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Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction

ISSN: 0011-1619 (Print) 1939-9138 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/vcrt20

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To cite this article: Georgia Walker Churchman (2025) "The Dance, the Music, the Rave": Partying, Pleasure, and the Politics of Cultural Production in *Morvern Callar* 1995 and *Morvern Callar* 2002, Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 66:5, 916-928, DOI: 10.1080/00111619.2024.2406760

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2024.2406760

Published online: 30 Sep 2024.

CRITIQUE: STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION
2025, VOL. 66, NO. 5, 916–928
https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2024.2406760

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"The Dance, the Music, the Rave": Partying, Pleasure, and the Politics of Cultural Production in *Morvern Callar* 1995 and *Morvern Callar* 2002

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the meaning of two acts of cultural production: the writing of novels and the acid house and dance music scenes as represented in Alan Warner's 1995 novel *Morvern Callar*. Reading the novel against its 2002 adaptation by Lynne Ramsay, it historicizes the representation of working-class pleasure in relation to the developing discourses of the creative industries propounded by Tony Blair's New Labour. Drawing a link between the concept of the creative industries and the well-established conversation linking "cultural independence" and devolution in Scotland, it argues that Warner's novel represents acid house as a moment in which working-class pleasure and cultural production was a significant threat to establishment cultural values. By contrast, Ramsay's film presents Morvern's desire to party as indicative of a traumatized subjectivity which can be healed by the rejection of her working-class background and the embracing of a middle-class lifestyle informed by literature and travel. In this respect, Ramsay's film is unable to metabolize the transcendent potential of partying and pleasure, instead mobilizing well-worn tropes of acid house's meaningless hedonism to represent Morvern as an exceptional individual whose inborn distinction allows her to escape her background.

A young woman dismembers her dead-by-suicide boyfriend, burying him in the Highlands in the moody Scottish winter. A young woman dismembers her dead-by-suicide boyfriend, burying him in the Highlands on a beautiful summer's day. A young woman goes to Spain and abandons the trashy resort she finds herself in to explore the quieter towns further along the coast. A young woman abandons the trashy resort in which she finds herself in order to experience the "huge journey in that darkness" of acid house, gaining the understanding that through this form of celebration "you didn't really have your body as your own, it was part of the dance, the music, the rave."[1] A young woman passes her dead-by-suicide boyfriend's novel off as her own and later accepts a hundred-thousand-pound advance. A young woman does the same, but spends the money on acid house parties in Spain: when it runs out, she returns to the small Scottish port in which she grew up, pregnant and seeking work.

These are some of the key differences between Alan Warner's debut novel, *Morvern Callar* and Lynne Ramsay's 2002 film of the same name. Both texts are explorations of the relationship between cultural production, class and pleasure. Yet they offer widely differing visions of the respective meanings of these issues, meanings which, this article argues, can offer us a way of understanding some of the profound shifts in how culture was understood, framed, and legislated for throughout the 1990s in Britain. It also demonstrates how the project of Scottish devolution was at the forefront of these changes.

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The sphere of culture occupies a privileged place in Scottish devolutionary politics. Like much Scottish writing from the 1990s, the decade in which devolution took place, Alan Warner's work is often read in reference to the campaign for a Scottish parliament and for independence more broadly. This form of devolutionary criticism, in which literature produced in Scotland and the campaign to devolve power to the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood are intimately entangled, has dominated critical interpretations of Scottish writing from this period up to the present moment.[2] Here, Warner's work, amongst many others, represents a rejuvenated Scottish culture that in turn underwrote a sturdier independence movement, leading finally to the achievement of devolution in the late 1990s.

In this powerful hermeneutic, Scottish literary culture of the period is framed as the precursor to a reinvigorated Scottish nationalism which led directly to devolution, and action within the texts are very frequently read as pertaining to the nationalist project.[3] More recent responses to the literary politics of Scottish nationalism, in particular Scott Hames's, have made significant efforts to historicize such readings, attempting to disentangle the idealistic "dream" both of Scottish independence *per se*, and its relationship with literary production, from the more prosaic reality of the political "grind" it took to get to Holyrood.[4] Nonetheless, Scottish literary writing is frequently framed as uniquely integral to Scottish politics, not least by Warner himself, who in the lead-up to the 2014 independence referendum commented that a 'no' vote would "be the death knell for the whole Scottish literature 'project.'"[5]

Curiously, the other mode in which *Morvern Callar* has been framed is in relation to the aesthetics of postmodernism. Here, the unusual level of detail describing Morvern's self-care routines, the strikingly unemotional register of her internal monologue, the frank depictions of both recreational drug use and casual sex, and the way she disposes of her boyfriend's remains, are read as a smorgasbord of the affectlessness, anomie and obsessive consumerism associated with postmodernism. In readings of this kind, Morvern embodies "the 'affectless' postmodern personality so immersed in the various addictions of popular culture that she can no longer relate to anything that might lie outside that thoroughly commodified culture."[6] Some critics have also drawn links between Warner and Irvine Welsh, who they link in turn to the "blank fictions" identified by Steve Redhead in *Repetitive Beat Generation*, Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney in *Shopping in Space: Essays on Blank Generation Fiction* and James Annesley in *Blank Fictions*, as representative of the sensibility of the decade.[7]

