Introduction

Guy Fletcher, the protagonist of Anthony Horowitz's 2005 novel *The Killing Joke*, is subject to an unusual fate. He overhears the telling of a rather tasteless joke, which offends his sensibilities because the butt of the joke happens to be his own recently deceased mother. In the short-term, his reaction is to take umbrage with the teller of the joke and seek adequate apology. In the longer term, however, his strategy is different. He decides to trace the origins of the joke back through the course of its lifetime, asking each teller where he or she heard it, and hence hoping to trace the joke back to its source, where, presumably, it can be stifled.

What Guy does not know is that in Horowitz's world, jokes are not the expression of individual exasperation. Rather, they are produced by a specific government ministry as a specific public service. Jokes are placed into circulation by this mysterious ministry in order to compensate the public for a tide of other government-produced ills: taxation; social inequality; even bad weather. To trace a joke back to its source is thus to investigate the activities of the Ministry of Jokes, and ultimately to threaten its social purpose. For the joke once known is no longer effective. If Guy's investigation is allowed to reveal the existence of the ministry, it will undermine the minister, Liddy's entire *rasion d'ệtre.* Accordingly, a group of three secret agents is convened, tasked with tracking Guy down and eliminating him:

> Through the half-open door, Liddy saw a screen with a map of England projected on to it. There were half a dozen younger people – men and women – sitting at a long table, taking notes. The next office was empty. A pair of identical twins sat in the third, both talking on the phone. As Liddy continued along the grey-carpeted corridor, a tired-looking woman with a tea trolley

> turned a corner and began to move towards him. He allowed her to pass, and without knocking, went into the last room. The Englishman, the Irishman and the Scotsman were already there.[i]

The Englishman Smythe, the Irishman O'Neil, and the Scotsman McLarrity are the agents detailed to eliminate Guy. Horowitz's novel is a parody of the conventional thriller genre. His portrayal of the secretive and powerful offices of government service is incongruously combined with Guy's haphazard and ludicrous activities.

The one about the Englishman, the Irishman and the Scotsman is well embedded in British literary history. It is at least four hundred years old, and can be seen at work, for example, in Shakespeare's play *Henry V*, where members of the English army on the eve of the battle of Agincourt bolster their spirits and camaraderie through the medium of jokes with the Scottish, Irish and Welsh captains. What is striking about *Henry V* is that it was written barely half a century after the Act of Union between England and Wales in 1536 effectively brought the United Kingdom into existence.

The Killing Joke, by contrast, was written in quite a different historical context. It appeared less than a decade after successful campaigns for political devolution in Scotland and Wales, and the introduction of a joint power sharing executive in Northern Ireland. Shakespeare's *Henry V* reflects a period in which the newness of the British union was the very property that made it interesting to write about. The period surrounding *The Killing Joke*, by contrast, is one where not the introduction, but the seeming dissolution and transcendence of the united British state, are the emerging historical processes at work.

The Killing Joke by no means stands alone. Rupert Thomson's 2005 novel *Divided Kingdom* imagines an Orwellian Britain, ruled by an unelected despot and divided into four different groups for ease of authoritarian control. The groups are categorized on the basis of their mental 'humours', and once the classification is made, each group is designated a particular portion of the island in which to establish its homeland:

> Choleric people were known for their aggressive qualities. They led lives packed with action and excess. Melancholic people, by contrast, were morbid and introspective. What interested them was the life of the mind. Phlegmatic people were swayed by feeling. Empathy came naturally to them, as did a certain spirituality, but they tended to be passive, a little sluggish. As for sanguine people, they were optimistic, good-humoured and well-meaning. They were often held up as an inspiration to others... Everyone in the country had been secretly examined, assessed and classified, all in strict accordance with the humours... Once the population had been split into four groups, the land was divided to accommodate them.[ii]

Members of each humour-group are assigned a colour: Blue for phlegmatics, yellow for cholerics, green for melancholics and red for the sanguine. A map provided at the beginning of the novel suggests that the phlegmatic blue people who are spiritual and swayed by sentiment are the Celts of Wales and the southwest of England. The melancholy greens come from Scotland and the northeast. The northwest is the domain of the angry yellows, while the role-model reds come from London and the home counties.

