish pattern: “Scotland has been deafened by a search for heroes. Few figures fit the bill completely, so we elevate minor celebrities to the status they do not deserve or we mythologise the few genuine heroes who do exist.” Like others, Warner suggests that the “genuine” heroes that exist in the characters of William Wallace, Robert the Bruce, and Bonnie Prince Charlie, while providing a sense of pride and sentimentality for the land and its people, have failed to provide Scots with a truthful version of Scottish identity and a way to move forward through devolution. The Sopranos provides an alternative vision of a Scottish hero or heroine.

The Sopranos is not easily recognizable as a political novel. At first glance it appears as nothing more than another narrative regarding female teenage angst. The

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154 MacDougall 10.
155 MacDougall 60.
girls do not remotely resemble political activists, nor do they appear aware of their country’s geography, let alone political position:

Cocklawburn. It’s down The Border, she sucked on a cigarette.

The Border?

What Border?

The Fucking Border.

Oh.

Right.\textsuperscript{156}

Even their trip to the capital does not seem to promote a sense of national pride in the girls, but rather an opportunity to shop, eat at McDonalds, and enjoy a change of scenery from their local pubs. David Leishman argues that the girls’ hierarchy among each other and their class status in the Port is ample evidence that Warner is not concerned with Scotland’s position in the United Kingdom or Scottish identity:

Going further, the treatment of geography in Warner’s novels can suggest that notions of country, nation and origins have become largely irrelevant… In such a world, nationhood is somewhat a negligible concern and characters are seen to place more importance on group identity at a lower level (hence the nicknames, the strict pecking order of \textit{The Sopranos}…) than national identity.\textsuperscript{157}

It is true that the girls have a local identity and hierarchy among each other, but this can be said to be true of anybody. MacDougall argues that “national identity can only come from an individual identity; and the extent to which individual identity is dependent on

\textsuperscript{156} Warner 117.
role and function in society appears to be under continual review."¹⁵⁸ Manda is perhaps the most confused about her local identity: “Finnoula, ya can’t go around doin that, people’ll think you were lezzie."¹⁵⁹ While Fionnula and the others are concerned, they see a broader identity that supersedes their reputation in the Port. This individual or local identity remains as merely the first step in the sopranos’ discovering a larger national identity.

For all purposes, the world belongs to these young girls, who have seemingly endless possibilities before them, mainly because of their youth. The trip to their nation’s capital suggests a milestone in the girls’ growth from adolescents to adults with the ability to procreate. This change in their lives also signifies the loss of previous dreams and habits: admiring a big sister, being a rock star, and living long enough for a trip to Greece. The novel, itself, like Warner’s other novels, resembles a female bildungsroman, in which the girls experience an epiphany prior to the novel’s close; however, the epiphany appears to be that of both Warner’s and the sopranos’: the realization that these girls do not have endless possibilities before them, that they do, in fact, have very little promise. The trip allows them a distance from their every day rituals, so that they can see the changes occurring in their lives, and the capital gives them a stage on which to examine their national identity and how it fits or does not fit their lives.

In his exploration of Scottish identity, Warner discloses the failures in Scotland’s past. The bus traveling across the land provides a setting in which to explore the land and its history. Leishman argues that, “notions of country, nation and origins… have lost

¹⁵⁸ MacDougall 44.
¹⁵⁹ Warner 288.
their substance to feature merely as props for a heritage industry.” He refers to Warner’s mention of the Rest & Be Thankful Hotel, which is full of American tourists and tartanry, “…what was once a military supply station in The Clearance Centuries.” The “heritage industry,” as Leishman calls it, is exactly one of Scotland’s failings that Warner is referencing, as it is a false and shameful representation of Scottishness. The name of the hotel, which seems to address the Scots and their battles for independence, and the flippancy of the American tourists suggests an acceptance of the highland clearances rather than a denial to it. The road the bus takes alongside the hotel towards Edinburgh is massively steep, causing cars to often reverse up the hill and “rest and be thankful” when done. The sopranos represent a future without this reliance on the past, yet Warner’s inclusion of the road, which one must reverse up in order to go forward, suggests that the girls cannot escape the restrictions of the past: they must take a step backwards in order to go forward.

The sopranos wear this history on their bodies in the form of their tartan skirts, suggesting their bodies are also to be exploited and made a spectacle. They are not simply the female object of the male gaze, but the Scottish object of the foreign gaze. As the Americans watch the sopranos, the narrative changes and resembles a screenplay or script, evoking the notion of the typical Hollywood version of Scotland. Leishman argues that the girls are unaware of these details, yet he dismisses the very few interruptions in which the girls insert their own voice in the narrative. They are aware of being watched by the tourists, observed by the camera as defining Scotland.

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160 Leishman 128.
161 Warner 70.
162 MacDougall 13. MacDougall references this acceptance in the paintings of Faed and McCulloch, who painted the highlands absent of people.
They perform for the camera, providing their own sarcastic narrative, which ultimately reminds us that they are aware of their place and power.

The choir competition taking place in Edinburgh is both significant and ironic. As the capital of Scotland, Edinburgh represents the center of the nation, yet Edinburgh is often viewed as a city more English than Scottish. This is partly due to Edinburgh’s acquiescence with the parliament in Westminster. In comparison with Scotland’s other major city, Glasgow, Edinburgh represents what MacDougall describes as the Scots quest to “appear as urbane and refined as our neighbors.” The girls’ destination of Edinburgh as a source of Scottishness is ironic, as it is a city that represents England’s rule over Scotland and the Englishness they so desperately define themselves against. This fact is not lost to the sopranos, and it gives them another occasion for recognition of their place: “A castle acts as a vague focus of a capital that apes history but seems a stage set for some idea that’s been forgot, Whatever, it’s all a sham, Manda glares out the window.” Manda’s recognition that something has been lost in this mawkish symbolism of Scottishness evokes Edwin Muir’s statement of the progenitors of tartanry, Scott and Burns: “Sham poets of a sham nation.” Warner’s wrestlings with Scottish national identity might not be so apparent as they are subtle and easily overlooked. As MacDougall says, “Ours is a literature of hindsight, a literature of that which is not always obvious and does not always deal with the obvious.” These subtle, yet present, representations of the failings of former and current representations of Scottish

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163 MacDougall 10.  
164 Warner 88.  
166 MacDougall 195.
identity illustrate Warner’s awareness of the danger in taking on such a task; however, his novel places his future Scotland in the hands of the sopranos.

The sopranos’ attendance at a Catholic school seems suspect in a novel about Scottish identity, when only a small percentage of Scotland remains Catholic after John Knox’s riotous reformation. Neither does Warner’s preoccupation with biblical symbols, mainly in *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands*, explain his choice of religion, as he contends to have no allegiance with any one in particular. Instead, Warner’s portrayal of the institution of Catholicism seems more of a blatant parallel to the “heritage industry” that simulates a Scottish identity. Father Arduli’s “job creation scheme” is based on false miracles, imagined to bring both tourists and their money to the Port, which is not unlike the tartan tourism. At the same time, however, Warner exploits the stereotype of the Catholic Church and its love of riches. Besides Arduli’s desire for fame and money, the sopranos suggest that Sister Condron’s heated desire to win the Edinburgh choir competition is fueled by money rather than pride in Our Lady’s choir or as service to the lord. The sopranos’ nicknames of Sisters Condron and Fagen as “Condom” and “Fagan the Pagan” also symbolize two aspects that directly contradict the decrees of Catholicism. Yet most of these girls do fit the stereotype of Catholics in Scotland, that of the working class. This stereotype is perhaps drawn from the belief that most Catholics in Scotland today are descendents of Irish immigrants rather than indigenous Scots. Despite the girls’ own departures from the faith of Catholicism where each decides what they believe to be true sins, their positions as the potential mothers of Scotland’s future seem unlikely.