In these iterations, Morvern becomes an avatar of what Fredric Jameson describes as "the inner truth of that newly emergent social order of late capitalism."[8] In his influential diagnosis, the volume of image and information the postmodern subject must deal with incurs depersonalization both at the level of the individual, and within the culture as a whole. Readings informed by this critical tradition emphasize the weakness and pusillanimity of the cultural sphere, gesturing to the ways in which the postmodern moment had torn apart any pretention art may once have had to the creation of an autonomous world outside the sphere of consumption.[9]

The reader is therefore left in a bind. In these competing interpretations of both the novel itself, and the Scottish scene more broadly, the cultural sphere is framed in radically different ways: as either totally moribund or vivacious to the point of political pugnacity. So, what are we to make of these competing claims? I suggest that while it is understandable that Scottish devolutionary criticism has emphasized the role of politics within Scotland, a different approach is needed if we are to fully appreciate the pressures and possibilities afforded to Scottish artists and cultural producers writing in this period. In keeping with the new spirit Hames's work represents, this article reads the presentation of cultural production in *Morvern Callar* and *Morvern Callar* against wider currents in British politics in the 1990s.

I argue that how successive governments from Thatcher to Blair conceptualized cultural production had major implications for the imaginative possibilities of Scottish artists, possibilities which are particularly clearly demonstrated in the ideological shifts I trace between Warner's 1995 novel and Ramsay's 2002 film. From Margaret Thatcher's open suspicion of intellectualism and the creative arts, through an incipient managerialism developed under John Major, to Tony Blair's adoption of "the creative industries" as a panacea to endemic post-industrial problems, decisions and rhetoric emanating from Westminster both enabled and constrained the specific subject positions and attitudes that Scottish cultural producers found it possible to adopt. I argue that Warner's novel complicates, but does not

abandon, an understanding of cultural production as fundamentally oppositional to the ideology of private ownership propounded by Thatcher and Major's governments. However, as progressively more acknowledgment was accorded to the economic significance of cultural production throughout the 1990s, the disruptive power of such productions to contest the limits of elite political and economic organization was restricted. As such, Ramsay's film cannot conceptualize either the novel Morvern plagiarizes, or the raves she attends, as oppositional; instead, the former allows her an escape from the alienation of minimum wage labor, and access the cultural and material privileges of the middle-classes; meanwhile, the music so central to the novel is dismissed as inane and commodified hedonism. It is to the representation of the cultural fields in these two very different texts that I now turn.

Morvern, 1995: Authorship, Acid House and Cultures of Class

One of the most fascinating aspects of the two *Morvern Callar*s is the contrasting attitudes they take toward the two major forms of cultural production represented in the texts: the writing of novels, and participation in and creation of popular music scenes. Warner's 1995 novel opens with Morvern discovering her novelist boyfriend's suicide in their small flat in The Port (a fictionalized version of Oban), and throughout evinces a high level of skepticism toward the notion that literature has any redemptive power. Take, for example, Morvern's first response when she is directed by her boyfriend's suicide note to the novel on his computer:

> This novel thing was page after page of words then a number then more pages of words and another number. You had to read to get to the end; you couldn't see the point in reading through all that just to get to an end. Without reading a word of it. . . my fingers touched the keys and typed letters over His name.[10]

The phrases "page after page," followed by "more pages" demonstrate Morvern's perception of the interminability of the reading process, while "novel thing" indicates her lack of interest in this form of writing. While of course I am not suggesting that we as readers are expected to adopt the same attitude as Morvern (obviously we don't, given that we are reading this scene as it happens), her rejection of literature as a vehicle for meaningful expression should give any reading of Warner's work claiming it as an uncomplicated expression of a devolutionary literary sensibility serious pause. This skepticism about "the point" of literature is driven home numerous times: through the representation of the fatuous London publishers who agree to publish His novel, and indeed from the text's epigraph, taken from Isak Dinesen's "The Immortal Story:"

> Mr Clay, in the same hesitating manner told him that he had in mind books and accounts, not of deals and bargains, but of other things which people at times had put down, and which other people did at times read. The clerk reflected on this matter and repeated, no, he had never heard of such books.[11]

Ultimately, the possibility of an engagement with the cultural sphere represented by the novel as an improving force is gleefully rejected.

There is a stark contrast in Morvern's attitude toward literature and that of her boyfriend. Morvern's disengagement is notably different from the tone in the boyfriend's suicide note:

> I have decided to play this trick on myself. Keep me on my toes. I was happy with you Morvern but things became too cushy for this oldest of chancers. I was always looking for peace, but here, you take it instead.
>
> . . .
>
> I love you Morvern; feel my love in the evenings in the corners of all the rooms you will be in. Keep your conscience immaculate and live the life people like me have denied you. You are better than us. I do not want to leave this world I love so much. I love this world so much I have to hold onto this chair with both hands. Now send off this novel and have no remorse. Be brave!
>
> Right now, to work!
>
> x x x x x[12]

He has also provided a list of publishers for her novel, asking her to send his novel to the first one on the list: if it is rejected, she is to go through them all. He is, he writes with magnificent complacency, prepared to "settle for posthumous fame as long as I'm not lost in silence."[13]

How the reader is meant to understand this note – and Morvern's response to it – is to my mind one of the great ambiguities of this text. However, Warner does not make this simple. The boyfriend's rejection of "cushy" domesticity and the "peace" of life with Morvern, and his heroic exhortation that she "be brave" and "have no remorse," play on the myth of the creative artist as an audacious adventurer – what Al Alvarez might call a Romantic "extremist" figure whose work is intimately involved with his own self-destruction. It is also difficult to ignore the chauvinistic construction of domesticity as a "cushy" option – especially given that the novel takes pains to show that Morvern's life is not cushy in the slightest.