Of course this classification fails, since Divided Kingdom, like Orwell's 1984, is the story of one man's rebellion against the system. In other words, Thomson provides fictional realization to the impossibility of assigning generic categories to the people in different regions of the British Isles. People in each region move, interact and change. There is then no united kingdom, any more than there is a common interest.

The Killing Joke and Divided Kingdom share two notable characteristics. In each novel, a parodic re-structuring of the thriller genre opens up an ironic perspective on the loss of unity within the British state. Related to that, the British government is imagined as being somehow the enemy of the British people. This has been the case in a great range of popular cultural productions in the last decade or so. A disjunction between the British people and the British state has become something of a bedrock of contemporary culture, so that it has become, in Mark Garnett's words, 'quite possible to imagine a scenario in which Britain's armed forces would be called upon to act against their fellow citizens.'[iii] Suspicion of the political state bears deeply on the issue mentioned above: that we have entered a period when the stable and united identity of the nation-state itself have begun to break up. How has this come about?

Origins of the Break-Up of Britain

The Break-Up of Britain is the title of a political study published by Scottish commentator Tom Nairn in 1977. Its appearance must be understood in the context of a particular historical period. In 1969, the Kilbrandon Commission had been convened by Harold Wilson's Labour Government to investigate constitutional affairs and the governance of the United Kingdom. The Act of Parliament passed as a result of the Commission's report of 1973 recommended that Wales and Scotland be

governed by their own autonomous elected bodies on matters relating to domestic policy, with only foreign affairs and overall global matters remaining in control of the Westminster Parliament. Accordingly, referenda were held in 1979 in each country, asking the people of Scotland and Wales whether or not they wanted this form of home rule.

The referenda were defeated – strongly in Scotland, and overwhelmingly in Wales, where, on St. David's Day 1979, fewer than one in five of the electorate came out in favour of political devolution. It was to be eighteen years before the Labour Party would govern Britain again. Labour had been traditionally strong – almost at times dependent – on support from the industrial areas of both Scotland and Wales. Accordingly, as soon as the party returned to power in May 1997, within six months it again held referenda on devolution in Scotland and Wales. This time, the result was quite different. Home rule was fully embraced in Scotland, and also won a narrow victory in Wales. Within only eighteen years, the resounding and apparently final 'no' of 1979 had become a tentative but clear 'yes.' The apparent rapidity of these transformations is one of the important factors in understanding contemporary British public culture.

There are two considerations which mitigate the margin of the original failure in 1979. Nationalist movements had already existed for a considerable time in both nations. Tom Nairn suggests in *The Break-Up of Britain* that Welsh nationalism had been strongly associated with the Welsh language (which had in turn been in numerical decline for decades), and hence with a cultural rather than a political nationalism. 'It would be exaggerated to say that Welsh nationalism was culturist in outlook while Scottish nationalism was philistine. But few would fail to recognize some truth in the contrast.'[iv] By referring to Scotland as 'philistine' Nairn refers to a

nationalism based on material and political considerations, in contrast to the soft cultural nationalism of Wales. In Scotland, according to Nairn, the problem was almost exactly the opposite of the Welsh problem: the nationalist movement was mainly focused on political and economic factors, especially land reform and the vexed question of who precisely would profit from the discovery of North Sea oil. Scottish nationalism, in other words, did not include a sufficient cultural basis to allow it to pass into the popular imagination and gain momentum. Welsh nationalism, on the other hand, was excessively grounded in cultural matters, and so was unable to offer a substantiated political agenda capable of appealing to members of the Welsh electorate who were not Welsh language speakers.

I have argued separately that during the period 1979-1997, cultural figures such as writers, musicians and filmmakers contributed to the increase in cultural confidence in both Scotland and Wales, and hence to achieving the 'yes' vote in 1997.[v] Since cultural confidence is an important aspect in considering the two sets of referenda, it is not necessarily appropriate to draw such a strict line between the domains of *politics* and *culture,* as each informs the other. One of the premises of this study is that fiction is an appropriate place for the consideration of large matters of public political culture. The referenda defeats of 1979 might have been heavy, but they the fact that they were staged at all represented a step forward for the previously dissipated nationalist movements in each country, and hence can be seen as staging posts on the historical path towards devolution in 1997, rather than totally at odds with it.

