

Mitch Miller

WORK AS IF

(A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A GUIDING HAND)

'You saw part of God? Cried the author.
"How did that happen?"

Lanark explained.
The author was greatly excited. He said.

"Say those words again."

"Is . . . is. . . is . . . , then a pause,
then Is . . . if . . . is . . ."

If? "Shouted the author sitting upright.
"He actually said if? He wasn't simply snarling

'Is, is, is, is, is' all the time?"

Lanark meets the King of Unthank and Provan i
n the 'Epilogue' to *Lanark*



This image of a sinister, grinning white dog stretches along the opening text of Alasdair Gray's short story 'The Comedy of the White Dog'. Reading the words nearest to the dog's spine gives the following sequence;

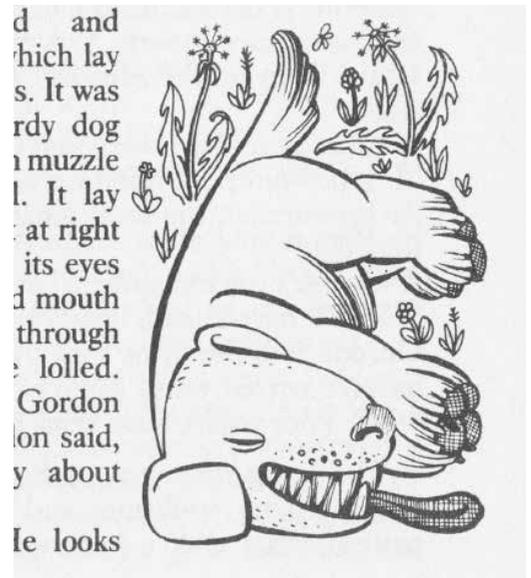
lay
 was
 dog
 muzzle
 lay
 right
 eyes
 mouth
 through
 lolled
 Gordon
 said
 about

Not quite a sentence, but something at least sense-ible. If this was deliberate – and Gray is notoriously particular about his typesetting – then he has here achieved a perfect illustrative balance. The drawing illustrates the action in the text, but *the text also illustrates the drawing*. Working together, the word and the image convey the importance of the dog and the lead character Gordon's immediate fascination with it. And, given the metamorphic denouement of the story, this hybridisation between word and text seems all the more assured, and powerful. As Marshall McLuhan would have it, type is also an image and Gray, whether through his own very distinctive hand drawn typography, or his creative use of text itself to structure the visuals of a book – as in the 000000's that signal a textual break his *Book of Prefaces*, or the sequences of Asterisks strategically deployed in *1982, Janine*, – has made a career, and many visually striking books out of reminding us of this.

In the print 'Inside the Box of Bone (1965) made for an unpublished book of poems, hand-lettered poems curve gently into the crook of a Zeus-like, cradling in his upstretched arms cities and what look like missile, and in his belly, a woman in stylised flames who prophesises Rima, Lanark's lover and foil. The poetry is itself, a visual experience, that finds its fullest force as a visual arrangement, much like the novel that was to come;

Inside the box of bone, the parcel of flesh,
 Under the helmet of that noble head,
 The figure of naked woman stands,
 Small, beautiful, obscenely mutilated,

God knows she has achieved many things,
 Heart, spine, a brain to cap them,

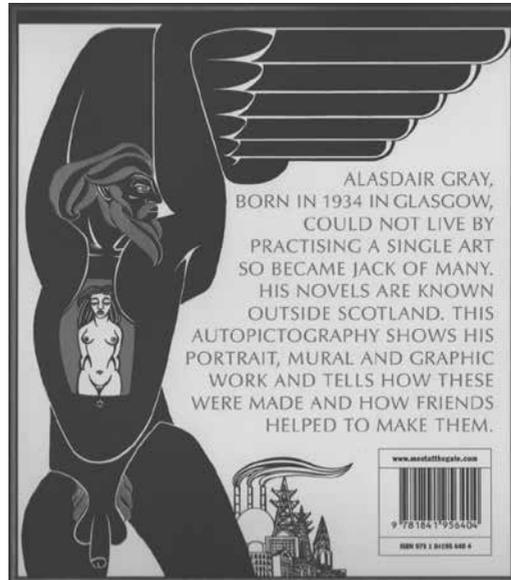


d and
 which lay
 s. It was
 rdy dog
 i muzzle
 l. It lay
 at right
 its eyes
 d mouth
 through
 lolled.
 Gordon
 on said,
 y about
 le looks

The use of words and fire,
Till now enshrined in ribs of dragon armour,
All her weapons seem a weary weight,
Her wounds not worth protecting