All this suggests that Warner is here drawing attention to the dubious assumptions underpinning the "creative artist as hero" myth. What we see in the suicide note is His expectation that the artist figure is redeemed by what Patricia Waugh describes as the "critical transcendence" of art.[14] He expects to be redeemed by the literary efforts which will speak for him from beyond the grave. The suicidal artist is, as Alvarez points out, a paradigmatically Romantic figure,[15] demonstrating what Mark McGurl describes as the "spiritual privilege derived from intimate commerce with the Muse": an assessment with which the novel suggests the boyfriend would concur.[16] Warner's tone indicates a high level of skepticism directed toward the vision of the creative artist as a lone genius, drawing attention to the economic and social privilege that underwrite His creative endeavors.[17] It is hard not to laugh at the portentousness of the note, especially as we later discover that He has neglected to mention the (presumably unimportant?) detail of his infidelity with Morvern's best friend.

This is important, because if we can take the note, and therefore the boyfriend, seriously enough, it becomes possible to interpret the novel as a trauma narrative in which Morvern works through the loss of her partner and remerges liberated into a world of plenitude and possibility. It is this reading which I will later argue Lynne Ramsay adopts. My feeling, however, is that the novel is simply too ambiguous to sustain this interpretation. Both the chauvinistic and patronizing tone of the note here, and Morvern's later actions (especially her deliberate destruction of the lovingly constructed model of the area in which they live with his body, and the celebratory mood of the text as she buries his remains) all mitigate against a reading of Morvern's story as a simple narrative of trauma and recovery.

Rachel Carroll, in one of the most convincing interpretations of the novel I have read, observes that "the apparent unaccountability of Morvern's reaction to her boyfriend's death is a recurring subtext in critical responses to the novel."[18] Carroll argues that such bemusement does not pay adequate attention to Warner's detailed representation of the difficult material conditions that undergird Morvern's life, and that many of her actions are straightforwardly practical when we take these into consideration. While I would agree that many of Morvern's actions are not as unaccountable as some responses suggest, I also believe that this sense of "unaccountability" might be easier to understand if we read it as partly directed toward the "high culture" of which the boyfriend sees himself as an avatar.

The subject position which Warner's writer figure is seeking to adopt is one of heroic oppositionality. Such an identity was, I suggest, partly made tenable by the politics of the 1980s, a decade, in Roger Luckhurst's terms, "marked by strongly demarcated ideological divisiveness" in which the then prime-minister Margaret Thatcher styled herself as an "adversarial, anti-cultural establishment crusader."[19] Due to their perceived left-leaning tendencies, both cultural producers and intellectuals in Britain, and the institutions that supported them such as arts councils and universities, were confronted with a punitive withdrawal of state support, opening up allegedly inefficient institutions to the free market.[20] This drove an oppositional rhetoric on both the left and right, and also, I would suggest, contributed to the rhetorical viability of the linkage between Scottish literature and Scottish nationalism – two other discursive formations which rely on this rubric of heroic oppositionality and the resistive power of creativity for much of their cultural force.

Under John Major's administration, however (1990 onwards), Conservative anti-cultural rhetoric was toned down in favor of a new strategy. While maintaining a vision of British culture as

a vector for the propounding of British values,[21] there was, as Luckhurst puts it, an "abandonment of oppositional confrontation with a recalcitrant cultural sphere; instead, the pressure of managerialism would bring it into line."[22] Alongside this more emollient approach to the cultural sphere, Major's government was responding to a developing strand of political and economic theory implicitly recognizing that creative work offered a narrative of redevelopment and renaissance that could combat that of industrial decline and increasing inequality in Britain's post-industrial cities.[23]

This form of rhetoric was particularly notable in the instantiation of the European City of Culture scheme, which first took place in Glasgow in 1990, as *Morvern Callar* was being written. Warner was also a post-graduate student at Glasgow University from 1987–1988, the years in which local and national media coverage of the European City of Culture was at the zenith of its pre-event positivity, despite trenchant critiques of the project from community groups within Glasgow itself.[24] It is therefore reasonable to assume that Warner would have had some familiarity with ongoing debates about the way in which governmentally sponsored cultural events were being offered as an antidote to the disenfranchisement and under-privileging of those suffering the worst depredations of de-industrialization. While I do not wish to overread here, I do not think it is unreasonable to suggest that some of the gleefully disrespectful scenes in the novel could be read as riposte to the idea that cultural pursuits such as novel reading or writing are of serious worth in addressing endemic poverty and exploitation.