Moreover, and of more fundamental concern for this study, is the fact that the break-up of Britain is not by any means uniquely concerned with political change in Scotland and Wales. Nairn writes at the start of his study that the original impetus for

his work was provided by a series of cultural and political conflicts across Britain. These included nationalist movements in Scotland and Wales, but not necessarily in any central or leading way, compared to a whole series of other public conflicts. The 1970s, for example, were characterized by labour unrest and a series of industrial disputes. It was a period in which feminist activists were beginning to challenge the roles traditionally assigned to women within the bourgeois nuclear family. It was also a period of violent racial antagonism, as exemplified by the Ugandan refugee crisis. Each of these historical phenomena contributed to an overall situation in which the consensuses that had governed British public and cultural life for decades was gradually beginning to evaporate. With the loss of consensus in the public sphere went also the easy sense of a single national interest and even a single national identity. What Nairn calls 'residual all-British consciousness' thus 'decays' into a series of fractious subcultures, with overlapping and sometimes competing interests.[vi]

Nairn's overall point in *The Break-Up of Britain* is that political break-up is a response to the contradictions existing in an unequal and conflicted society, in which break-away political movements in Scotland and Wales are only one – albeit important – consideration. The domains of feminism, and of ethnicity, are at least as significant in asking how individual subjects perceive their relationship to the political state, and may be even more so.

According to Nairn, the conflicts that give rise to the break-up of Britain are conflicts brought about by the economic inequalities of capitalist society. He thus wrote *The Break-Up of Britain* with, as it were, his socialist hat on as much as with his nationalist hat on. This was also the case with Nairn's older contemporary, the Welsh socialist intellectual Raymond Williams. Williams (1921-88) belonged to that first generation of working-class children who received scholarships to study at

Cambridge in the 1930s and 40s, and devoted his career to extending the educational franchise. He was enormously influential in bringing political questions into the cultural environment and hence in democratizing educational institutions and cultural practices.

Late in his career, Williams increasingly came to see that implicit in the extension of the democratic franchise was the need for reform of political institutions across Britain. Like Nairn, he advocated reform of the House of Lords, and the establishment of certain regional political assemblies across Britain. In his important late essay 'Are we becoming more divided?', for example, Williams touched upon the relationship between the campaigns for devolution in Scotland and Wales, and the evaporation of a single consensual political community in Britain more generally:

> The central fact about Scottish and Welsh nationalism is perhaps this: that in Scotland and Wales we are beginning to find ways of expressing two kinds of impulse that are in fact very widely experienced throughout British society. First, we are trying to discover an identity... And second but related to this we are trying to discover political processes by which people really can govern themselves.[vii]

By relating political change in Scotland and Wales to historical developments that were in fact 'very widely experienced throughout British society' Williams implicitly makes a connection between political devolution and the break-up of Nairn's 'all-British consciousness' on other grounds. The goals of devolution, as Williams points out, were to discover new identities and achieve new forms of political representation. These also were the goals behind the feminist movement, and

political and legal measures aimed at safeguarding the legal equality of members of Britain's ethnic minority populations. This suggests that the political processes and the new identity politics at the heart of *The Break-Up of Britain* were not confined to devolution in Scotland and Wales. On the contrary, the break-up of pan-British social cohesion was occurring on all sorts of other terrains.

As a result of these changes, the radical academic Anthony Barnett developed the *Charter 88* movement in the run-up to the 1988 General Election. *Charter 88* was tantamount to the beginnings of a Republican movement, and Tom Nairn described it as a manifesto demanding 'a new state.'[viii] The charter called for the introduction of a written constitution and a bill of rights in Britain, capable of transforming its people from monarchic subjects into civic citizens. Tellingly, *Charter 88* was signed by representatives of the home rule movement in Scotland, exponents of the women's movement, and important campaigners for racial equality.[ix]

Raymond Williams's interest in political change included a commitment to devolution in Wales, for which he actively campaigned in the run-up to the 1979 referendum. At the same time, Williams was also an innovative novelist. His 1978 novel *The Volunteers*, for example, imagined a Britain set in the (then) futuristic world where political devolution had been achieved – and explored some of the challenges involved in that process. In other words, by writing a novel in 1978 giving fictional realization to the possibility of successful home rule in Wales, he was using his writing to try and contribute to that political end. Here again we can see that the rigid distinction between *politics* and *culture* does not always hold up.