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As with Morvern, these unlikely mothers are seemingly justified in the epigraph taken from *Wuthering Heights*: “They do live more in earnest, more in themselves and less in surface change, and frivolous external things.” The sopranos do live more in earnest, but can we truly say they live less in surface change? The answer lies in Warner’s unapologetic subscription to the twinning of opposites: Caledonian Antisyzygy. These young female characters act as heroines or deities because of their lack of cynicism and their ability to procreate. They differ from Warner’s male characters who are jaded and impotent. Yet, these women do not fit traditional categories of heroes. Like Morvern they live with moral abandonment, failing to hold their religion or educations sacred. The novel’s elevation of these girls further proves Warner’s lack of faith in Scotland’s previous search for heroes, suggesting that even the notion of what constitutes a hero is also in question. Morvern and Kay, his expecting mothers, suggest that both money and education are not essential to a hero, as Kay has both, and Morvern has neither. His adherence to the yoking of opposites is paradoxical in itself. On one hand he admits the failure of previous searches for genuine Scottish identity, and yet he holds on to perhaps the oldest of Scottish stereotypes.

*The Sopranos* is filled with Warner’s inclination for twinning, including both urban and rural, lower and upper class, life and death, isolation and community, and mortal and seemingly immortal beings. As usual, Warner also includes elements of magic realism with the ghost of Chelle’s father, the giant Fingal, and a haunted castle. Perhaps the most memorable remains Lord Bolivia, the Spanish parrot, who swoops in to steal Onan in his cage “in red and emerald splendor, like a burst firework,” all the while
chanting a mix of curse words and the Lord's Prayer in both Spanish and English.\textsuperscript{168} This seeming mascot for the girls' school is not the only contradiction contained in the walls of Our Lady. The school’s namesake represents relief and protection, yet the girls find no help from her in times of trouble:

> How many pregnant this year? Michelle nodded up towards Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.

Twenty-seven, beamed Manda.\textsuperscript{169}

Michelle, now one of those twenty-seven, recognizes the inconsistency in the protection or help provided from their Blessed Mother, whose name also means “to suck,”\textsuperscript{170} a favorite pastime that the girls’ of Our Lady engage in with the neighboring boys. While Michelle is not an ongoing member of the sopranos—something her pregnancy does not allow her to continue—she represents the duality of such a group. We rarely see any of the sopranos on their own, as they seem to derive strength from each other; however, their sense of community thinly veils the feeling of isolation each girl feels inside: “And suddenly Orla felt a huge surge of hurtness that the Sopranos weren’t immediately turning attention to her and her news an Orla thought, \textit{We really are alone. Amazing.}”\textsuperscript{171} This first person perspective of Orla’s and Manda’s previous recognition of the “sham” capital illustrates the dichotomy in these girls’ understanding of the world around them. Orla and the girls chuckle at the buffet guy’s arrest for “writing all these sort of anarchist slogans on wee scraps of paper and going into the bookshop sections,

\textsuperscript{168} Warner 312.
\textsuperscript{169} Warner 46.
\textsuperscript{170} “Sucan,” \textit{A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary}, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. 2002.
\textsuperscript{171} Warner 318.
slipping them into all the novels and touristy Rabbie Burns stuff.”¹⁷² They are not completely oblivious to the fallacy of the Scottish identity that they live under, nor MacDougall’s conclusion about the Scots’ tendency for elevating “minor celebrities” into heroes: as Orla says, “That guy was obviously a bit of a hero.”¹⁷³ Warner’s inclusion of this buffet guy who exploits the exploiters is countered with a tattered homage to one of Scotland’s inventors, J.L. McAdam, “inventor of the tarmacadamed road.”¹⁷⁴ After several hours of being lost, Fionnula and Kay magically find themselves rescued with the help of a map on the pound note dedicated to McAdam, perhaps a playful reference to the Scots’ inclination to revel in the large number of Scottish inventors.

_The Sopranos_ seems to simply be _Morvern Callar_ cast in a sunnier, funnier light. One could ask, then, what the difference is between Morvern, who has seemingly failed in her attempt to bring forth a savior of Scotland, and the girls of the _sopranos_? The most obvious difference between the two novels is the narrative structure. _Morvern Callar_ is told through Morvern’s voice, while _The Sopranos_ is mainly told through a third person narrator, which is a departure from Warner’s other novels. He retains his most striking practice of playfulness with the instability of language and signs, as seen in his reference to the signs and symbols of Scottish identity. Again he also introduces actual signs into the text of street signs, the girls’ graffiti, and a pub’s marquee. The language remains just as unstable for the _sopranos_ as it is for Morvern. While Morvern’s words exist as her own, however, the _sopranos’_ exist in the mouth of some unknown third person. Occasionally Warner inserts the intimate thoughts of one of the characters into

¹⁷² Warner 314.
¹⁷³ Warner 314.
¹⁷⁴ Warner 237.
the third person narrative, which provides a sense of both insight and detachment. Therefore, though, the sopranos do not have the power to tell their own story, thus their ability to create is lessened. They are reduced to mere participants in a play, similar to their acting for the American tourists’ video. The list of the girls’ names at the beginning, “a sort of dramatis personae,” and the table that lists their clothes, or “costumes,” in Edinburgh furthers the idea of a play in which the girls are merely actors rather than writers. They have the ability to act and interpret, but they are denied the creativity to write their own story. We watch them in the role Sister Condron warns of: “Men are watching all the time. Wicked, wicked men.” As readers of The Sopranos, we inevitably become spectators, taking on the male gaze. We are like the men who lean closer to watch the kiss between Fionnula and Kay on The Mantrap’s dance floor. The girls are simply playing with the penis by acting for us rather than writing with it.

This lack of power is coupled by an onset of cynicism toward the end of the novel. In Edinburgh Fionnula feels her first real lack of power:

…what Fionnula felt was anger, not anger at Ian or Catriona, not anger at Kay’s folk, not even anger at their absurd religion, but anger at the sky and the roundabout and the whole charade that puts a young, lovely girl, lost in a city; unknown as to what she really wants an too lonely to imagine.

This quotation shows Fionnula’s realization that her role as a woman in Scotland denies her the power to create her own narrative. While the sopranos at first appear more

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175 MacDougall 27.
177 Warner 95.
178 Warner 236.
optimistic and capable of meeting Scotland’s expectations, their failure is foreshadowed by Morvern’s fate. Although The Sopranos acts as a prequel to Morvern Callar, Morvern’s failed efforts remain in the minds of the readers, suggesting the sopranos have perhaps vicariously endured Morvern’s hardships, as the readers have, and will suffer the same failures. Kay, Morvern’s equal, seems a better suited deity than Morvern. Beside her recent indiscretions, Kay has lived rather piously. She does not simply have the face of an angel, but the voice of one as well. She was born, not so much with a silver spoon in her mouth as with a pearl in her ear. Fionnula tries to convince her that there is change on the horizon, “They say there’s goan be changes in this country. Well I think the only thing changes you in this life is the people ya talk with, the people you sleep with, people you work with.” Fionnula’s is a bittersweet acceptance, hinting at her recognition of the power the narrative has seemingly bestowed upon them because of a lack of political representation. Only later does Fionnula again confront their lack of power when she hears the news of Orla’s impending death: “…she accepted everything that was going to happen until the end.” Orla’s returning illness suggests a cancer-ridden Scotland, not yet recovered from its past, which is also illustrated in the songs the girls sing. Fionnula tells us that their inability to win or advance lies in their preoccupation with the past: “No sweat, we'll never win; other choirs sing about Love, all our songs are about cattle and death!”