Looking at the vast archive of figurative work by Gray we are confronted with an ongoing subversion of easy distinctions between surface, substance and structure. The classical traditions Gray studied at the art school emphasised the solidity, and edificial mastery of the human body, while clothing draped, or, in later schools of art, hid this form. But in a portrait of Gordon Lennox drawn on crumpled brown paper (which often stands in for skin tone in his work) in the fluid, continuous, sculptural line Gray is best known for, he draws a kink in his subject's garments that seems every bit as structural to this figure, as the finely observed contours of the hand. These edificial kinks, folds, flesh rolls and wrinkles are commonly found in Gray's illustrations and murals. This kinkiness is found in the frown of Ian Nicol, the man who splits in two in *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*, or the bulges in the waistcoat, and frills round the cuff of William Smellie, in the *Book of Prefaces*, in the architectural folds of a white skirt in the half nude *Mrs Nanni in White Slip, Bra and a Glass of Wine* (1964) or, very early in Gray's output, a self portrait in hospital in a tucked in shirt, with creases that nudge the painting onto Cubist turf (*Hospital Sketch I*, 1956).

As if to satirise this tendency, the 1963 precursor to the illustration for 'An Explanation of Some Recent Changes' shows a clothed woman, described in bold, nearly glowing black lines with her back to us; the crumple of her jumper is her body. In 1982 this was replaced with the woman as life model, the classical body reasserting itself through the delicate suggestion of a single black line running from the base of the head to the middle of the back. Social display – that is clothing, hair, facial expressions, seem as much part of the physical exoskeleton of his subject as its hands, nose eyes or chin. Put another way, the way a form is used, the way a person's feelings change a face is, in Gray's art, as integral to form as the academic reality of human anatomy. His clothing becomes the thing, rather than just drapes across it. A frown becomes the brow, so that we cannot imagine it not frowning. There is a sculptural permanence here that puts the social signal above all other considerations, particularly 'realism'. It is in short, a profoundly social approach to drawing or as he puts it, the marks of an 'old fashioned post-impressionist' who apparently borrowed much of his technique from Gauguin.



I

These images are broadly representative of the Alasdair Gray (b1934) best known and understood by the public as the maker of uniquely sculptural, cubist-social-realist figurative works heavily influenced by graphic art and traditional book design that mostly, but not exclusively, depict postwar Glasgow in symbolic or documentary form. The sheer volume of paintings, prints, book designs, posters and drawings, and the apparent coherence of vision, including the instantly recognisable clear line style and accomplished draughtsmanship underpinning them, runs the risk of reducing his oeuvre to a brand.

This might lead us to the impression that we absolutely *know* Gray. But a work from 1953, *The Marriage Feast at Cana* (which was later, like so many of Gray's works, cameo'd in *Lanark* as one of Thaw's Art School projects), seats us at a table with grizzled working men, reaching for empty glasses with hands drawn as cranes, vices and clamps – the hands of the Apostles of lore, working men following a man, and a notion that may be heaven-sent. A year earlier Gray produced a lithograph '*Minister with Ominous Street Scene*' (1952), all pastel colours, soft lines and strobe effects – very different in feel and texture to what has come since. A 1953 gouache *Still Life with Green Slippers and Piano* is Colourist in style and presumably, derivation, that little resembles later output, though as Gray points out, this marks a developing – and abiding – interest in apparent symmetries found in everyday life. And then we have, from 1950, two paintings made 'according to the rules of the Scottish Department of Education's Art Inspectorate'. The characters in *The drawing Class* (1950) and *The Card Players* (1951) resemble slightly milder paintings by Grosz, or the Svejikian tomfoolery of Josef Lada. Again, there is the fascination with human forms joining together to make shapes, pattern and possibly, wider meaning.

These early images, and the above quotes are published in Gray's 'Autopictography' *A Life in Pictures*, which collects, for the first time, the bulk of his work as painter, muralist and illustrator. It marks not just a various and distinguished career in visual culture (none but a dread enemy would argue otherwise) but acknowledges an increasing emphasis, in recent years, of Gray the artist, over Gray the novelist. This may be linked in part, to Gray's close, and relatively new-minted commercial relationship with the highly regarded Sorcha Dallas gallery, but there is little doubt that

a serious appraisal of Gray as a visual artist is overdue. In the huge sweep and scope of Murdoch MacDonald's book on Scottish Art Gray is treated with very briefly as an illustrator of his own works and is only alluded to in MacDonald's assessment of 'the interwoven fabric of verbal and visual art in Scotland'. *A Life in Pictures* and a 2011 GOMA exhibition of Gray's work as *City Recorder* in the late seventies, seem to insist upon a more careful re-examination of Gray's contribution to this fabric, not so much to dispute this assessment of his contribution but to enlarge it. The jacket to *Life in Pictures* argues in monumental script (similar in case, if not actual font style, to the closing words of *Lanark*) that Gray –

...COULD NOT LIVE BY PRACTISING
A SINGLE ART SO BECAME A JACK
OF MANY. HIS NOVELS ARE KNOWN
OUTSIDE SCOTLAND.