At the time of his death in 1988, Williams was working on a further novel entitled *People of the Black Mountains*. Initially, it takes the form of a realist narrative in which a young man goes out into the mountains on the border between Wales and

England, in search of his missing grandfather. As he searches, rather than finding his lost relative, he sees a series of historical tableaux, showing him the myriad different people who had lived in and worked on that land, from the Stone Age, right up to the present time (although by the time of Williams's death he had, alas, only got as far as the late medieval period). Each historical episode becomes, in effect, a separate story. Continuity is provided not just by the physical place, and the overall quest narrative, but also by important historical details. Characters in one section, for example, become the mythical figures of another section two hundred years later. The names of characters here become transmuted into the names of places there – so that each generation leaves its mark. Tony Pinkney says of *People of the Black Mountains*, 'forgetting in this novel, across the long span of its history, is... a matter of having your history stolen from you – your buildings burned, your laws and traditions rewritten, your maps redrawn – by successive waves of invasion and domination.'[x] He concludes that 'even the reader is drawn into this process.' (Ibid).

People of the Black Mountains is profoundly innovative, starting as it does in or around the year 23,000 B.C. and aiming to carry on right up into the present. This innovation invites the reader to ask two questions: What does it mean to write a historical novel that is 'set' across several vastly different historical epochs? Can we call a collection of stories linked thematically across time a novel - or simply a collection of stories - and why does this matter? Williams's novel shows that this kind of writing probes the creation and the undoing of several different social and political orders, and this bears deeply on his notion of how different political formations, including national formations, are built up and challenged. That technique of using the trans-historical imagination can be described as a postmodern technique for engaging with existing genres, while also trying to contribute something new to them. But

before this point can be explored in detail, it is necessary to consider the emergence of the concept of postmodernism.

Origins of Postmodernism

The postmodern movement arose in architecture during the 1960s and 1970s when a number of architects in the United States of America and Britain became dissatisfied with the practices they had inherited from architectural modernism in the public sphere. The modernists in turn had been inspired by the opportunities for innovation that the interaction of culture and advanced technology seemed to offer. The leading figures of modernist architecture, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and above all Le Corbusier integrated technological precision and geometrical accuracy into their plans for public buildings, transforming the traditional concept of a home into a machine for living in.

Half a century after the work of Le Corbusier, however, it had become apparent that combining technology with art in such a manner would not necessarily create a harmonious living environment. The emphasis on urban standardization, for example, led to an apparent lifelessness in the buildings themselves. Moreover, the buildings were cramped, unable to be adapted for a variety of purposes, and ecologically highly unsound. They were tantamount to so many creepers choking the life out of an urban jungle. Charles Jencks, one of the early postmodern architects, emphasizes that the machines for living in envisaged by Le Corbusier had become places where ‘citizens’ became ‘incarcerated’ in ‘modernist anonymity.'[xi] Le Corbusier had dreamed of the city of technological modernity, in which problems of social space and inequality would be answered by man’s dominance over science and by the resulting designs for new urban and civic built environments. An early

American postmodern architect like Jane Jacobs, by contrast, entitled her critical study *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* to refer to the need for regeneration of the urban environment following the failings of modernism.

The modernist machines for living in, rather than helping to combat society's ills, actually contributed to exacerbating them. The realization that the interaction between human beings and their landscape played a formative role in shaping human society was an important stimulus to the postmodern movement. The possibility that an innovative architectural postmodernity might be mobilized to challenge some of the inequalities of a society divided into rich and poor was one of its early insights.

According to Charles Jencks, postmodernism is characterized by a particular form of double coding: 'the combination of modern techniques with something else... to communicate with the public and a concerned minority.' (*What is Post-Modernism?* p.29). When Charles Jencks talks about the importance of double coding in understanding the origins of postmodernism, this applies in a number of different ways. The postmodernists, like the modernists, believe in the interaction of culture with technology. Jencks believes that postmodern architecture can communicate both with a general public, and with a specialist body of other architectural professionals. The former might appreciate the elegance and outward appearance of a structure such as Robert Portman's Westin Bonaventure in Los Angeles, Norman Foster's headquarters of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, or Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Skilled architects by contrast might be interested in the ways in which each of these buildings refers to others in the postmodern tradition, by means of visual echoes. Thus postmodern architecture is doubly coded in the sense that it can speak simultaneously to a highly specialized sector or professional elite, and to a willing general public, in terms appropriate to each.