Despite the optimism of the novel, it is the ambiguous narrator who ultimately sheds light on the girls’ impending failure, and concurrently Scotland’s. We are never quite sure who the narrator is, except that he or she speaks in the same manner as the

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girls, a combination of Scots, local colloquialisms, and a vernacular all their own, observing the sopranos from some omniscient perspective in the sky. More than anyone else, this narrator speaks the same language as these girls, suggesting that the narrator is an older woman. This suggestion is furthered by the use of the word “we,” which sets up a binary opposition between her and the sopranos: a then and now. She relates a sense of failure early in the novel as she observes the girls’ preparation for their trip to the capital:

They’ve youth; they’ll walk it out like a favourite pair trainers. It’s a poem this youth and why should they know it, as the five of them move up the empty corridors? We should get shoved aside cause they have it now, in glow of skin and liquid clarity of deep eye on coming June nights and cause it will go… After all what do we amount to but a load of old worn-out shoes?182

The narrator’s perspective most likely occurs from her own failure, and this experienced perspective suggests that the sopranos will simply end as she has: a worn out body covered in tartan. However, it is once again truly Warner who fails in his attempt to give birth to a brighter, genuine Scotland. His transformation of his own being in the guise of young females, his narrative transvestism, is evidence of his lack of self-assurance in creating a hero in his own stead. While aware of them, Warner does not escape what MacDougall describes as the trappings of the failed Scots before him. Like them, Warner deconstructs his own myths, searching for a hero because of an ever present lack of faith in himself. While Morvern, Kay, and the sopranos are not the “tartan

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182 Warner 25.
that has eluded Scots for centuries, as heroines they eventually fail. When Warner casts his voice into their mouths, Fionnula describes what comes out: “She was speaking out these things to try and bring them clear into the world, the way a baby would come or an aborted foetus would hit air.”¹⁸⁴ Fionnula’s description suggests that Warner’s words come out an abortion when placed in their mouths rather than a birth.

These sopranos would seem to represent what Warner feels is an indigenous body of Scotland, yet they are both indigenous and not, isolated in community, optimistic and finally doomed. As Fionnula stands staring at the capital, a symbol of Scotland, the narrator tells us:

it was possibly one of the ugliest places in the land, for these girls who came from a town, hunched round a harbour like a classical amphitheatre, where the ocean grew still in a trapped bay an the mountains of the islands seemed to hang in the skies of summer nights… where clouds would always move faster than anywhere these girls would ever travel to.¹⁸⁵

The quotation suggests the Port is more genuine or natural than the “ugly,” man made Edinburgh. Yet it is in Edinburgh where many of the girls have epiphanies and are saved by the map on a Scottish pound. Warner illustrates to us that there is no simple way to define or find a genuine Scottishness as it contains multitudes, nor is there a simple answer to Scotland’s future, whether devolution or independence will give the nation something it has long expected: a national identity that does not feel contrived or exaggerated because of years of being beaten down and feeling inadequate. Despite

¹⁸³ MacDougall 60.
¹⁸⁴ Warner 234.
¹⁸⁵ Warner 233-4.
the girls’ (and his) failure, Warner suggests that there are other possibilities for an expecting Scotland besides Morvern and the sopranos. Looking out from the Port, the narrator notices, “the conception of further islands on the horizon.” The islands represent more bodies with the ability to conceive a future. Perhaps one of these conceptions will bring expecting Scotland the birth it deserves.

186 Warner 309.
CHAPTER 5

FROM FRUITLESS ABSENCE TO IMPOTENT PRESENCE:
THE DISAPPOINTING BIRTH OF THE MAN WHO WALKS

Alasdair Gray’s *Lanark* features an oft-quoted passage in which two characters discuss Glasgow: “‘Glasgow is a magnificent city,’ said McAlpin. ‘Why do we hardly ever notice that?’ ‘Because nobody imagines living here,’ said Thaw… ‘If a city hasn’t been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively.’” Alan Warner says he felt the same way as Gray’s character Thaw, thinking real literature would exist in Paris, Rome, or London, rather than Scotland, and particularly not in Oban. After reading the works of other Scottish writers, including James Kelman and Duncan McLean, Warner realized his former assumption was wrong. All those stories that he previously thought were the “wrong sort… too perverse, too far-fetched, too Scottish,” began to appear his novels. It was not simply the content of the stories but the language as well. Scots have been dissuaded from using their own language in favor of “superior” Standard English. James Kelman says, “As soon as you enter school you are informed that your culture and language are inferior. My culture and my language have the right to exist and no one has the authority to dismiss it.” Many contemporary Scottish authors express this same sentiment, particularly in reference to the use of Scots in their fiction. It was Kelman, among others, who introduced Warner to the idea that fiction could be written in a language other than standardized English and still avoid the label of inferiority.

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Warner, Kelman, and their contemporaries often write in a language “of the people,” a demotic language that has facilitated what Warner calls the “democratization” of literature, in which “the gulf between writers and readers has gotten smaller.”\textsuperscript{190} This democratization creates a literature that represents “lived experience in a way that is vital and alive, in a way that feels authentic, without having to speak in borrowed tongues.”\textsuperscript{191} Although the connotation of borrowed tongues does not reference the differing voices of gender, it is somewhat ironic that Alan Warner’s first three novels, \textit{Morvern Callar}, \textit{These Demented Lands}, and \textit{The Sopranos} are mainly written from female perspectives. Warner’s fourth novel, \textit{The Man Who Walks}, is the first in which Warner does not speak with borrowed tongues, but places his voice in the mouth of two male protagonists. For once, Warner does not disguise himself in a costume of femaleness, retreating into his customary narrative transvestism. Rather than a subtly aware, uneducated, hyper-sexualized young woman, \textit{The Man Who Walks} features a well-traveled and well read “sexist pig,” who is painfully sensitive to the debates of nation and identity.\textsuperscript{192} Warner does not just move his voice into that of a male character, but his metaphor of equating the land with his heroines’ bodies also shifts to that of Macushla and his doppelganger uncle, the Man Who Walks, who now represent the land of Scotland. They symbolize the labor of these former heroines, a labor that results in a stillbirth rather than a future Scotland.

\textit{The Man Who Walks} is Warner’s first novel published after devolution, and


\textsuperscript{192} Denes 39. Warner calls himself “a sexist pig like all men,” and then goes on to point out that “the narrators of the new book really are sexist pigs.”
perhaps ironically, it is the most political. Warner, himself, describes it as a “critique of past Highland/literary/historical landmarks.” Ultimately *The Man Who Walks* is not simply a critique of the past, but of the present, and a dreaded future. Warner sets up a metaphor in which Macushla and his uncle represent opposing sides of the stereotypical, contemporary Scotsman, who is duped by a notion of freedom and acceptance in a devolved Scotland.

Warner’s use of Scots and demotic language is not as extensive as many of his contemporaries. A common critique for the use of this kind of vernacular is the splitting of the narrative between the language of the characters and the language of the narrator. This splitting suggests that the characters are inferior to the narrator or author. For the most part, Warner’s novels are not narrated in a language separate from what their characters speak. As narrators, however, we are subject to their thoughts as well as their dialogue. The thoughts of Warner’s narrators are often more poetic than their dialogue, especially when describing the landscape. *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands* are both written from first-person perspectives with a consistency between spoken and unspoken language. *These Demented Lands* contains a more traditional narrative, which is in keeping with the changes in the character of Morvern. In *These Demented Lands*, we see Morvern conform more to Standard English usage and use less of her own personal and Scottish vernacular. *The Sopranos* is narrated by a sort of omnipotent narrator, whose advantage over the sopranos is most likely experience rather than social privilege. *The Man Who Walks* is remarkably different from Warner’s previous novels in reference to the narrator(s). The narrator of the novel

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is important as the metaphor of the penis and the pen suggests that the one who holds the pen, holds the power.

There are mainly three different types of narratives in *The Man Who Walks*. The outcome of these three narratives is an ambiguity that parallels the ambiguity of Scotland’s current situation and that of Macushla and his uncle. Warner’s preoccupation with the instability of language is mirrored in the instability of reality. Macushla and his uncle often describe events that are later contradicted by the other characters’ perceptions of the same events. We see Macushla run away from an elderly couple, leaving them unharmed, yet later the news reports that he beat them viciously. There are times when the reader is very unsure of what is truly occurring and who is the true demon: Macushla or his uncle. Macushla, himself, is aware of this phenomenon of unstable realities, which is illustrated in his continuous references to the location of battlefields: “Some battlesites have gone missing, generals arguing it all happened over the next hill.” Macushla does not mean that the battlesites have literally disappeared, but rather the generals have different perceptions of where the original battle took place. Macushla’s ambiguous nature distances the reader from Macushla and his intentions. On one hand, we want to empathize with him and his perverse situation, yet we are skeptical because other characters suggest Macushla has a violent and cruel nature. The Man Who Walks is similarly detached from the reader, but even more so. His lifestyle and physical body are grotesque, and his memoirs are intentionally disdainful and deceitful. Until the end of the novel, we blame the Man Who Walks for Macushla’s demise. This ambiguity and detachment surrounding the Man Who Walks is furthered by his lack of voice. True, his memoirs are first person narratives, but they are written to

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be read. Thus they contain a semblance of fiction and public speech, which is less truthful than a private thought that is unguarded, undoctored, and not slanted for public consumption.