Perhaps, then, we can read the ambivalence directed toward the dead author in Warner's work as partly informed by the cultural flux surrounding the figure of author-as-cultural-producer. The older, oppositional model of artist-as-cultural-hero was being undermined both by a growing awareness of the problematic classed and gendered relationships on which such heroic subjectivity is based, and simultaneously by the co-option of the world of creative endeavor as a mode of governmentality to address social ills. This ambivalence was recognized shortly after publication by Warner himself, who in interview noted that "I think he loved her very much but perhaps as an ideal, even as a trophy to his freedom from middle-class conformity."[25]

Nonetheless, while His suicide notes contains moments of cringe-inducing self-indulgence, we cannot ignore the moments of good writing even within the note itself (I particularly like "Feel my love in the evenings in the corners of all the rooms you will be in"[26]). One of the irresolvable tensions of the novel lies in the ambivalent status of the literary artist and literary culture: absurd, irrelevant (not to mention dead), and yet with a lingering compelling aura which means that both Morvern and the reader are unable to dismiss him as completely nugatory, even as Morvern plagiarizes his work and destroys his body.

This ambivalence stands in marked contrast to the other art form celebrated throughout the novel, music; particularly in acid house. It is this form of culture, above all, that is represented as offering Morvern a genuine mode of engagement, and it is precisely these forms of culture that the mainstream cultural politics of the era were least able to treat with. Throughout the novel, house – unlike the production of the novel – threatens the limits of ownership, land rights, and bodily autonomy. The dance scenes in the novel read as a celebration of an unlegislated-for creativity resistant to the "soft-touch" regulation and incorporation of cultural production. Take for example, Morvern's account of a rave:

> A dreamy repeating pulse began … Sometimes torso and arms were everything else: the bleepers or synth patterns; sometimes I stretched up fingers - my keys banging, banging against collarbone … the music was just a huge journey in that darkness … I'd lost my water bottle … I was so close some boy or girl that their sweat was hitting me when they flicked arms or neck to a new rhythm … You felt the whole side of a face lay against my bare back, between shoulder blades. It was still part of our dance. If the movement wasnt in rhythm it would have changed the meaning of the face sticking there in the sweat. You didnt really have your body as your own, it was part of the dance, the music, the rave (sic).[27]

Warner presents these parties as spaces which temporarily defy the logics of accumulation, appropriation, and capital, and those of gendered power imbalances. They even suggest a transcendence of

individualized subjectivity, the surrender to an aesthetic experience in which both the individually gendered body (faces, arms, shoulder-blades) and individual property (keys, water-bottle) briefly become subordinate to the dance itself. However idealized this conception of the scene may be, it suggests a powerful mode of cultural co-production of aesthetic experiences which cannot be created or experienced alone, and which were not at that time available to the kind of appropriative maneuvers favored by the Major government.

Given the lyricism with which Morvern describes her experiences of dance music, it is notably difficult to find critical responses that take these scenes seriously. Morvern's engagement with acid house was consistently dismissed in responses to both the novel and the film, as acid house scenes commonly were in media coverage at the time. At worst interpreted as deviant and criminal (represented as a "vast internal emptiness" by the book's first dust-jacket and a "feral" sensibility for Berthold Schoene),[28] or at best as a "thoroughly commodified" form of hedonism deployed to temporarily escape grinding tedium and poverty, the production and consumption of dance music, along with participation in the subcultural activities associated with it, such as recreational drug use, was simply not legible within the frames of reference the vast majority of critics had available to them at the time of the novel's publication or the film's release.[29]

This critical blindness to the transcendent possibilities foregrounded in the text, reflects, I would argue, the hardening of cultural attitudes toward acid house taking place throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. Both the Thatcher and Major administrations made concerted attempts to curb the appeal of raves and free-parties through state surveillance, legislative changes, and the harassment of those they deemed responsible for organizing the events.[30] There was also the profound shock of the huge convergence of ravers at Castlemorton Common in July 1992, with the resultant media frenzy representing ravers as either a lawless, drug-fueled underclass, or vulnerable and easily led children who must be protected from predatory organizers and drug dealers. By 1994, when Major's government passed the infamous Criminal Justice Act targeting music characterized by "repetitive beats" (and when the novel was in press), rave had been consistently demonized as mindless, apolitical and destructive. It is against this background, I argue, that we can read Warner's representation of the rave scene as genuinely disruptive to establishment values, and understand why so many of the critical responses to it seem to have missed the lyrical intensity and pure pleasure represented in Morvern's experiences of rave. By the time Ramsay's film was produced, however, this landscape looked very different, and it is to this text that I now turn.

Movern 2002: The Cultural Industries, Escape and Aspiration

Ramsay's film is substantially less concerned with Morvern's experiences of specific music scenes, and offers a less mordant representation of the publishing industry. The film effectively cuts the text in half, ending on the section in which Morvern meets with her potential publishers; this encounter takes place in Spain, when the publishers fly out to visit her.[31] This structural decision also means that the film does not distinguish between Morvern's experiences in the resort she first visits in the novel, and the transcendently satisfying encounter she has with dance music later in her trip, and then in her return to Spain. As such, the diminishment of the experiences of dancing and acid house is built into the very structure of the film.[32]

In strong contrast to the novel, the publishers in the film are represented as both serious and sympathetic. For example, in a very late scene, Morvern takes the pair to visit a monument honoring deceased members of the congregation. With Ramsay's characteristically toned-down approach, Samantha Morton, playing Morvern, expresses muted awe in the face of this religious faith, which is mirrored by the pair's respectful silence.[33] It is as if all three of them are communing with some form of atavistic, spiritual understanding (informed, as we know, by Morvern's traumatic loss of her partner). There is a distinct suggestion that the cosmopolitan pair offer Morvern a form of understanding of the yearning she has experienced while in Spain and which, unlike in the book, is not available through her experiences of acid house. In the film, this is only ever represented as nugatory.