What all of this points to is the capacity of postmodernism to cut across and combine different styles, traditions, and even disciplines. This is precisely what we find happening in postmodern fiction. As Charles Jencks says of postmodern novelists, their work 'cut across literary genres and combined such separated types as the historical romance, comedy, detective story, and philosophical treatise.' (*What is Post-Modernism?* p.32). Novelists such as Italo Calvino, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Umberto Eco, E.L. Doctorow and Carlos Fuentes all combine different genres, and integrate different historical moments into the present, combining the intellectually high-brow with the populist and even the kitsch. By now, though, these writers have already been the focus of several critical studies of postmodernism. It is with a younger generation of British postmodern novelists that this study is concerned.

Postmodern Fiction and the Break-Up of Britain

Critical concepts of postmodernity arose in late twentieth-century architecture. The break-up of Britain is a historical process, rooted in the movement towards home rule and devolved political power in Scotland and Wales. In other words, both *postmodernism* and *the break-up of Britain* are informed by an important spatial dimension. Since the 1970s, social scientists and scholars across a range of disciplines have been increasingly aware that physical space is not value neutral. On the contrary, social space is thoroughly imbricated with public and hierarchical relationships, and ultimately, with different forms of power. The spatial turn that arrives with the moment of postmodernity lays bare the power nexus between individuals, peoples, and organizations at a range of levels. Accordingly, the portrayal of different kinds of social space is an important element in much postmodern fiction.

In Chapter One I will argue that a new awareness of Britain's relative decline in stature on the world stage since the Second World War and the end of the imperial period has provoked a range of fictional responses. In the decade immediately following the war, the dominant fictional response was to conjure away the problems faced by an encroaching exterior world reality, and offer fictional solace in the strongly delineated world of home. This technique can be seen occurring in some of the most emblematic British novels of the 1950s: Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*; J.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*; and Ian Fleming's *Live and Let Die*. By the 1970s, in contrast, an increasingly well-informed and critically-motivated segment of Britain's intelligentsia had become aware that the nostalgia and return to the days of imperial rule and public decorum offered by so many novels in the 1950s was neither possible nor in truth desirable.

Symptomatic of this new wave in Britain's post-imperial fiction is J.G. Farrell's empire trilogy: *The Siege of Krishnapur;* *Troubles* and *The Singapore Grip*. The earlier work of Amis and Tolkien had addressed the spatial turn with apprehension, allegorizing the encroachment of global forces for change into a series of fables in which Britain's loss of global eminence could receive symbolic restitution through recourse to an emphasis on its own fictive continuity. Farrell by contrast embraces the spatial turn wholeheartedly. *The Siege of Krishnapur;* *Troubles* and *The Singapore Grip* cannot be considered a trilogy in the conventional sense of tracing one or more families across one or more generations of a life story. The narrative of each novel is discrete in that plot-based sense. Farrell portrays a structural congruence between the first attempt in India to gain independence from Britain in the 1850s; the sectarian troubles that have afflicted Ireland since partition; and Singapore on the brink of Japanese invasion. In other words, the linking theme of the trilogy is space,

and how different constructions of public space make manifest certain power relationships.

The spatial turn reveals that what is happening at one point on the globe might be informed and even directed by events at another entirely separate point. For although *The Siege of Krishnapur; Troubles* and *The Singapore Grip* are historical novels, they are imbued with a peculiarly modern and even contemporary idiom, which has the effect of focusing attention onto the moment at which they were written, rather than the different moments at which their action is imagined to occur. In other words, history itself is revealed in postmodern fiction to consist of a series of overlapping and ironically recurring scenarios, each of which has an important relationship with the present. At the conclusion of Chapter One, I suggest that the perpetual movement towards a ubiquitous present has become even more accelerated in a series of novels in which the period from the 1970s to the present day is imagined as being both a separate historical period, and an important moment of the present. Jonathan Coe's *The Rotter's Club* is an important example of this.