References to the movie *The Usual Suspects* appear several times in the narratives of both Macushla and his uncle. The title of the movie suggests that Macushla and his uncle are among “the usual suspects” for any crimes committed in their area based on their formidable reputations. In *The Usual Suspects*, Verbal, a crippled criminal, tells the story of Keyser Söze, a man who strikes fear in the hearts of other criminals. The end of the movie suggests that Söze is merely an urban legend or that Verbal is the same man as Söze, yet the audience is left with more questions than answers. Thus the movie calls to mind the unreliability of Macushla’s and his uncle’s narratives and the duality of their personalities. Either of these men could be the Verbal or Söze character, as both of them alternately play the victim and the abuser, the storyteller and the man in the story. Just as *The Usual Suspects* does not provide the reader with the answers, Warner does not relate whose narrative is more “true.”

Despite the inclusion of his memoirs, the Man Who Walks is not allowed a “true” voice by Warner, which is significant as he represents a North Britishness, thematically opposed by Macushla’s Scottishness. It is interesting that the only voice we hear from Macushla’s uncle is a memoir written in a “haughty English voice.” This “haughty” voice is easily overlooked, yet its juxtaposition to the demotic language of Macushla and the narrator of *The Man Who Walks*, calls attention to its sterile, standardized effect. This inclusion of a separate narrative is one of the many political aspects in the novel.

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As Jeremy Scott argues, “Very often, this concern with the demotic arises out of ideological standpoints peculiar to Scotland: attempts to create a distance from Standard English, a nationalist position, or the ambition to reassert the primacy of oral over written forms of language.” Warner obviously sees the benefits of maintaining the Scottish oral tradition since each of his novels contain a multitude of storytellers. This feature is national in nature, as Warner, among others, presents the oral tradition as an unquestionably Scottish trait, as opposed to the “tartan biscuit-tin variety.” As stated before, Warner acknowledges his use of Scots as an indiscreet attempt “to create a distinctive literary voice the better to represent” the people of Scotland. In the past, many critics did not agree that Warner’s use of demotic language represented a nationalist position. Their stance has changed with the publication of *The Man Who Walks* and Warner’s own acknowledgment of its political aspirations.

The Man Who Walks does not represent the English in Warner’s novel. His affectation of Englishness exhibits a traditional characteristic of Scottish literature. He represents what Kenneth Simpson calls Cringe, one side of the two “personifications of extremes of the Scottish personality.” Cringe is the Anglified Scot who “tries to disguise anything which betrays his origins,” essentially presenting himself as English. While the Man Who Walks is not your typical Cringe, he has many of his characteristics. It is not simply his English affectation in his memoirs that suggests his affiliation with Cringe, but the content of his memoirs as well. The Man Who Walks

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197 Delaney 58.
198 Scott 1.
200 Simpson 15.
claims to have come of age in London with his Scottishness existing as a quaint characteristic to his English roommates. The memoir is full of lies. He says he is the son of a rich man, the head of a celebrated family known for their military pursuits. He often claims to be the author and director of well-known movies; *The Usual Suspects* is among the many. The Man Who Walks desires acceptance, but he chooses to emulate rather than rebel from the socially elite Britishness. His use of Scotland’s finest newspapers to make a paper mache cocoon in which to live symbolizes his desire to assimilate Britishness rather than Scottishness, a crime the papers themselves commit according to Macushla who makes puns with their names: “*Rise and Be an Erection Again*, the *Scudsman*, the *Glasgow Hard-On*, the *Piss and Journal*, the *Daily Retard*, *Scotland on Binday*, and other great organs of truth.”

His lies and deceit are symptoms of his self-loathing, and his retreat from an existence in which he will always be a poseur in one way or another is evidenced in his lunacy. The loss of his eye shows the Man Who Walks's tendency to turn a blind eye towards his “inferior” position in the United Kingdom.

Macushla and his uncle are arguably two sides of an opposing body of Scotland. Macushla is often mistaken as his uncle, as the bartender says: “I’m sorry but aren’t you The Man Who Walks?” The italicized narrative that discusses the individual travels of both men are often written so ambiguously that it is impossible to discern if it is describing Macushla or his uncle. As his nephew, Macushla has possibly been born with many of the same traits as the Man Who Walks, or he has picked them up along the way. Both are men who walk the skylines, love literature, desire to tell stories, and

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201 Warner 36.  
202 Warner 167.
are fascinated with the land. Many of their literary references are the same, and they share a tendency to use the same vernacular or to be fascinated with specific objects, such as “ghost bags.” However, the Man Who Walks’s fascination with water directly contradicts Macushla’s fear and hatred of it, which again suggests a yin and yang of one person.

Warner’s fondness for the stereotypical Caledonian Antisyzygy is fully realized in these two characters. They are the “usual suspects” of the Scottish personality. Macushla is representative of the Scotsman at odds with his colonizer, an angry, young man frustrated by his lower-class subsistence. Simpson calls this angry man, Bluster, who is “epitomised in the phrase ‘Wha’s like us?’, the challenge flung down by the Scot at his most defiant.”\(^{203}\) He does not apologize for this existence and uses it as fuel for his burning rage, believing that it gives him the right to act as outlandish and barbaric as he feels, which ironically buttresses the stereotype he strives to break down. He has a self-loathing spirit that causes his sub-conscious desire for acceptance. Bluster “cloaks an insecurity as to identity.”\(^{204}\) Cringe is often embarrassed by Bluster, striving to “disown” him, which both Macushla and his uncle do to each other. Macushla puts on the disguise of Cringe at Old Barrell’s dinner party. Warner suggests that this disguise is unfit for Macushla when he vomits after the party, unable to stomach the hypocrisy of his disguise.

Just as Warner plays with the traditional dichotomy of Bluster and Cringe, he also uses and deconstructs other traditional narrative styles: the unreliable narrator, the gothic and picaresque narrative structure, and the Scottish literary tradition of

\(^{203}\) Simpson 15.

\(^{204}\) Simpson 15.
associating characters with the land. Macushla is the first of Warner’s characters who exhibits a strong sense of unreliability. While he is not technically the narrator, the narrator does seem to exist, at least sometimes, in Macushla’s mind. As the novel goes on, the reader is increasingly made aware of Macushla’s resemblance to the Man Who Walks, creating the same experience of that in James Hogg’s *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, in which a character interacts with his alter ego, a character not unlike a realized Satan. Although Macushla is often portrayed as angry and violent, he either denies his crimes or insists that they are done in self-defense. His first two hitchhiking mishaps occur because of unwanted sexual advances. However, we later learn that Macushla probably instigated these incidents and has a history of severe violence. Macushla’s unreliability is furthered by his hazy perception of reality, which is often obscured by drugs, alcohol, exhaustion, and pain. At other times, Macushla is simply not privy to all the information needed to make correct assumptions. In the end, we find the Man Who Walks does exist outside of Macushla’s mind. Both characters somewhat refute their violent legends when they react kindly, rather than violently, towards each other and others. The narrative suggests the ambiguity of Scotland’s history, built on a combination of truth and myths rather than hard facts alone.