This poses the question of whether he would have practiced a single art, if he could have? Gray has elevated the use and choice of type to a level of refinement, both as carrier of substance and the thing itself the question is perhaps somewhat irrelevant, the issue now becoming one of how Gray himself is presented. *A Life in Pictures*, and a section of his own at GOMA, would seem to argue that the time has perhaps come to separate out the different ingredients of Gray's art and to, in the fashion of *Lanark* (who tries his hand at being a writer to stave off the Hell of Unthank) and Thaw (whose dedication to the image destroys him) converse with two Grays, in two separate languages.

Is this possible, or even desirable? Overall, there seems to be a wider project of settling the account or rather, the multiplicitous author onto a perch, of some kind. If so this is perhaps a shame (and already doomed) as Gray's greatest value is surely his erratic and idiosyncratic movement through the Scotland of his time; from the studios on Garnethill through to east end streets, the literary precincts of publishing houses and theatre footlights, benefits for workers afflicted with asbestosis and the quiet, ruffled intimacy of various front rooms. The trace patterns of these encompass novels, short stories, plays and images, and of the latter, more must be said beyond illustrations for his own books and pieces of art for the gallery. A profusion of handbills, bespoke Christmas cards, book covers (for others) posters and magazine covers testify to his ephemeral contribution to the look and feel of Scottish culture, and an industry as distinctive and impressive as another street-level image maker, Edinburgh's John Kay.

The solid Gray line has also been introduced directly into the city's physical space; many of Gray's most serious and important visuals are built into the structure of converted churches (Oran Mor), actual churches (the beautiful, surviving mural at Greenhead Church) or tenement rooms (the very definition of what interior designers and sellers of decorating paint call a 'feature wall'). If *Life in Pictures* initially posits Gray up as an individual mind, voice and talent that emerges from Riddrie, then a closer read still confirms that this artistic persona has been diffused into the city of Glasgow itself, with many of the works created to stand – and perhaps fall – along with it.

What is evident is that Gray has exerted a real influence on the overall debate and direction of art in Scotland. There is for example, the age-old task of hailing and documenting individuals of note, a task that has necessarily pushed against the tide of conceptualism in contemporary British/Scottish art – in 2003 he painted an acrylic of Edwin Morgan that will doubtless stand as an important, rare image of the Makar in his last years. Morgan's works are subtly referenced in the astronomical skies above Glasgow cranes and spires; the yellow of the jacket gives the form some classical force, while the personal alarm draped round the neck, the large rubber handgrip of his walking stick and the slightly feathered creases and folds in the neck fend of any Sandy-Stoddart-style heroics.

But there is a conceptual dimension to Gray; wedded though he may be to the figurative, there is an argument to be made that each individual piece is part of a wider conceptual project. Some of this is pure thought, and has to be found in prose. In *Social Sculpture*, her history of the Glasgow art scene, Sarah Lowndes reuses a passage from *Lanark* – 'If a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively.' - which acknowledges its analytical accuracy and its concision in describing the conditions that drove the beginnings of contemporary Scottish art. Note here the recurring significance of the 'if' word that excited the Gray/Demiurge figure of *Lanark*, the word that offers just a possibility for imaginative expansion through streets and spaces traditionally regarded as beyond the Pale – Unthank, in other words. Unlike Stephen Dedalus, whose self-awakening Thaw's development purposively references, Gray does not imply walking along the streets fancying ourselves to be walking in 'another Marseilles' or snobbish retreat to the refuge of a University, but deliberate and direct understanding that our surroundings are Glasgow. Gray's intention is not Dedalus' escape and not, it should be said, Thaw's self-annihilation but *Lanark's* long and weary tholing of the demands a place, a people and a public exerts on the individual artist. To be fair to the senior partner here (Joyce), Stephen's own reverie on the nature of art drags him towards the everyday world he finds alternately intoxicating and distasteful;

Stephen pointed to a basket which a butcher's boy had swung inverted over his head.



-Look at that basket, he said.

-I see it, said Lynch.

-In order to see that basket, said Stephen, your mind first of all separates the rest of the visible universe from the rest of the visible universe which is not the basket. The first phase of apprehension is a bounding line drawn about the object to be apprehended. An esthetic image is presented to use either in space or in time.