J.G. Farrell's three novels comprise a historical trilogy which ends up in the present. This opens up a second perspective on postmodern fiction and the spatial turn, whereby the presence of the past is revealed in a striking and sometimes surprising number of spatial locations. This is probed further in Chapter Two, which analyses a series of novels that have drawn an implicit parallel between the end of the British empire overseas, and political devolution domestically. For example, Rachel Seiffert's novel *Afterwards* portrays the aftermath of political violence in colonial Kenya, and pre-Good Friday Northern Ireland. As with the Farrell trilogy, the implication seems to be that certain historical scenarios recur with specific variations across a range of societies and periods. *Afterwards* thus sets off as a historical novel,

and ends up in the present. This is also true of Andrew Greig's *In Another Light*, where Malaysia on the brink of independence from Britain in the 1940s is juxtaposed with Scotland, struggling to define its political constitution in the first decade of the new millennium. Greig, like Seiffert, seems to suggest that the power nexus that exists between different global spaces is important in understanding contemporary Britain. Moreover, this can only be done through recourse to the history of each society, and an understanding of how the past comes to be operative in the present.

Philip Tew has suggested that the work of recent novelists contributes to a general reconfiguration of concepts of Britishness and narratives of British identity. In commenting on the ever-increasing diversity of British authors, he writes:

> Since the 1970s not only has fiction become more 'multicultural' or ethnically diverse in authors and subject matter... but when considered with the emergence of a strongly working class oriented literature in Scotland after the 1980s because of devolution and the strengths of local publishing opportunities, overall a shift in the focus of British literariness can be traced.[xii]

The diversity of British authors in ethnic terms has certainly increased significantly since the first period of relatively wide-spread immigration from the Commonwealth during the period of decolonization. The coming to maturity of a large number of second and third generation immigrant authors coincides in time with political devolution in Scotland and Wales, and a changing political landscape in Northern Ireland. Immigrant British ethnicities and devolution politics both contribute to the new kind of British novel that has emerged since the 1970s: both are aspects of the postcolonial predicament and the need for new narratives of identity. Chapter Two

concludes with analysis of Desmond Barry's *Cressida's Bed* and Trezza Azzopardi's *The Hiding Place*, where the implicit parallel between the end of empire overseas and the phenomenon of political devolution in Wales is pointed up.

If social space is an important medium for the reification of power relationships, then the capacity to contest its meaning is at least potentially transformative. Chapter Three looks at two fictional responses to the spatial turn, exploring the imbrication of space with political change and hence with the break-up of consensus in Britain's public sphere. Andrew O'Hagan's *Our Fathers* imagines the spatial turn very explicitly as a matter of transforming social relationships through the construction of egalitarian social spaces. In his portrayal of the aspiration to meet the need for high quality public housing in post-war Scotland, O'Hagan conjoins two distinct kinds of space: the nation, and the home. *Our Fathers* portrays a society in which unwholesome or unsanitary housing manifests power relationships through economic inequality, literally imprisoning subjects within their own poverty. To engage in a public programme of housing is in this sense to offer to build the nation anew. By extrapolation, the failure of such a programme bears heavily on the dissolution of the unitary state, just as the incongruities and injustices of the past weigh heavily upon the present. *Our Fathers* can be seen as a symptomatic novel of British postmodernity in that it explores the relationship that exists between critical concepts of space and political processes of change – leading ultimately to devolution.

Economic inequality is one of the areas in which the power-space nexus becomes particularly visible. Another such area is that of gender. For five centuries of literary production, public spaces such as courts, castles, palaces and prisons have been ascribed to men, while private places such as home, school and hospital have been ascribed to women. If the power-space nexus imprisons low-income families in

their own poverty, then it is also true that it imprisons men and women in their gender. This imprisonment is physically instantiated by the different spatial domains in which they operate. To explore these domains, Chapter Three concludes with analysis of Shena Mackay's novel *Heligoland*. Mackay, like O'Hagan, symbolically commits herself to the rebuilding of the nation through a fictional portrayal of a public housing programme. Mackay is however more attuned than O'Hagan to the particular dictates that associate *home* with *woman*. As she is interested in inverting the patriarchal hegemony, she creates in *Heligoland* a novel that is part-realist and part-fable. Her female protagonist Rowena has survived orphanage in India and servitude on a country estate in Scotland. The names of her masters, Lord and Lady Grouseclaw, indicate that the novel is to be read as an allegory of traditional power relationships and the ways in which they might be opposed. Although she becomes imprisoned by the traditionally feminine role of housekeeper in a communal estate in London, she also achieves a hard-won truce with herself.