The difficulty of Macushla’s narrative is the third person narrator, who appears as an omnipotent, nonjudgmental god-like character at first. However, the narrator eventually makes his presence known, when he “not only comments on his characters, but on Scottish failings generally,” as George Douglas Brown’s famous narrator does in *The House with the Green Shutters*. Like Brown’s narrator, that of *The Man Who

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Walks often appears to be a fellow townsmen. He knows the legends and the gossip of the area. His judgments of Macushla and his uncle occasionally rise up from this place of observance: "he wandered beneath the mountain tops with that decay-ridden, halitosis haunted cave drooling, wide open, and what self-respecting wasp would have entered?" Unlike Brown's narrator, however, The Man Who Walks ends seemingly in Macushla's mind. There is no final judgment of Macushla's errors by an all-knowing narrator who ties up loose ends. Instead, we are placed again in a situation of ambiguity. Warner deconstructs the notion of a traditional narrator, "planting questions rather than reaping answers."

In addition to the ambiguous identity of the narrator there are a number of different narratives that are distinguishable by font. There exists, besides Macushla's main narrative, the Man Who Walks' typed memoirs and an italicized narrative that alternately and ambiguously describes Macushla and/or his uncle as they walk and the legends that surround them. These legends give The Man Who Walks a gothic feel. The novel, full of wild landscapes, madness, cruelty, torture, and suffering, presents a hero in dire straits. Macushla is, in a sense, a suffering individual rebelling against social constraints. There is a "sense of impending calamity, just about kept at bay." The novel consistently foreshadows Macushla's demise. He passes Itchy Magellan on the street, a man with no legs, and later wakes up feeling that his legs are missing. Even later, Macushla legs are beaten so badly that he is crippled. This foreshadowing gives Macushla an unconquerable sense of hopelessness.

206 Warner 153.
208 Delaney 58.
This sense of cynicism surrounding Macushla’s limited options and his paradoxical journey across the Scottish landscape reads like a picaresque novel, where Macushla’s mishaps are arguably brought on by those he “serves” under. He fits Christopher Whyte’s description of the stereotypical “hard male,” in which the “establishment” is always to blame for his inadequacies.\(^{209}\) This notion is reinforced by Macushla’s name, which evokes the “Macushla Revolt” that occurred in Dublin in 1961. The revolt surrounded a group of young policemen who staged a strike in the Macushla Ballroom over pay issues against the Commissioner’s orders. Eventually the entire nation supported the young Gardai (policemen), and after several years an organization was set up to ensure equal rights among them. Andy Needham explains, “The Macushla Revolt was a product of latent resentment in an authoritarian hierarchical organization.”\(^{210}\) Tom Murphy later wrote a play based on the Macushla Revolt, *The Blue Macushla*, which examines national identity through the “violence of IRA splinter groups in 1970s Dublin, …while constantly alluding to the past.”\(^{211}\) Although Macushla’s name has more significance in Ireland than Scotland, the sentiment of the individual opposed to the establishment transcends national boundaries. Macushla bears the same burden of mistreatment from authority figures who belittle his existence as a man. His name predicts his violence and attempts at lashing out at an establishment that ignores or abuses him.

Macushla also serves under direct authority figures that are more real to him than the ‘establishment,” most notably the foreman. In addition, Macushla serves his uncle, as he has existed as the sole father-like figure in Macushla’s life, and his notoriety and unconventional ways still imprison Macushla. Yet Macushla is also to blame for his self-doubting masculinity, which fuels his anger. This self-doubt is arguably a result of Macushla’s upbringing in a rootless, low-income, socially unaccepted, and unloving family. Ultimately the novel suggests that Scotland is to blame. *The Man Who Walks* appears to be a conglomeration of stories with no “overriding story of its own;²¹² however, if we look at the novel as an example of the picaresque, it is clear that these many stories serve as satire against the nation and its people. Macushla’s journey across Scotland enables him to see all levels of society, from the elite upper-class of Old Barrel’s party to the lowest-class in the caravan park. None of these characters are portrayed more favorably than the others. Macushla places no more fault for his position in society on Old Barrel than he does on his Old dear. The blame placed on England is too obvious for Macushla to mention, as the colonization of the Scots was as much a self-colonization as it was one done by a foreign or neighboring nation. Although he does not say it aloud, it is clear that Macushla believes it is their position in a colonized nation that hinders the Scots, a notion that resembles Mark Renton’s in Irvine Welsh’s Trainspotting, where the Scots, as a body, are at fault.

If the Scots are to blame for their lack of identity, it comes from the desire to define themselves by what they are not. Scotland’s search for a national identity has led to their own creation of the “‘torrent of tartanry’ and the mismarketing of everything

²¹² Denes 39.
The highland landscape, so popular among Scottish artists and the tourist market, now represents Scotland in general. MacDougall argues that the symbols of Scottishness (kilts, whisky, and the highland landscape) have failed them: “we often identify with the symbols… feel sentimental about the heather and tartan rather than the place they represent.” Warner is aware of the tradition and the fallacy. In his previous three novels, Warner’s heroines have all been intrinsically tied to the land; however, in *The Man Who Walks*, Warner moves away from his expecting females to an impotent man and his crazy uncle. These men represent the offspring of Warner’s female deities, yet they are born impotent and blind.

Both Macushla and his uncle are known by their walking of the land. Macushla knows every element of the highlands around him, including the gradient of the rise and fall of a slope, with an uncanny ability. It is as if there were a map of the land imprinted on his brain. This, we are led to believe, comes from his relationship with his uncle, who chooses to live off the land in a way not done for centuries. The Man Who Walks often carries the land on or in his body, dead crabs in his hair and cooling insects in his empty eye socket, as well as the literal soil on his body and clothes. Thus Macushla and his uncle paradoxically become symbols of the landscape, and they are not the typical romanticized highlander standing in the heather, clad in tartan. Both are described as malicious and selfish, and unlike his previous representations of Scotland, Warner portrays the land as angry and diseased. It is overrun by offensive cattle, drenching rains, stinging wasps, flesh-tearing nettles, and deathly, dark lochs. Its beauty is dismissed by Macushla, who sees the land as a row of battlegrounds, covered in the

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213 Simpson 15.
214 MacDougall 13.
ghosts of long ago warriors and the ghost bags of superstores, evidence of a land eaten away by its own consumer heritage.

This metaphor of a land at odds with itself is common in post-colonial literature. Macushla notes, “Man has never been able to sufficiently impress himself on this land, men can only turn on one another under these heartless mountains, useless as beauty.” When one is held down by an infinitely superior colonizer, the effect is often a metaphorical cannibalism, in which the colonized becomes the colonizer. Obviously the hierarchy of power struggles comes into play: when one is the colonized, you must find another to overcome, one who is weaker. This metaphor plays out in literature amongst the people of Scotland, who turn on each other with a fury that shrouds their true enemy. Macushla is the ultimate metaphorical cannibal. Just as the land has turned against him, Macushla has turned against himself and those most like him, the foremost being his uncle. As Macushla feels that he has been wronged and damaged by the Man Who Walks, he takes “an eye for an eye,” literally removing one of his uncle’s eyes. The havoc he wreaks on Seamus and the old couple come from their sexual advances, a form of colonization. While Macushla attempts to have sex with Paulette, he forces her to place her arm in an ant hill, overcoming her with simultaneous sexual activity and pain. His breathy whispers about the queen and her colony illustrate his paradoxical hatred and justification of the colonial experience. He is later overcome by her husband and the foreman. In the middle of the beating, Macushla again equates this violence with sexuality, noting Colin’s erection, “firmer than any of his life, pushing from his groin and known to all men who torture.”