Indeed, Lowndes' book serves to place Gray in a wider intellectual shift in modernist thinking that was accentuated and in many respects, driven by Scottish scepticism over the preserves and

privileges of artists. Living in a country where artists were not kept or coddled, the idea of existential struggle as something reserved for uniquely sensitive individuals of a certain class was hard to sustain. Glasgow, a place where art, culture and existential struggle did not *apparently* happen, was the ideal laboratory for extending this understanding. The Glasgow art scene from the early seventies to the turn of the century was at its most vibrant, inclined to encourage the imaginative use of the universe Glasgow artists shared with people who carry baskets, to explore what 'if' means in a city where 'is' was no longer clear.

II

I never design anything new, and I have something old to work upon.

Alasdair Gray,
in interview with Charlotte Higgins, 2011

The period covered in the City Recorder Exhibition offered an important opportunity for such an imaginative using. In *Life in pictures* Gray recalls his teenage self liking the patterns made by the group of human figures in the *Card Players* across the canvas; in his work for Elspeth King of the People's Palace, he had another such opportunity, sanctioned by Glasgow Corporation itself. Between 1977 and 1978 Gray worked in the face of redevelopment and miniscule cultural budgets to assist efforts to augment the collection of the old museum. Based in an old warehouse on Arcadia Street, Bridgeton, he joined King and Michael Donnelly who routinely entered condemned buildings to retrieve what artefacts they could before they were demolished. Working to a simple plan Gray set out to paint the following

- 1 Streets about to be changed or demolished.
- 2 Folk in politics and the arts.
- 3 Private members of the general public.
- 4 Interiors of workplaces with the workers.

This located Gray in the same area as Greenhead Church, the model for the church in Lanark whose mural Thaw abandons *en route* to his self-termination (Gray seems to have finished his, as he did with the Greenbank Church, later). Greenhead had itself been demolished by then, so the urban reconfiguration of Bridgeton made the matter somewhat personal. The street scenes hung in the GOMA are some of the most intriguing of the works on display, and the compact use of a single L-shaped gallery, with a choice selection of images, carefully spaced and hung at comfortable shoulder-height facilitates close study. The bold, flat typographical palettes of Gray's printed works are largely absent here. In *North Arcadia Street, with Honda and Constable Adams*, ink watercolour and acrylic are used with great delicacy, particularly in depicting the subtle tones and harmonies in the blue of the sky above. The architecture is rendered in tans and light browns, some of it probably the paper colour itself. The linework is still confident but delicate, filament-thin and reminiscent of

Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland Strip*, giving the whole a dream-like quality. Interestingly, Gray has made pencil notations of the name of the cyclist and policeman included in the painting. Handwriting frequently crops up in his visuals. Seen in reproduction, the colours of the painting appear much less muted, but up close, hung on white space, the effect is altogether more moving. If Gray can be separated out from the writerly element, then this is very much the 'gallery' image such a separation requires, demanding a close examination of the mixed physical textures of watercolour, ink and pencil in order to understand the merging of public agency and personal reflection. This is difficult to achieve in a book, and easier to facilitate in an actual space.

London Road between Templeton's Carpet Factory and Monaco Bar (End of Arcadia Street III) picks up, at least spatially, where its predecessor left off, but takes a markedly different approach (the title is notably ironic; this is not so much the spatial as the temporal end of Arcadia). Effectively a tinted ink drawing, Gray uses the 'plate colour' of the paper to associate buildings, earth and people closely together against flashes of greenery in the middle distance and the delicate, but slightly bruised looking blue sky. As the composition pans right, four Templeton factory works walk towards the artist in varying states of solidity – three of them are transparent, seeming to emerge from the landscape or – perhaps in an inversion of *Lanark/Hobbes'* Leviathan, made from the landscape itself. Gray revisits this use of transparency elsewhere – it is not unusual in some of his interior paintings for the corner of a table of sideboard to overlap one of the bodies within it, and many of his woman have semi-transparent licks of hair that cross lines in their face. But it is in his city recorder work that Gray seems most comfortable with his merging of landscape into the bodies of his human figures.

Produced under item 2 in the King/Donnelly/Gray plan, *Tom McGrath in his Office at the Third Eye Centre with Secretary Linda Haase and View through the Window behind of Scott Street* follows this idiosyncratic approach to line, shape and solidity in these works. An employee can be seen through the titular window leaning on a rail which can be seen through the hands that drape over it – yet just to the right, a man in the distance appears to be solid as seen through the same rail, so that he almost seems superimposed on top of it. Further to the right, street signs and architectural features emerge through the walls and screens of the office as the window scene continues on, blithely indifferent to the constraints of architecture. Yet the objects of the office – which constitute its purpose and activities, are rendered carefully, in great detail and solidity in the Lowland (Benelux, that is) fashion, while the woman to the left foreground in almost heraldic attitude, emerged as the most solid of the figures represented here. As with the other images, pencil written notes provide a further layer of documentation and representation for those willing to peer into the drawing.