Throughout the film, the prevailing representation of Morvern's sensibility is one of traumatized isolation. This is compounded by Cathleen McDermot's rendering of her friend Lanna, which drastically recodes the dynamic between the two girls, especially in social settings. In the film, scenes set at parties or in clubs emphasize Morvern's alienation and social awkwardness, with Ramsay drawing a clear distinction between the glamourous, flirtatious Lanna and the childlike, introverted Morvern.[34] This is quite different to the book, where attention is consistently drawn to Morvern's striking good-looks and confidence in her sexuality.[35] In Ramsay's version, we're being asked to read Morvern as if she is moving out from under the shadow of Lanna's dominance, to recover from her mourning, and to embrace the broader horizons of the implicitly middle-class world she has now entered.

As Rachel Carrol notes, many of the judgmental critical reactions to Morvern's behavior in the novel implicitly adopt what Beverley Skeggs identifies as the long-held tradition of associating working-class women's behavior with excess and middle-class mores with restraint.[36] In fact, in the novel, Warner takes a mischievous delight in Morvern's disruption of middle-class expectations, and these moments are firmly focused on her encounters with the two publishers. A particularly delightful example of this is in the section in which she helps herself to a plateful of chocolate buttons left on the bar as a bar-snack, whereupon she:

> chewed up one button till it was a melted ball then pushed out the mush on the tip of my tongue and smeared the paste between two solid buttons making a wee chocolate button sandwich.[37]

In the novel, it is not simply the case that Morvern is out of place in this metropolitan environment, but that she has no desire to conform to the codes expected by her London publishers. The fact that these scenes come immediately between the transcendent descriptions of raving further contribute to the sense that there are certain forms of culture that harden, and others that blur, class distinctions. In the film, however, it is as if the figure of Lanna is made to bear the brunt of these excessive association, while Morvern is exculpated through her awkwardness and childlike pleasure in the natural world.

Furthermore, the issues of cultural and gendered power that the novel pointedly raises seem largely absent from the film, which firmly rereads the ambivalences of the novel's narrative as a journey of trauma and recovery in which Morvern's sojourn to Spain gives her access to a redemptive state of unity with nature, and capacity to engage with the otherness of Spanish culture, thus healing the traumatic wounds of her boyfriend's death.[38] Scenes of Morvern's encounters with both the natural world and the otherness of Spain – as when she sits on a beach alone, admiring the movement of an ant as it jumps from the ground to her hand or when she inadvertently participates in a fiesta in one of the villages they have driven through – suggest that her encounter with a simpler, more primitive way of life attuned to the natural environment, and the money she receives from her boyfriend's inheritance and then his publication, ultimately give her the strength and cultural self-confidence to overcome her traumatic loss and explore the wider world.[39]

Take, for example, the key differences in how the novel and the film handle the scenes leading up to the burial of the boyfriend. In the book, Morvern deliberately desecrates His body by smashing it into the model version of the Port and its surrounding He has built in the attic.[40] The burial of the body parts takes place on a sunny day, with Movern listening to the "happy sound of Salif Kaita" while she jauntily disposes of his "chopped off head."[41] However, in the film Morvern buries her partner's remains in the dead of winter. The scene draws attention to the difficulty of the task at hand, with Morvern physically encumbered by the enormous bag she uses to carry Him up into the mountains, and her heavy clothing. Morvern stumbles up the hill, losing her footing and having to steady herself with her hands. Once she has arrived at the top of the mountain, she turns off the music she has been listening to off, again emphasizing the silence of the scenery. We also do not see Morvern handle the body itself, and the implication is that her sense of elation afterward comes from ridding herself of the burden of his body. [42] In the moments after the burial, she bounds down the hill toward a small burn: the camera lingers over the worms visible in the stream of water, drawing attention to the processes of natural

decay that He will undergo and suggesting a sort of wonderous reverence toward the cyclical rhythms of the natural world.[43]

The scene is gorgeously shot, and it all undeniably emphasizes Morvern's sense of isolation and loss. In other words, it *makes sense* of Morvern's emotional responses: there is little ambiguity as to how Morvern is feeling and what the reasons for this are. The central ambivalence of the book is gone: in Ramsay's interpretation, Morvern's action are those of a sympathetic young woman overwhelmed by feelings she is unable to process. In contrast, much of the novel's powerful ambiguity, and its engagement with the politics of cultural production, reside in the impossibility of resolving the extent to which Morvern is traumatized and in mourning, or the extent to which her partner's death allowed her to live her life unencumbered by an asymmetric, perhaps even exploitative, relationship.