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215 Warner 17.
216 Warner 274.
While Whyte argues, “To be gay and to be Scottish, it would seem, are still mutually exclusive conditions,” Zoe Strachan begs to differ in her article, “Queerspotting.” The article predates The Man Who Walks, but it does explore the female homosexuality in Morvern Callar and The Sopranos. She sees Warner as blatantly rejecting Berthold Schoene’s notion that “heterosexual masculinity is still commonly regarded as ‘the normative gender.’” The Man Who Walks is not a homosexual novel, yet Macushla exhibits a homosexual side that threatens to destroy his facade of masculinity because Macushla and the other male characters of the novel associate homosexuality with femininity. We are never quite sure of Macushla’s attraction to men; it is merely mentioned in asides or as accusations from others. In his attempt to get an erection, he thinks of Paulette’s name, “almost a boy’s name.” Later, when remembering the voluptuousness of her mouth, he admits the same of the Buddhist snowboarder’s, just as quickly and dismissively as he mentions his erection formed at the view of Hacker’s bare back and the beating he has just given him. But it is his coincidental acquaintance with a girlish teenager at a pub that causes him to shiver merely at the boy’s voice: “The child’s face was of real beauty, perhaps there was something provocative about the little scamp, personally lifting the light so near the Nephew’s mouth?” It is perhaps, Macushla’s desire to colonize that lends to his homosexual tendencies, which he denies in all but the few examples listed above.

220 Warner 119.
221 Warner 169.
Macushla falls prey to the belief that “women and gay men are polarised into one, allegedly inferior opposite group which the golden ideal of masculinity is believed to outshine by dint of its natural superiority.” Although Warner could be criticized for somewhat championing a “self-loathing homosexual,” his inclusion of this part of Macushla’s desire is not simply in reference to the parallels between sexuality and colonization. As with language and identity, Warner deconstructs the myths of sexual preference, again illustrating that sexuality is not clear cut. Macushla’s inability to decipher his sexuality mirrors his struggle with national identity.

The character of Macushla is the final realization of Warner’s impotent men. The spectrum of Warner’s novels, from the absent male to this impotent presence, tells a story of the contemporary Scotsman. Macushla’s name represents a paradox in this way. On one hand, Macushla’s name symbolizes mistreatment and violence. On the other hand, Macushla is mostly known as a term of endearment most often used for women or young girls. An old Irish song, “Macushla,” centers on the death of the singer’s loved one, his “Macushla.” Macushla’s name evokes the image of a dead female, which doubly emasculates him: he is both absent and female. Macushla’s rootlessness, desire to colonize both with violence and sex, and his self-loathing homosexuality are all symptoms of his emasculation. Macushla is the archetypal feminized male, fully realizing what was formerly suggested in Warner’s previous novels. His emasculation is one of self-infliction, in which he is incapacitated. Again and again, Macushla is hurt or rendered disabled by drinking, drugs, or the land that he

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222 Schoene 92.
walks over. His uncle is also handicapped by alcohol, unable to walk, which contradicts his own name.

Macushla’s main emasculation lies in his literal impotence: “It is as if, in straining to be an icon of masculinity, he has left a crucial element in it far behind him. He cannot ‘perform’ as impregnating future father on the intimate scene of sexual intercourse.”

His flaccid penis often leaves Macushla overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy and depression, and more than once, he feels he must cry. In a land with phallic symbols surrounding him in the guise of thistles and dashboard needles, Macushla’s penis, “Bethlehem steel,” is no match for its alter ego, “Old Moody.” He is jealous of Colin and his insemination of Paulette, noting, however, that if he were in his place, Macushla would expertly deliver two superior boys rather than Colin and Paulette’s two daughters, as Macushla sees all females as inferior.

Paulette’s two daughters in their ineffectual youth emasculate Macushla: after being disabled and crawling before them, he attempts to assert his masculinity by standing erect at his full height when, ironically, the swelling in his legs has gone down. Although they are young, they exhibit a sexuality that causes Macushla to cower in front of them. The scene of Macushla urinating in the girls’ doll’s mouth is at first sexually charged, as the little girl watches. Yet, the scene of his penis in the doll’s lips only serves to illustrate his impotence, as he fills the doll with waste rather than his creative semen.

The few times in which Macushla is able to achieve erections are always destroyed by outside forces, which further fits Whyte’s suggestion that the stereotypical “hard male” will always blame others for his own failures. The highland wind causes him

224 Whyte 277.
to loose his erection, a symbol of his own blame. Most often it is the recognition of his own failings or lack of necessity, which is illustrated in Paulette’s masturbating: “Now the Nephew realised it was her own wonderful body alone she was celebrating in the things they did together, her eyes lowering and raising over the subtly pre-positioned mirrors.” His lack of a role in her sexual satisfaction ensures his lack of role in the future of Scotland. Macushla’s violence and love of reading are meant to counterbalance his flaccid penis. Yet, his violence proves to be more self-defeating than helpful, and as always, Warner is insistent on the ineffectuality of an education in his Scotland. Macushla is ridiculed for his love of reading rather than rewarded. Macushla’s broken legs at the end of the novel represent his broken penis, and still he desires to be “propped up,” a semblance of erect masculinity.

Berthold Schoene argues that “heterosexual men have so far managed to do without such a confrontation which would involve a profound re-consideration of all of one’s attitudes towards sexuality and gender.” Yet it is exactly this confrontation that has caused the anxiety of masculinity, which formerly being considered the norm, has never been truly defined. Like a Scottish identity that has hitherto been described as what it is not, masculinity is stereotypically described as what it is not: feminine or gay. Warner is aware of this construction of masculinity and relies on the binary oppositions surrounding gender identity in order to deconstruct it. He is aware, but his male characters are not. Macushla projects the blame of his crisis onto the “other,” which is consistently women, homosexuals, or “the establishment.” At the same time, he is subconsciously aware of his own blame, which is illustrated by his phrase “Yacuntya,”

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225 Warner 113.
226 Schoene 103.
which is muttered to every “other,” including his own self. The word “yacunta” sounds hauntingly like “Macushla.”

Warner’s preoccupation with authorship continues in *The Man Who Walks*, in which Warner again relies on the synonymy of the penis and the pen. Macushla’s inability to become erect is mirrored in his inability to create. He often relies on the texts of others, rather than his own words. He puffs up his ego, similar to an erect penis, by imagining himself as an author or an important literary figure. He quotes Aleister Crowley and Albert Camus, while comparing his plight with that of Prometheus or Gulliver of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. Macushla’s association with these particular characters is telling, as he finds himself unworthy of the god-like ability of creation, and like Gulliver, Macushla often finds himself feeling larger than life or small and outnumbered. His quest amongst the highlands is often paralleled to an odyssey in which Macushla is often taken advantage of and tricked. Unlike Him, the Aircrash Investigator, or Father Arduli of Warner’s previous novels, Macushla does not attempt to be an author. Instead, he apes the narratives of established writers, admitting to Paulette that his anger is fueled by a “kind of resentment at others’ eloquence.”

It is his uncle’s memoirs that fail him. Like Aircrash Investigator’s toy typewriter, Macushla transcribes his uncle’s memoirs in the pages of a coloring book. Both the typewriter ribbon and the coloring book are later destroyed by Colin, who has literally procreated. This inability to create is intrinsically tied with Macushla and his uncle’s inability to create, recreate or find an identity.

Macushla is painfully aware that his odyssey in the highlands is ultimately a search for identity: “The Nephew, a symbol of his nation, shivered, stood square in the

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227 Warner 111.
cow shit, musing under cloudy Scotch skies on better days ahead.” This quotation places Macushla between a world of opportunity, which is symbolized by the “Scotch skies on better days ahead.” At the same time, though, Macushla’s skies are cloudy, and his feet are stuck to the ground in cow feces. This references suggest that Macushla is looking for something better in the future, but he will always be looking, never achieving. Macushla’s odyssey, which ends on the battlefield of Culloden, is a symbolic dialogue between Macushla and the manifestations of Scottish identity. The Bluster and Cringe extremities are joined by the differences in the working and upper classes. Macushla experiences each rung on the spectrum of the Scottish social classes. Even Paulette and Colin represent a stereotype of middle-class Scots, who strive for a comfortable life, living abundantly in a house that is only “quarter-bought.” While Macushla yearns for this “settled” life, he recognizes the fallacy of it all, noting that fools and kings die the same way.