100 Pcs. 12/23/81 10:00 pm. 10:00 pm.
NY 10017 NY 10017

The Digital
RAMBLER
THEATRE
FRIDAY 10
MONEY
PLAY 30
DOOR TO DOOR
A

ALL AGES AND GROUPS WELCOME
Elton John
AN EVENING
OF MUSIC
FRIDAY 10
MONEY
PLAY 30
DOOR TO DOOR
CIRCLE
F N 29
FIRST AID KIT
BY THE THEATRE
THE THEATRE IS NOT RESPONSIBLE

DISCO
**The
Midnite
Rambler**
Mobile Disco
IN THE
HIGHLANDS INSTITUTE
ON
Friday 8th April 1977.
8pm - 1am

Handwritten signatures and scribbles

7264
S/D 6B
R. 91B-218
35
SANTA CRUZ
E5-99

ALDI DIARY
Numbers fit for the Pa



Vertical handwritten note on the right edge of the white background.

Visit to
the Ambassador Club
Mogul to see a
band

16/ 281186

Visit to my friends
week, while on holiday

Phone 1611 600
Can you see the Gambia's Next?



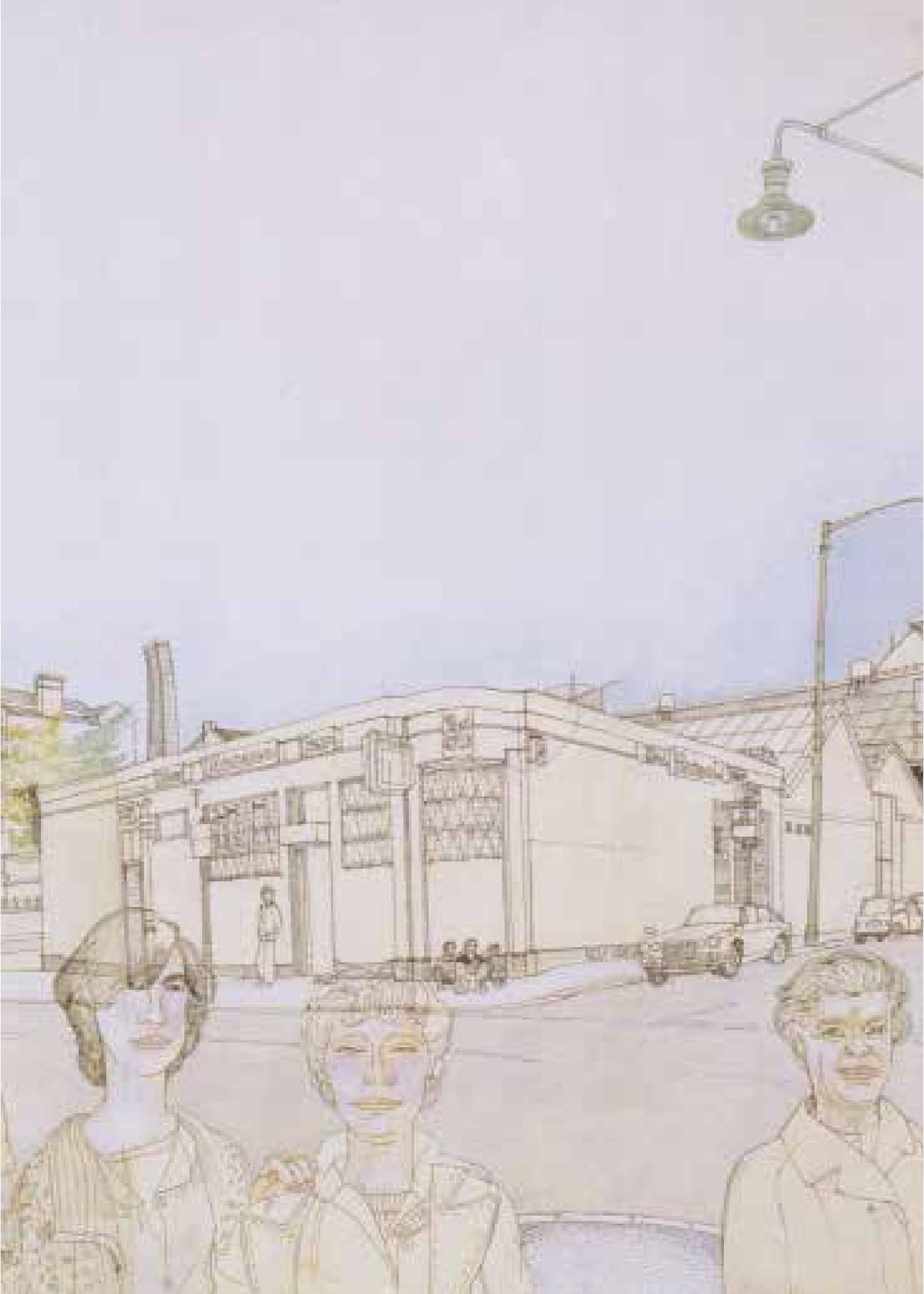
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Vertical text on the right side of the bottom row.