One facet of this is that it is clear that the film ultimately dismisses the world of acid house – in fact, the clubs that Morvern visits with Lanna are barely coded as orientated toward a specific genre of music at all. Many critics at the time noted this approvingly, reading the film's narrative arc as one in which Morvern moves away from mindless pleasure seeking and "towards redemption," through a realization that "the spirit's needs count for as much as the body's," with Morvern's ultimate recognition of "the mundaneness inherent in her usual form of flight."[44] We can see here that dominant sense of the "acceptable" cultural sphere and those activities which have to be cast of out it. In press responses at the time, few critics noted these changes from the novel, although in one of the most sensitive and convincing responses to the film I have found, Sukdev Sandhu observes that the film give the impression that it has been made by "someone who prefers to collect rave flyers than raving itself."[45]

Devolutionary responses to the film, however, did notice this shift in emphasis. Robert Morace in particular reads these changes as a shift from the community-minded emphasis of Warner's novel to an individualistic narrative of personal recovery and self-fulfillment. However, in a striking example of the insistent tendency to (over?) read Scottish texts as referring largely to Scottish devolutionary politics, Morace argues that Ramsay's celluloid version "silences" the "crazy culture" of the Port and effaces "anything and anyone that turns our attention away from the autonomous self and the autonomous work of art."[46] He suggests that devolution-minded writers focus on community but that Ramsay, in the post-devolutionary moment of 2002, broke faith with that community in favor of an emphasis on individual experience. While I would agree that Ramsay's film is certainly more focused on the individual, in this argument we clearly see the tendency to associate devolution with the oppositional or leftist causes, and an absence of such a feeling with Thatcherism (coded as "individualism"). However, this does not strike me as a convincing reading of the text (although to be fair to Morace, he does acknowledge that Warner has distanced himself in interview from "the whole Scottish thing").[47]

As an alternative, I would like to suggest that some of these differences in emphasis are attributable to three interlinked factors: firstly, the overarching change in the discourse of cultural production between the early 1990s and the early 2000s; secondly, how these changes affected the specifics of funding arrangements for cinematic production; and, thirdly, the implications this had for the conceptualization of class, pleasure and culture in the early 2000s.

After Tony Blair's landslide election in 1997, the Labour government rebranded the Department for National Heritage as the more modern-sounding Department for Media, Culture and Sport. In 1998, under the leadership of Chris Smith as secretary of state the department, the Cultural Industries Mapping Document was published. This, according to Oli Mould, "set about adopting a cultural production policy that championed [the] competitiveness, global reach and viability" of these industries within the UK. It was a concerted attempt to establish "the cultural industries" as a major form of capital accumulation in the post-industrial era, contributing significantly to flagship regeneration projects in formerly industrial areas, and conceived as one antidote to post-industrial decline.

In doing so, these changes also implicitly moved away from the forms of class politics encoded most famously in the commitment to public ownership of the means of production instantiated in Clause 4 in the Labour Party Rule Book in 1918, and abandoned by Blair in 1995[48] after he redrafted the clause

to emphasize not collective ownership but society's capacity to "create for each of us the means to realise our true potential."[49] Creative work was thus recoded as a form of employment in which talented individuals would compete for financial gain and professional recognition. Although there is debate about the extent to which the creative industries agenda was a serious priority for Blair's government, many participants at the time interpreted this "new attention given to the creative industries" as "an important part of the overall process of 'modernisation.'"[50]

These changes were particularly relevant to the film industry, which, as Duncan Petrie notes, "is an expensive cultural medium," often requiring government funding from several different sources to produce a picture.[51] This was the case with Ramsay's *Morvern*, with financing eventually deriving directly from the UK Arts Council and two smaller organizations, Scottish Screen, and the Glasgow Film Fund. Scottish Screen was a new institution that took control over lottery money from the Scottish Arts Council, a move which chimed, according to Petrie, with the growing consensus in Blairite circles that a more industry-oriented approach to cultural funding was needed.[52] Petrie also suggests that this shift signaled a move away from a traditional grant-giving mentality to one more aligned with the concept of investment. The Glasgow Film Fund, too, was a relatively new entity, set up in the wake of the European City of Culture: Glasgow 1990. This, as we have seen, was an early example of the discursive construction of the cultural industries as a potential antidote to post-industrial decline.[53] I would argue that it is therefore not an unreasonable argument to make that without both the affordances of "the cultural industries" discourse, and the ideological shifts toward competitiveness, investment and capital accumulation it undergirded, it is much less likely that Ramsay's film would ever have been made.

Ultimately, I read the novel *Morvern Callar* as a satire on the notion that politically and socially sanctioned forms of cultural capital can elevate an individual's subjectivity. As I have shown, the novel's profoundly ambivalent representation of the socially desirable act of writing is consistently contrasted with the collective and anonymous raves which Morvern participates in while in Spain. In stark contrast to this, I read the film as deeply invested in the very same conception of culture that the novel dismisses. The structure of Ramsey's film transforms the narrative of the novel, such that what we witness is Morvern's social regeneration. Not only does it mirrors the logic of regeneration of post-industrial decline described above, but it makes significant changes of emphasis from the original text in order to do so.

Conclusion: Morvern's Regeneration?

Throughout this article, I hope I have shown that the shifts between the novel and film do not simply, as Robert Morace suggests, represent the differences between a devolutionary and post-devolutionary sensibility; rather, they are indicative of ideological and discursive shifts enacted at the highest levels of government in Westminster. The notion of the creative industries, "true potential" and regeneration all serve to increase the legibility of narratives in which working-class characters make a transition into a middle-class sensibility, and throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s this transition was increasingly conceptualized as likely to be brought about by cultural means. This is not, I would suggest, because Ramsay has less respect for the experiences of working-class women than Warner, but rather because major ideological shifts in the way that culture was understood and represented between the novel's publication and the film's release leave Ramsay with fewer opportunities to work within an oppositional framework.