Heligoland bears many of the features that have been described as postmodern. In the portrayed connection between India and Scotland, there is an embedded awareness of the co-presence of different points on a global terrain, and of how actions in one impact upon events in the other. This opens up a dialectical relationship between space and time, where the affinity that exists between different kinds of place in a connected system is symbolically repeated by the relationship between different periods of time. What happens in one time period may be ironically repeated in another, just as what happens in one place might have a particular impact in another. The presence of the past, and of past locations, are both important elements in *Heligoland*.

Mackay's flat, two-dimensional portrayal of Lord and Lady Grouseclaw as characters from a fable suggests that there is a third element in *Heligoland* that can properly be called *postmodern*: the commitment to parody. By parodying a didactic fable in an otherwise realist novel, Mackay creates a fictional form capable of registering opposition to the masculine hegemony over social space. This becomes even more strongly the theme in Chapter Four, which provides analysis of A.S. Byatt's *The Virgin in the Garden* and Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*. As feminist writers and experimental novelists, Byatt and Atkinson are aware of the power-space nexus that exists, and of the impact it has in the specific domain of gender. Accordingly, each writer undertakes a subversive parody of monarchic culture, in which monarchy is associated with patriarchy and hegemony.

In *The Virgin in the Garden*, Byatt imagines a pageant commissioned to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953, written on the theme of the earlier Elizabethan golden age of the sixteenth century. Byatt allows her pageant to disintegrate into farce, thereby drawing attention to the disjunction between pompous and undemocratic state-authored rituals, and their incongruous human realization in the nation at large. *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* too takes the 1953 coronation as an important climax. The protagonist's family gather in a living room above a shop to watch the event on a television especially purchased for the occasion. In other words, the patriarchal masquerade of state power is brought directly into a private social space that would more traditionally be ascribed to women.

As with *The Virgin in the Garden*, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* emphasizes the lack of fit between male authority and female experience. In addition, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* is set in the flat above a pet shop, which turns into a scene of carnage when a fire breaks out, the animals perish, and the family are

compelled to move home. The image of the expulsion from the garden of Eden had been a mainstay of patriarchal culture and authority for two millennia. In her ironic refrain of the expulsion archetype Atkinson mobilizes the power of parody in order to demonstrate her opposition to patriarchy. In other words, through the politics of parody, and the parody of politics, Byatt and Atkinson reveal that feminist critique it capable of making an important contribution to the break-up of consensus in Britain's public and cultural life and hence to the symbolic break-up of Britain that occurs in much postmodern fiction.

Just as A.S. Byatt parodies the myth of an Elizabethan golden age, and Kate Atkinson parodies the expulsion from Eden motif, I suggest at the start of Chapter Five that Jeanette Winterson is another feminist writer capable of accessing the politics of parody. Winterson's *Boating for Beginners* is a feminist re-coding of the biblical narrative of Noah's Ark, in which Noah becomes a tyrannical despot and the women around him are the long-suffering heroines. Biblical narratives of this kind are in many ways ripe for the plundering by parodic postmodern writers, though, and feminist critique is by no means the only grounds on which such work has been carried out. Chapter Five goes on to explore in more detail Julian Barnes's novel A History of the World in 10½ Chapters, which is a series of short fables, each of them a different re-conceptualization of the narrative of Noah, and each occurring in different societies during different historical periods. The linking theme of each fable is the oceanic feeling, expressed through a series of sea voyages undertaken by the different protagonists and capable when read cumulatively of generating a sense of the ocean itself as being the main highway and connecting force in the world. The ocean in this sense generates a feeling of the globe as such, undivided by national, political or cultural frontiers.

A similar portrayal of a borderless world is explored in David Mitchell's novel _Cloud Atlas_. There, five linked short stories set in radically different time periods from the pre-historic to the space age invite the reader to cultivate a mental image of the world when looked at from a point outside it. Mitchell, like Barnes, portrays a world as a single unbounded entity, free from borders and where the concept of a nation-state has ceased to be operative.

Mitchell's portrayal of the world without borders can be read positively or negatively. Negatively, it gives rise to a dystopian fantasy in which nations have ceased to exist simply because the power of transnational capitalism has enabled corporations to transcend the boundaries of individual nation-states in the scale of their operations and the reach of their power, obliging every human being on earth to bow down before the capitalist system. Positively, it suggests a form of cosmopolitanism, whereby different peoples, different cultures, and speakers of different languages are not precluded from social association with each other by a pre-conceived boundary or frontier.