Text below the second photo in the bottom row.

Text below the third photo in the bottom row.





If Glasgow was to be remade and reimagined, then Gray's explorations of 'folk in politics and the arts' take us into another, scarcely considered dimension of his work; texture. A number of his portraits of writers – such as the family of Tom Leonard – are in the manner of artisans, presented alongside their 'products', namely a handwritten version of Leonard's own 'moral philosophy'. Again, the image's role here is not so much to illustrate the text as for the text to illustrate the slightly banal image; the 'balance' of the white dog is neither present, nor entirely desired.

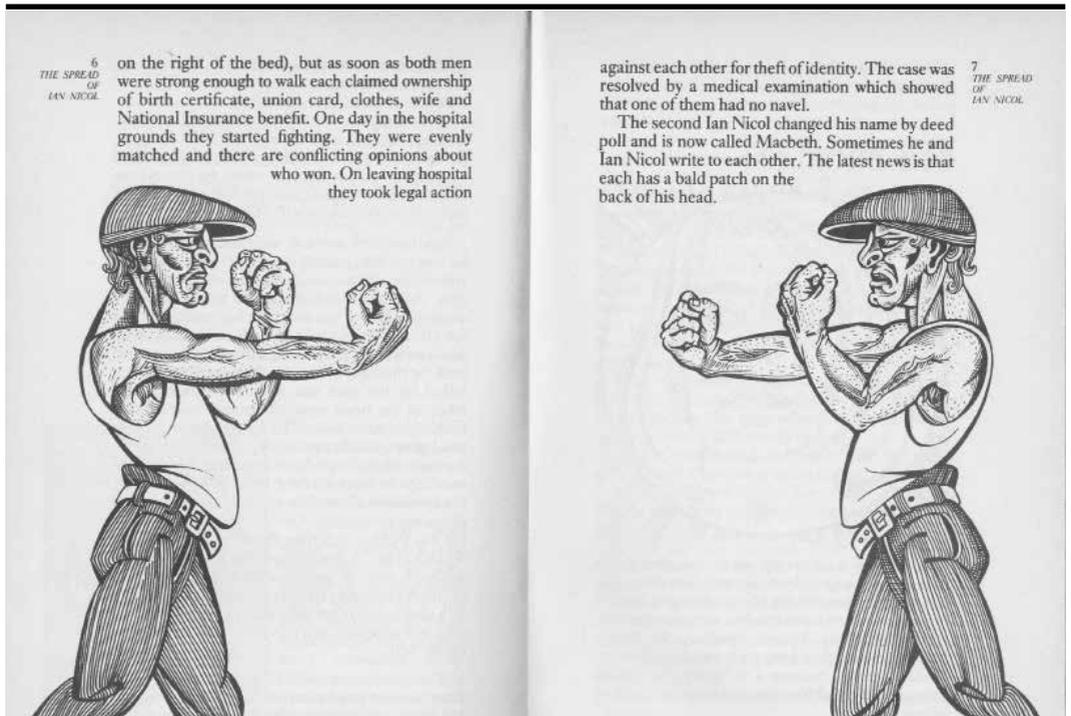
Gray took what is now called a 'mixed media' approach in other directions. In a series of portraits of figures in art, politics and 'private citizens' he presented them framed, surrounded or accompanied by items from their everyday life, with varying success. Gray's portrait of *Inspector Derek O'Neill, Tobago Street Police Station* is described by the artist himself, in the exhibition notes, as unsuccessful, and it is hard to disagree. While the frame of colour photographs of officers and places in the station in themselves, intrigue us as found art, the lemon background of the supposed main event makes Insp O'Neill seem weak and diminished at the centre, somewhat divorced from the context Gray has attempted to provide. His drawing of Reo Stakis – he of the hotels- is more successful, using the multi-coloured brochures to create a collage border around his subject – though again, the strength of these leaflets, with their bold colours and serifed type, overpowers the portrait at the centre. The union between image and type, which Gray experimented

with successfully both before and after this period, is hard to achieve when he only controls one of these elements. But there are two striking pieces where Gray achieves equilibrium and breaks new ground. His portrait Bill Skinner combines a simple, cross-hatched and feathery drawing on the brown paper Gray seems especially fond of, with family photographs from his childhood and young adulthood. The sepia ones work well with the minimal colour and simplicity of the drawing, while the obituary (written by Gray for the *West End News* in 1973) frames the left, just above a small sticky label emblazoned (in elegant type) with the words *Scottish*

Socialist
Republic

and an appeal for neutrality in the Second World War and the Cold War. These labels were left on lampposts during World War 2 but the reproduction in *A Life in Pictures* cuts off this interesting detail.