To illustrate this point, I would like to turn to the final, crucial difference between the film and novel: the amount of money that Morvern receives for her boyfriend's text. This is astronomically higher in the film: £100,000 rather than £1,825, a figure so unlikely that it was noted by a number of reviewers.[54] While the incredulity expressed by these critics is reasonable, this change is clearly necessary because it constitutes a ballpark sum needed to ensure that, if Morvern is prudent, mature, and fiscally responsible – characteristics notable by their absence in the novel, as Carroll points out – it could support a middle-class way of life on a permanent basis. It thus both negates the need for

Morvern's final return to The Port itself, and functions as an example of the culture of aspiration that was so central to the Blairite "creative industries" project.

This allows the audience to fantasize that Morvern will be able to enter into a world of middle-class plenitude, yet, through the way that Morvern has obtained this financial security, the film maintains a thrill of the subversive and the formally innovative: a "challenging" ending that works to disguise the fact that, despite the illegitimate nature of her windfall, the dénouement of Ramsey's Movern conforms closely to the understanding of social progress propounded by the Blair administration's ideological co-option of the creative industries. The individual protagonist, through an engagement with the bountiful forms of culture available to her, transcends her oppressive social and personal circumstances and symbolically enters the desirable world of the London literati. Morvern becomes an ethically acceptable heroine, who reaps the rewards of her unconventional but ultimately emotionally legible behavior.

In stark contrast to this, the Morvern of the novel remains oppositional: hedonistic, anti-conformist, insouciant in the face of literary prestige, and fully committed to the acid house scene in which she finds profound meaning. Her lack of interest in investing in the trappings of middle-class existence – home, job, formal education – represent a genuine challenge to the sensibility of cultural aspiration developing from the late 1980s to the early 2000s.

Notes

1. Alan Warner, *Morvern Callar* (London: Vintage, 1996), 203. All references are to this copy unless otherwise stated.
2. For examples of this form of commentary on Scottish literary devolution, see Peter Marks, *The Literature of the 1990s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 200; Georgia Walker Churchman, "(Scottish) Critic Fodder: On Why Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* Is Not a Nationalist or a Postmodernist Novel, Mainly," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 75–89 https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqy069.
3. For examples of how this tendency plays out in interpretations of *Morvern Callar*, see Berthold Schoene, "Alan Warner, Post-Feminism and the Emasculated Nation," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 255–264, and John LeBlanc, "Return of the Goddess: Contemporary Music and Celtic Mythology in Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar*," *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 41 (2000). The former's claim that "the girl always also symbolises the nation, whose independence and sovereignty can only be reasserted once her old self has effectively been reconstituted by new experience garnered from hitherto untapped sources abroad" (256) and the latter's that "Morvern becomes pregnant with . . . the future hopes of the Scottish nation, the fruit of the ordeal she has undergone" (150) are two of the more extreme examples of this tendency.
4. Scott Hames, *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2021.
5. Alan Warner, "Scottish Writers on the Referendum – Independence Day?" *The Guardian* 19.07.2014, [https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jul/19/scottish-referendum-independence-uk-how-writers-vote, accessed 17.07.2024].
6. Colin Hutchinson, "The Abandoned Church and the Contemporary British Novel," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 37 no. 1 (2007): 239, Project MUSE. For other examples of a critical approach emphasizing postmodern anomie, see Sophy Dale, *Morvern Callar: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2002) 8; Carole Jones, *Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979–1999* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) 169; and Romain Nguyen Van, "The Last Voice of Democracy: Precarity, Fiction and Community in Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar*" in *Narrating Precarity and Poverty in Britain*, eds. Barbara Korte and Frédéric Regard (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 162.
7. See Steve Redhead, *Repetitive Beat Generation* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc, 2000), especially xi-xii, Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney, *Shopping in Space: Essays on American "Blank Generation" Fiction* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992) and James Annesley, *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary Novel* (London: Pluto, 1998).
8. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Cultural Turn* (London: Verso, 1998), 3.
9. Jordana Brown, "Finding Her Religion: The Search for Spiritual Satisfaction in Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar*" in James McGonigal and Kirsten Stirling *Ethically Speaking: Voice and Values in Modern Scottish Writing* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2006), 99–115 (114).
10. Warner, *Morvern Callar*, 82–83.
11. Warner, *Morvern Callar*, 1. Warner's use of the story, which was published both posthumously, and under an assumed and gender swapped name, adds another mischievous level here.