Cosmopolitanism is the theme of the final chapter, which explores the contribution made by writers from specific ethnic communities to the imaginative process that has been described as the break-up of Britain. Presenting Salman Rushdie's _The Satanic Verses_ alongside Monica Ali's _Brick Lane_ and Andrea Levy's _Small Island_ helps to elucidate the double encoding characteristic of so much postmodern fiction. All three novels are firmly embedded in one particular place which is also a point of intersection with other spaces and other cultural practices. Again, all three novels speak of one particular time, while successfully conveying the presence of the past in the contemporary.

Kazuo Ishiguro goes a step further than this, deploying a range of intersecting linguistic codes to achieve a precise effect. It is with an interpretative reading of Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* that this study concludes. In setting his historical novel in an English country house of the 1930s, Ishiguro appears to have decided to fashion a plot and a novel out of a cast list of characters that is exclusively white and European. That the Japanese-born Ishiguro should make such a choice seems like a startling omission. The new analysis presented draws strongly on the different linguistic codes employed by Ishiguro and argues that in effect, the language in question is the language of a contemporary, urban, cosmopolitan society. This after all is the society in which Ishiguro writes. To read this cosmopolitan sense back into *The Remains of the Day* is to realize that all of its characters must speak Ishiguro's language. Yet Ishiguro's language is the language of a multicultural, ethnically varied and linguistically complex society. In other words, because they are fashioned through such a language, all of the characters of *The Remains of the Day* can be imagined and read as members of a cosmopolitan society, and ultimately as members of different ethnic subcultures. This is the case not because Ishiguro explicitly tells us that his characters are Indian, or African. On the contrary, he says no such thing. Yet Ishiguro's compound linguistic heritage, fashioned out of the blending of myriad different varieties of English, makes them in the postmodern imagination the proper inheritors of a global multicultural reality.

The complex linguistic heritage with which Ishiguro's characters are endowed belongs to the period in which the novel was written, rather than that in which it is set. In other words, his characters are historical characters imagined into being in the present. In this sense, Ishiguro, like so many other postmodern novelists, reveals the

presence of the past in the contemporary, just as J.G. Farrell had done by endowing his historical characters with a thoroughly modern consciousness.

Farrell's *Empire Trilogy* makes an implicit parallel between the end of the period of empire, and the break-up of unionist politics in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. His imaginative reach is global, but the precise focus of each novel is firmly local, fixed in particular places at particular times. In global terms, the nation-state appears to have become superseded, a unit now too small and too bounded for the generation of useful cultural and imaginative analysis. In the postmodern imagination, the borders between nation-states are thrown open, allowing the nation itself to be transcended by larger ethnic and linguistic categories, even as it is breaking up into smaller competing and conflicting units. The contemporary nations-state, in other words, is a dialectical entity, negated and superseded even at the moment of its own assertion. This has important implications for the work of fiction. In British postmodern fiction, portrayal of the break-up of a coherent, unified or consensual national culture brings in its train an opportunity to pay particular attention to the contemporary make-up of Britain itself.

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[i] Anthony Horowitz, *The Killing Joke*, (London: Orion, 2004), p.123.

[ii] Rupert Thomson, *Divided Kingdom*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p.11.

[iii] Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy: The Story of Politics, Society and Popular Culture in Britain Since 1975*, (London: Vintage, 2008), p.9.

[iv] Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, (London: New Left Books, 1977), p.197.

[v] Hywel Dix, *After Raymond Williams: Cultural Materialism and the Break-Up of Britain*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), *passim*.

[vi] Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, (London: New Left Books, 1977), p.80.

[vii] Raymond Williams, 'Are We Becoming More Divided?' in his *Who Speaks for Wales?* ed. Daniel Williams, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p.188.

[viii] Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, (London: Granta, 2000), p.73.

[ix] D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke discusses Salman Rushdie's role in the *Charter 88* group in his *Modern Novelists: Salman Rushdie*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), p.69.

[x] Tony Pinkney, *Raymond Williams*, (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), p.132.

[xi] Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Editions, 1996), p.22. Cited hereafter as *What is Post-Modernism?*

[xii] Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel*, (London: Continuum, 2004), p.14.