It also makes it hard to see the careful pencil marks and writing on the bus tickets, disco flyers and other handbag detritus arranged around *Temporary Typist (Frances Gordon, Glasgow Teenager)*, arguably the most successful of the City Recorder portraits. The painting is kept very simple, with the emerging clear line of the books coloured in muted greens and browns, but the contents of Brown's handbag, given over at Gray's request and carefully annotated roll painting, collage, curation and illustration into a single art object. The pencil notes are here very knowing about their role and position in relation to the viewer; one reads 'this



is a London Bus ticket Hope you haven't strained your neck very badly.'

There is a sense of exploration about these pictures that can be lacking in Gray's more structurally careful, 'cleaned up' work. In an interview on the subject of Lanark Gray spoke of the 'airy freedom' of William Blake's naked figures that 'felt like liberation'. Ironically, it is these clothed figures recorded for public posterity that feel freer, lighter, more experimental, while the naked Leviathans and deities of later work have a greater sense of civic weight and importance to them – as if having already been deputised by the city, the pressure to express the civic nationalist ideals Gray has publicly committed to, is lessened.

There is also perhaps a certain irony that the re-examination of Gray's work as a social documentarian comes at a time when his commercial stock is rising. Some ten or so years after the City Recorder project the tenure of King and Donnelly would be engulfed in the controversy over the Chief Curator role at the People's Palace. The driving force behind these sweeping changes was the increased commodification of Glasgow's cultural output and onset of the City of Culture, all moves which Gray made a personal and political commitment to oppose. Nevertheless, the People's Palace material – some of the most interesting, if variable that Gray ever produced – remains held in trust at the People's Palace.

The problem with a book such as *A Life in Pictures* is that it cannot of course, contain everything about said life, nor can it, as a physical container of these images, size itself to the complete benefit of an output that comprises book jackets, scribbles and

wall-sized paintings. It creates problems where close looking is required of actual gallery pieces, while it renders book illustrations and jackets as thumbnails, missing an opportunity for actual size appreciation. The murals come off best, having been carefully photographed for appreciation in their totality. As author, Gray is generally honest and apologetic of the limits of books as visual messengers, noting several times what the reproductive process precludes. It is tempting to see here the tension in Gray in microcosm. Influenced and sustained by books, working within a tradition that stretches back to the print-shops of the Foulis brothers (the spiritual, if not actual founders, of the Glasgow art school) and the editions of the publisher William Smellie, the democratic mass-scale of making books requires necessary compromises in how readers encounter images. We can perhaps, at least be happy that Scotland has become much more at ease with the visual as the aftershocks of reformation iconoclasm gradually subside.

In *Social Sculpture* Sarah Lowndes credits Gray's figurative approach as a direct influence on artists such as Lucy McKenzie, who is herself a product of today's version of the Fanzine and small press culture that gave Gray so many of his earliest opportunities. Stuart Murray, who draws incidents and encounters on his postman's route or in the pubs where he goes to unwind has also tipped the cap. Both artists show a distinct loyalty to art as a social intervention. It is likely that Gray's prolific output will lead to further acknowledgements. Especially if we remain clear sighted that while many writers are called 'scribes', Gray really is.



LANARK

BY
ALASDAIR
GRAY

INSCITE HUK LEGILLUM
IMPRALUM CINGLO SCOME
AUTIUM NON IMPRENTIL

A LIFE IN FOUR BOOKS: *for*

ANDREW GRAY



III

The image, it is clear, must be set between the mind or senses of the artist himself, and the mind or senses of others.