12. Warner, *Morvern Callar*, 82.
13. Warner, *Morvern Callar*, 82.
14. Patricia Waugh, "Creative Writers and Psychopathology: The Cultural Consolations of 'The Wound and the Bow' Thesis," in *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture*, eds. Corrine Saunders and Jane Macnaughton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 180.
15. Al Alvarez, "The Myth of the Artist," in Saunders and Macnaughton, 195. See also Al Alvarez, *The Savage God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002) [1971].
16. Mark McGurl, *The Programme Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011) 26–7.
17. For a concise discussion of how male authors were figured as rebelling against feminized domesticity and socialization, see Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors" in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory,*ed. Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986) 63–79.
18. Rachel Carroll, *Rereading Heterosexuality: Feminism, Queer Theory and Contemporary Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, 93–4.
19. Roger Luckhurst, "British Science Fiction in the 1990s: Politics and Genre," in *British Fiction of the 1990s*, ed. Nick Bentley (Routledge: Abingdon, 2004), 79. See also Eddie Dyja, *Studying British Cinema: The 1990s* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2010) 39–40, and David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London: Penguin, 2000), 174.
20. Luckhurst, 79.
21. The most famous example of this is Major's vision of the "invincible suburbs," "warm beer" and "long shadows" on English cricket grounds that he described at a meeting of the Conservative Group for Europe in 1993. See https://johnmajorarchive.org.uk/1993/04/22/mr-majors-speech-to-conservative-group-for-europe-22-april-1993/ [accessed 26.07.24].
22. Luckhurst, 80.
23. See, for example, John Myerscough, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1988).
24. See Beatriz Garcia, "'If Everyone Says So . . .' Press Narratives and Image Change in Major Event Host Cities," *Urban Studies* 54.14 (2017).
25. Dale, *Alan Warner's Morvern Callar*, 36.
26. Warner, *Morvern Callar*, 82.
27. Warner, *Morvern Callar*, 203.
28. Schoene, 264.
29. Hutchinson, 239.
30. For fuller accounts of Conservative attempts to quell the groundswell of interest in acid house, see Ed Gillett, *Party Lines: Dance Music and the Making of Modern Britain* (London: Picador, 2023) especially chapters 3 and 4; Matthew Collin, *Altered State: The Story of Ecstasy Culture and Acid House* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997), especially 115–120, and Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Dance Music and Rave Culture* (London: Picador, 2013).
31. *Morvern Callar*, Directed by Lynne Ramsay (Warp Films, 2002). 1:33:16. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Morvern-Callar-Kathleen-McDermott/dp/B00ESKUVF2.
32. Warner, *Morvern Callar*, 145. It is worth noting that even sensitive critics such as Carroll have tended to frame Morvern's time in "the resort" as the hellish antithesis of her later experiences, but although she clearly hates the physical contact enforced on her by the holiday reps at her hotel and resents Lanna's lack of boundaries, especially around members of the opposite sex, she seems to enjoy her time in the clubs at the resort (she says to Lanna that she feels "quite posey" (145)).
33. *Morvern Callar*, 1.20:31-1.22:00.
34. See, for example, the Christmas Eve party scene at 14.26–16:01 and the club toilet scene at 52:43-53:31.
35. For example, when in The Mantrap, Lanna says that the two boys they have been flirting with both fancy Morvern (17), Couris Jean says that Morvern looks "like an angel come to this earth" (38), she gets "kissed by a few gray heads" at the New Year's Eve party at the Kale Onion (65) and she notices her driving instructor "dart a look at the creaminess of skin under the black low-dernier stocking" (78); there are numerous other instances later in the book.
36. Bev Skeggs, *Class, Self and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 99, quoted in Carrol, *Rereading Heterosexuality*, 99.
37. Warner, *Movern Callar*, 160.
38. Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011) 7.
39. *Morvern Callar*, 1:22:30–1:22:55 and 1:04:00–1:06:57.
40. Warner, *Morvern Callar*, 52–3.
41. Warner, *Morvern Callar*, 86–8.
42. *Morvern Callar*, 36:28-37:20.
43. *Morvern Callar*, 36:28-38:50.

44. Geoff Andrew, "Morvern Callar," *Time Out*, October 30, 2002, 78; Mark Pearson, "Morvern Callar," *Village Voice*, 11 June, 2002, 154. For further iterations of this reading, see Steve Jelbert "Painterly, Yes. Action-packed, No," *The Independent* 15 August,2002, 15, and James Christopher, "Celtic Rangers Do the Double," *The Times Section 2*, 31 October, 2002, 12–13.
45. Sukdev Sandhu, "Film of the Week: Morvern Callar," *Daily Telegraph* 11 November 2002, 25.
46. Robert Morace, "The Devolutionary Jekyll and Post-Devolutionary Hyde of the Two Morvern Callars," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 53, no 2: 121, https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2012.62347.
47. Warner, quoted in Jeremy Scott, "Talking Back at the Centre: Demotic Language in Contemporary Scottish Fiction.: *Literature Compass* 2, no 1 (2005): 1–26, quoted in Morace, 121.
48. See Oli Mould, *Against Creativity*. London: Verso, 2018. 8–9; The Creative Industries Mapping Document, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-mapping-documents-2001. [last accessed 25/07/24]; and Ian Adams, *Ideology and Politics in Britain Today*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. 144–145.
49. Adams, 145.
50. Jonathan Gross, "The Birth of the Creative Industries Revisited: An Oral History of the 1998 DCMS Mapping Document," Kings College London, 2018, 8. https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cmci/assets/report.pdf.
51. Duncan Petrie, "Cinema and the Economics of Representation: Public Funding of Film in Scotland," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Fiction*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 364.
52. Petrie, 364.
53. For details of the film's funding, see Leon Forde, "Case Study: *Morvern Callar*," *Screen International*, February 22 2002.
54. See Martin Hoyle, "Morvern Callar," *The Financial Times*, October 31 2002, 17; Alexander Walker, "Morvern Callar," *Evening Standard*, October 31 2002, 52; and Anthony Quinn, "Movern Callar," *Independent Review*, November 11 2002, 9.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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