Macushla is desperate to change his world, which is ultimately his identity. Unlike Morvern and the sopranos, Macushla has traveled the world, and Warner does not have him identify with the Scottish tradition of succeeding outside of Scotland. Despite his desire to “arrive, to transform,” somewhere “proper,” he is slapped with the knowledge that changing locations is not the answer: “It’s disgusting to think a changing landscape will change us inside. What will a new landscape change inside of me?” There is no desire in him to escape to an urban landscape as he incorporates urban and rural into one; as he walks along a road lined with trees, he equates it with strolling up “Third

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228 Warner 87.
229 Warner 116.
230 Warner 192.
Avenue under waterfalls of glass.”

Neither the trees or glass mirror his longed-for sense of identity.

Along Macushla’s odyssey he meets Scots of every age, means, and gender who symbolically hold up mirrors in search of an overreaching Scottish identity. There are those who illustrate complacency with the achievement of devolution, yet Macushla is surprisingly in disagreement: “We have our history, an old tart, we don’t know when to chuck her out of bed or when to roll over and shag her for a last time, and we have her pimp, our own wee parliament, big hotel in the sky for our representatives... the kilty liberals.” At the same time, however, Macushla is not necessarily an advocate for independence: “Sure! Imagine the joy of it all. Late parliament sittings to decide on the stewardesses' uniform for Scottish National Airlines,” an image that is later realized through Tracey, the tartan-clad train trolley girl. His narrative of Scotland’s famous battles, betrayals, and legends for a Hollywood location scout are tongue-in-cheek, as Macushla is aware of the fallacy of the “torrent of tartanry” and the romanticization of this type of Scottishness that a Hollywood film facilitates, something he terms, “the curse of Connery.” In the end, Macushla, like Warner, finds no answers in his search for identity. Unable to walk the land, he resigns himself to accept this tartan clad identity, an identity that has been created as much by the Scots, themselves, as any other. The lights of the Hollywood film crew blast “down on reality, fighting the natural light with overwhelming, colonising superiority, determined to force a vision on the

231 Warner 11.
232 Warner 204.
233 Warner 205.
234 Warner 259.
mundane and curse the consequences.” Warner suggests that this tartanry cannot be escaped in a country doomed to suffer its past, lame by its own hand. On a battlefield strewn with kilt-clad mannequins, Macushla pulls “himself up onto the hard mannequin, like the last of some awkward species trying to breed a final generation.” The image suggests Macushla’s last ditch effort at creating, but it is an image of falsehood.

Warner parallels this falsehood with the false sense of freedom given with the achievement of devolution. Macushla, “a symbol of his nation,” achieves a sense of freedom from the foreman, who represents Scotland under English rule. His cell phone, a metaphorical umbilical cord, consistently interrupts Macushla’s odyssey with the tune, “Rule Britannia.” Only at the end of the novel do we find that Macushla’s errand has been a trick, his sense of freedom and role as an accomplice in the mission a sham, one that parallels Scotland’s devolution from England and the impending sense of freedom that accompanies it. Despite Macushla’s blindness to this fallacy, he subconsciously is aware of it long before he is crippled in his attempt for independence, “By the time you actually grasp it, if you’ll forgive the pun, freedom doesn’t amount to much these days. It was packaged long ago.” Warner’s novel suggests that this package of potential freedom in the guise of devolution will only cripple Scotland. The erection of the house of parliament symbolizes the emasculated Scottish male and his attempt to “get it up” and create a future Scotland. The final scene of the novel

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235 Warner 277.
236 Warner 276.
237 Warner 3.
238 Warner 205.
represents Macushla’s “personal Culloden,” an infamous battle of betrayal and the last of the Jacobite rebellions.

In some ways, Warner’s previous metaphors of Scotland expecting are realized through Macushla, albeit in a disappointing outcome. Macushla represents the child of Morvern and the sopranos, a failure to the future because of the past. Macushla’s mother and uncle represent aging versions of Morvern and Aircrash Investigator. Morvern, who lights another Silk Cut minutes after birthing her child, is not clearly distinguishable from Old Dear, whose smoking has turned Macushla’s white parrots yellow. There is the distinct suggestion that the Man Who Walks is not truly Macushla’s uncle, but coined with the name that all of Old Dear’s suitors invariably inherit. The Aircrash Investigator, or “the Man Who Walked the Skylines,” in attempt at salvaging scraps of the past resembles the Man Who Walks and his increasing lunacy. Macushla represents a stillbirth: he is born and dead at the same time. Macushla’s stillbirth parallels Morvern’s death. These similarities only further Warner’s vision of a defeated future or “New Scotland.

Warner’s novels parallel this odyssey of Macushla’s search for identity from the conception of Morvern to the crippling of Macushla, the failed child and future Scotland. Having fallen into the loch, Macushla experiences not fear of death, but a solidarity with Morvern, “that foster-daughter.” Their rootlessness and failures mirror each other’s. Warner’s move from a pregnant, young shopgirl to a body of her peers and a passive helpmate, is finalized with the failure of Macushla, “the Gaelic... wee baby, wee darling,”

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240 Warner 52.

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the product of their births. The Man Who Walks opens and closes with references to birds. The crows at the beginning of the novel eat the dead remains of other crows as they move north, which symbolizes Macushla’s quest for the Man Who Walks, an image synonymous with cannibalism. Macushla’s final vision of birds dying because of no place to land and the subsequent failure of man’s crops is a troubled image that holds man to blame for his own failure and also negates Macushla’s dreams of freedom. This image suggests that even with the freedom of flying, we are dependent upon the land, just as Macushla muses at the sky while his feet are stuck in cow feces. The birds mirror Macushla’s walking. Both circle the land, never arriving anywhere, and are eventually crippled or killed. Like the reference to Cassandra in The Sopranos, the birds’ warnings to the Scots go unheeded. The birds falling to the ground also represent Macushla’s failed masculinity, and consequently Scotland’s inability to move forward. It is a notion that suggests Scotland is yet to find a way to obtain this freedom, in which it must simultaneously accept and transcend the symbols of its land and people.

241 Warner 221.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

From Morvern Callar to The Man Who Walks, Alan Warner relies on the body as a metaphor for the land of Scotland. His females exist synonymously with the land that they represent, the land that is as much a character as the character’s themselves, a land that exists as an extension of their beings, either helping or hindering itself. This metaphor extends to Macushla in The Man Who Walks, who is the product of their births and the disappointing outcome of Scotland expecting.

Despite some critics denial s that Warner’s novels have nationalist attitudes, this dissertation illustrates that Warner uses these symbolic bodies to explore national identity and as a metaphor for a nation caught between devolution and possible independence. Each of these four novels explores a different aspect of the expecting through the metaphor of pregnancy and birth.

Morvern Callar introduces Warner’s most memorable character, who is the foremost of Warner’s expecting mothers. This novel sets up the metaphor of the body and the land that Warner features in his next three novels. Morvern symbolizes a freshness that distinguishes her from a corrupted past, enabling her to be the mother of a metaphorical savior of Scotland. Her conception mirrors the conception of an idea placed in the nation: the notion of independence for Scotland. Morvern’s appropriation of the male narrative illustrates Warner’s fascination with texts and authorship and the power of the phallic penis: the pen. In this way, Morvern is an example of the colonizer. She is like England

These Demented Lands continues Morvern’s pregnancy with an odyssey-like
adventure to the place where she plans to give birth. Her trip across the island brings
her into contact with an eclectic group of men, who are locked in the past. The island
and the past, which is symbolized by these men, make up the qualities of Morvern’s
unborn child. They represent the gestation of Morvern’s pregnancy and the future of
Scotland. These qualities, like the idealized and mythological versions of Scottishness,
suggest a future Scotland still caught in the failures of the past, and this failing is
represented by Morvern’s ambiguous death that occurs before she has a chance to give
birth. Once again, Warner relies on the power to tell the story and the binary oppositions
between constructed gender roles in order to examine the constructs of national
identity.

After Morvern’s supposed death, Warner returns to the expecting body in The
Sopranos; however, Warner places the expectations of his nation in several bodies.
These girls act as both extensions and contradictions of Morvern, and while they are
many against her single self, they act as a body made of multiples, which furthers
Warner’s reliance on the tradition of the duality of the Scottish psyche. In the end,
though, only one of these girls succeeds in becoming pregnant, but her optimism is
filtered through a doubting narrator who seems to have a god-like authority and the
experience to see the sopranos’ failures to give birth to a savior or create a “genuine”
Scottish identity. There are suggestions that this narrator is Morvern looking on from the
after-life, but the examination of this suggestion lies outside of the scope of this
dissertation.