Stephen Dedalus to Lynch,
in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

In an interview on *Lanark* and the autobiographical *bildungsroman* at its centre, Gray has remarked there is an inevitable 'neatness' to narratives constructed of our lives, and *Life of Pictures* is no exception. There is an arc in the narrative that pushes us towards, and out from, Chapter Fifteen (entitled 'Towards Lanark'). It is hard not to see this massive book as a vortex that draws in all ideas and activities towards it. Just as Gray's chipped, chiselled use of language resembles his clean clear lines, making his fiction inherently visual, regardless of the illustrations, so too are there parallels in the borrowings between autobiography and autopicography that surface in the novel. Re-use and self quotation are a marked feature of Gray's output that mirrors the autobiographical reprocessing of the text, with frequent self quotation; the tight embrace of Adam and Eve on the Greenhead Church mural becomes the suckling clinch of Lanark and Rima (and that is far from the only re-use of such an image; man and woman clinched in what may be love, desperation or conflict is found in several such images). An image of the young James Kelman becomes Thaw in *Lanark* (begging the question, if Kelman is Thaw here, is Kelman then Thaw – the 'tougher' 'more honest' alter ego of Gray himself?) The assembly of little people who constitute Leviathan reappear in different contexts elsewhere, as does the Vitruvian man of 1982, Janine. Alan Fletcher, an early colleague and evident influence, becomes the devilish Drummond. Visuals are also echoed in text and back again – the spectre of the divided Ian Nicol, becomes a bunned Leviathan in *Lanark*, nowhere visualised, having been dissolved into the plot itself -

"Who did the council fight?"

"It split in two and fought itself."

"That's suicide!"

–and then reappears as a panel figure in the new Hillhead mural, currently in process, to represent under the title of 'Braw Fighters', the enduring madness of Sectarian Divide.

Taking this constant use and re-use into account, we can understand what the compromised demiurge of Lanark's epilogue means when he retorts, angrily to Lanark's assertion that he writes science fiction;

'Science fiction has no real people in them, and all my characters are real, real, real people!'

This is true enough. Gray is a writer not of science fiction but of civic fiction; stories, novels and attendant images that speculate on what civil society could be, might become. This is obvious enough in the novels – *Lanark*, quite obviously, but also *A History Maker*, much of the short stories and even his non-fiction, such as the imagined dialogue of ages in *The Book of Prefaces* (the use of the definite article in the title being the greatest of all Gray's fictions, creating a false centre that could never hold) and *Why Scots should Rule Scotland*. Beyond this though, we see civic fiction in Gray's constant reworking and redrawing of images famous enough to become cliché; the Lanark-Leviathan, the Lanark De Humani Corporis Fabrica, a cartooned Sir Thomas Urquhart (translator of Rabelais) in *Unlikely Stories Mostly*, the reworking of the Scottish coat of arms, medieval illuminated manuscripts and Chaucerian pilgrims in *The Book of Prefaces*. If these were the only things around which Gray drew his bounding line it would be mere caprice perhaps. But then we add the re-emergence of the Gray bounding line in countless bills, book covers, posters murals and a bewildering number of portraits of 'ordinary' people, activists and writers. More so than the likes of Sandy Moffat, Gray has come to determine how we imagine, and recall, the likenesses of the latter – Agnes Owens, Archie Hind, Tom Leonard, James Kelman, Liz Lochead, Iain Crichton Smith... but these are even more suggestive when the same lines describe policemen, barbers, firebrand preachers and battle-hardened anarchists. His current work for the Hillhead subway station transposes the panoramic illustration of Glasgow to its walls. As Gray notes in an interview with *The Guardian's* Charlotte Higgins

...you couldn't see all this from any single place, even if you were in the sky. It combines a great deal of viewpoints that cannot possibly be reconciled. That doesn't matter, it gives a better truth to the buildings. It's going to be flanked by tiles of 'folk of all kinds'

This would be the lost fifth point in Gray's programme as City Recorder

5) Folk of all kinds

This is revealed to be a very familiar cast of Gray's literary/graphic archetypes, retitled – under 'lovely mums' the matriarchs of *A History Maker*, as 'Brain Babies', the Winged Cherubs of *Unlikely Stories*, under 'Lucky Dogs', the White Dog himself and as mentioned above, a reprise of the divided Ian Nicoll.

'Being keen' as Gray says 'on definite edges and extreme clarity', viewpoints that cannot be reconciled do not matter to a writer whose prose is visual and whose images are – for the most part - wordy; in his city recorder phase Gray's line encompassed Provost Peter McCann and anarchist Harry McShane, *Pastor Jack Glass* and *Canon Collins* (the GOMA exhibit cannily hangs these two together). Is this just disinterested observation with an ecumenical eye, or is there more to it than this, a sign of what Gray's project might actually be – and of how long –term it actually is. It leads us to conclude, perhaps, that we are *all* characters in the body of Gray's work, in a vast work of civic fiction that binds Scotland in motifs and what-ifs the kinky Gray has stolen, adapted and suggested for us. Such conclusions are NECESSARILY PROVISIONAL AND AS THERE IS AS YET NO MAP OR DIAGRAM OR HILLHEAD PANORAMA DETAILING THE OBJECTIVE TRUTH OF THE MATTER, SO RATHER THAN TELL ANY MORE LIES I SHALL SIMPLY END WITH

HELLO.