As I stated earlier, Macushla is the symbolic realization of these girls’ births in
The Man Who Walks. This is Warner’s final novel set in Scotland to date, as his next
novel, *The Worms Can Carry Me to Heaven*, is set in Spain and seems to be without the ever-present Scotsman.\(^{242}\) In *The Man Who Walks*, Warner makes his final move towards an all male narrative, giving his readers the first major in-depth view of his emasculated males. This journey from a sole female narrative to an all male narrative mirrors the conception and birth of a future Scotland. The Scottish male, who Warner portrays as having no necessary role in Scotland’s future, is absent in *Morvern Callar*. He is nothing but an idea that is finally realized in *The Man Who Walks*. He represents a stillbirth: a body that is at once born and dying at the same time. Macushla’s stillbirth suggests that the future of Scotland is doomed to repeat the past. The notion of freedom is simultaneously born through devolution, but it is a possibility that is already dead.

In each of these novels, Warner creates a microcosmic Scotland characterized by the twinning of opposites, an exaggerated representation of contemporary Scotland that simultaneously rejects and encompasses stereotypes and a mythological history. This microcosmic body of Scotland is the backdrop for an exploration of a national identity that is done so through a parallel investigation of gender identity, an identity that Warner suggests is foremost in the search for self and one that is intrinsically tied to one’s national identity. Warner’s search strategically breaks down stereotypical ideals of gender identity in order to scour the base of what constitutes a true identity and what is constructed. Of course, any attempts at a “true” gender identity are often difficult to determine, and this same difficulty is extended to the investigation of national identity.

The search is problematized by the conglomeration of individual people who arguably only exist as an imagined group. Cairns Craig speaks of the reason for a

national identity: a group identity that works for the individual. Warner somewhat
subverts this idea, creating individuals to represent a group, such as Morvern Callar and
Macushla, who are sole representations for the body of Scotland’s people. Even in
_These Demented Lands_, Morvern’s narrative is merely supplemented by Aircrash
Investigator’s, who exists as an extension of Morvern herself. The same occurs in _The
Man Who Walks_, where Macushla and his uncle are two parts of the same person: an
old and a new, a hidden and a visible, a man who is blinded by his other half that sees
too much. The girls of _The Sopranos_, although somewhat different, exist as a group
moving together as a single entity. Other characters in Warner’s novels exist as mirrors
of these single entities, none of whom reflect a genuine Scottish or gender identity any
more than the protagonists do.

This search for a national identity occurs outside of Scotland, but Scotland has
the uncharacteristic history of a constantly elusive identity and the strange predicament
of voluntarily becoming a colonized nation that has recently achieved devolution. The
borders between Scotland and its colonizer, England, are barely visible. Only signs
indicate the difference between the two nations; there are no customs officials or
passports required to travel from one nation to the other. The difference appears
unclear until you meet the Scots and listen to them speak. This space between a
Scottish identity and an English one is marred by their existence beneath an
overarching umbrella of Britishness, and, of course, the parliament in Westminster,
which hitherto had control over both nations while arguably only representing the
English. The achievement of devolution for the Scots suggests a clearer pathway to a
more genuine Scottish identity. Clearly, however, this search is not simply about a
Scottish identity but the nation’s expectations as a nation that has been granted the power to politically and legally represent itself. This power is only partial and ultimately places Scotland in a position of statelessness, wondering what it can become while leashed to England. History shows that devolution usually leads to political independence, but Scotland seems unsure of how to proceed.

Warner uses the metaphor of the body and Scotland to explore the expectations of Scotland under devolution. This partial granting of power exists as a pregnancy in Warner’s females. In Morvern Callar, the conception of freedom is planted, just as devolution provided an expectation of a better life in Scotland with a parliament to represent the particular needs of the Scots. These Demented Lands is the gestation and birth of these expectations for Scotland, yet it is a somewhat nightmarish version of the nativity, and Morvern's ambiguous death suggests that the birth is only a dream or imagined. In The Sopranos, Warner again plants the seeds of expectation in the girls, but their bodies are ultimately diseased and doomed to fail. Their future is as bleak as Couris Jean’s in Morvern Callar, in which they exist as flowers that inevitably wither and die. The product of Morvern’s and the sopranos’ wrung out lives is Macushla in The Man Who Walks. Macushla’s devolution from the foreman is the expectation of flying free like a bird, yet Macushla is crippled from even walking, let alone flying. Macushla’s feminization is reminiscent of Bonnie Prince Charlie, whose nickname, “Bonnie,” is usually used to describe a beautiful woman. Instead of a savior crouching towards Bethlehem, it is the rough beast of Macushla. Thus, Warner symbolically suggests that the body of Scotland does not give birth to a functioning, independent Scotland, but to a crippled being.
In Warner’s novels, this expectation of Scotland to represent its people’s needs ultimately fails, as does the search for an identity that is not false or dependent upon the ties to another. Warner fails partially due to his reliance on the same constructs that he deconstructs, specifically gender as the basis of identity. Warner’s narrative transvestism implies that Warner is exploiting the construct of gender binaries. His characters are metaphorical hermaphrodites, containing the qualities of both sexes. Christopher Whyte suggests that undoing this construct “would prove deeply disturbing because it would destroy the link between textual power and social power attributed to the possessors of a penis.” Despite Warner’s attempts to break up this construct, he reinforces it. Warner bolsters the idea of the union of 1707 as an emasculation and constructs a parallel between his emasculated males and Scotland, in which an independent Scotland is synonymous with his male characters gaining back their masculinity. At the end of *The Man Who Walks*, defeated in his attempt at freedom, Macushla longs to be propped up in a director’s chair in order to help create a Hollywood version of his nation’s final battle for independence. Propping Macushla up, or erecting his masculinity, is simply a semblance of manhood, a reflection rather than a reality. It is reminiscent of Carl MacDougal’s assertion: “In reclaiming our losses we may decide we like things as they are, that we prefer our symbols. If that happens they will at least have significance.” While MacDougal is speaking of the symbols of Scottishness, it is no stretch to apply this idea to those of gender. However, the argument is moot since Warner places the future of Scotland in his females. Macushla is merely the result, albeit one of failure.

Warner’s pregnancies ultimately fail as spilled semen, aborted fetuses, or stillbirths. The expectation for a future Scotland and a genuine sense of identity is disappointed once again. From Morvern to Macushla, Warner’s colonized characters figuratively become the colonizer. They are not unlike England, a nation that is both powerful and femininized, one that is both the top and the bottom of the metaphorical power struggle of sexual intercourse. Warner is arguably not afraid of handing over his pen to a female, even if she exists solely as a disguise of his masculine face. Although he seems to place his hope for the future in the bodies of women through this narrative transvestism, Warner illustrates that these women cannot get rid of the male, just as Scotland cannot get rid of England or the effects of colonization. Perhaps Warner is like his characters, still searching for the answers that elude them. As David Leishman argues, “Breaking up language and other signs, although necessarily linked to doubt and insecurity over form and meaning, is similarly often the first step in a re-creative process in Warner’s writing.”

Warner often leaves us with more questions than answers, consistently relying on traditions that he simultaneously deconstructs. Warner’s narratives are overshadowed by doubt, but a notion of hope does exist, just as his characters exemplify a cohabitation of opposites: they are both suicidal and heroic. Warner fails to provide the answers surrounding the birth of new Scotland and its identity crisis, but his questioning of constructs and symbols prepares the way for further examinations. His latest novel is perhaps merely a reprieve from his elusive search. Perhaps the answers lie in MacDougall’s suggestion of the acceptance of symbols, and Warner has not yet wholly accepted them. Warner has only just begun his

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“breaking up” of false constructs, which suggests that his novels will provide an answer to Scotland’s identity crisis in the future.
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