Universidad Zaragoza
1542

Trabajo Fin de Grado

Edwin Morgan in Context:

Social Criticism and Caledonian Antisyzygy in the "Glasgow Sonnets"

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2015

Resumen:

Después de situar al poeta Edwin Morgan en el contexto de la tradición literaria escocesa y de recorrer brevemente la influencia de los Beatniks y la Poesía Concreta en su estilo poético, este Trabajo de Fin de Grado pretende analizar la denuncia social plasmada en los "Glasgow Sonnets" de acuerdo con los principios antitéticos de la Caledonian Antisyzygy. Dicha colección de sonetos retrata la realidad de Glasgow, ciudad natal de Morgan, en las décadas de los sesenta y setenta del siglo XX, una ciudad sumida en una terrible crisis debido a las políticas de desindustrialización, deconstrucción y reedificación. Así pues, el objetivo de este trabajo es demostrar el modo en que Morgan, a través de una crítica social, relaciona y reconcilia una serie de principios aparentemente opuestos; entre ellos destacan la forma y el contenido de los sonetos, la representación de Glasgow como crisis y esperanza, y el modo en que el lenguaje contribuye a reforzar el contenido crítico del volumen. Como resultado, Morgan no solamente justifica su relevancia dentro de la literatura escocesa, sino que afianza su grandeza estilística mediante la combinación de tradición y (neo)modernidad.

Abstract:

After locating the poet Edwin Morgan in the context of the Scottish literary tradition, and after briefly analyzing the stylistic influence of the Beatniks and Concrete Poetry on his literary career, this dissertation aims to analyze the social denunciation portrayed in the "Glasgow Sonnets", according to the principles of Caledonian Antisyzygy. This collection of sonnets depicts the Glaswegian reality in the 1960s and 1970s, being Glasgow – the native city of Morgan – a decadent city due to the policies of deindustrialization, deconstruction and rebuilding. Thus, the goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate the way in which Morgan, through a social critique, relates and reconciles a series of apparently opposite principles; among them it is worthy to highlight the form and content of the sonnets, the representation of Glasgow as crisis and hope, and the way in which language contributes to reinforcing the critical content of the volume. As a result, Morgan not only justifies his relevance within Scottish literature, but also strengthens his stylistic greatness through the combination of tradition and (neo)modernity.

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I. Edwin Morgan in Context

Having received prizes such as the Poet Laureate of Glasgow (1999), or the Scots Makar – i.e. the National Poet of Scotland (2004) – Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) is considered as one of the most preeminent figures in 20th century Scottish poetry and one of the most influential authors in today's Scottish literary world. In his early literary career he became attached to the 'Scottish Renaissance', which aimed to recover Scottish literary prestige – often subordinated to the English one in a national sphere – through the use of the Scottish Gaelic language. However, Morgan's involvement was only tangential due to his particular interests in literature, mainly the creation of Concrete Poetry from the 1960s, his distinctive view of language – he defended English over Scots in literature –, his motifs –urban environments than on the idealized rural Scotland –, and his idea of tradition – explained in what follows.

After locating the poet Edwin Morgan in the context of the Scottish literary tradition, and after briefly analysing the stylistic influence of the Beatniks and Concrete Poetry on his literary career, this dissertation aims to analyse the social denunciation portrayed in the "Glasgow Sonnets" according to the principles of Caledonian Antisyzygy. Placing social denunciation of the Glaswegian depression of the 1960s and 1970s at the centre of his collection, Morgan is able to construct a series of apparent oppositions that are later on deconstructed, reconciled and merged according to the principles of Caledonian Antisyzygy.

I.1. The Scottish Renaissance, Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Idea of Tradition

The Scottish Renaissance, led by the Scottish author Hugh MacDiarmid, recovered the term 'Caledonian Antisyzygy', coined by Gregory Smith in 1919, and used to describe the Scottish tendency to duality through the representation of opposites in literature. This term is, in fact, regarded as the most outstanding feature of Scottish literature (McGuire 25). Sassi defines the phenomenon as "a continuous tension and fluctuation between opposite tendencies, a love for 'domestic' realism on the one side and a love for the supernatural and the fantastic on the other" (148). Caledonian Antisyzygy comprises the rational and the supernatural, the latter having its origins in the folk Scottish tradition. Thus, it can be considered as a metaphor of reality: Scottish literature makes opposites merge in writing as a sample of Scottish necessity to join opposites in life. In fact, this tendency to duality is much more complex than it seems, and can be extrapolated to broader fields other than realism and magic. Smith himself declared in his *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919) that "in the very combination of opposites […] we have a reflection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability" (qtd. in Hoenselaars and Buning 231). Besides, Smith adds that although Scottishness consists of two aspects that seem contradictory, each extreme invades the other without warning; opposites merge giving rise to a complex identity difficult to explain.

This complexity is embodied in Edwin Morgan and developed throughout his entire literary career. He described himself as reluctant to tradition in his works, but raised – in a very subtle way – the antithetical principles of Caledonian Antisyzygy to a supreme level. In fact, "as a nationalist with a small 'n' he carefully balanced his

interests in experimentation with a measured respect for national literary tradition" (Mackay, Longley & Brearton 244-5). Morgan rejected the idea of tradition as a frame to encapsulate present writing. He deeply condemned any kind of restriction for an author's creativity. However, he attempted to adapt traditional principles to the current reality and to the new necessities that the current world required. Because of that, and despite being a profound admirer of Ezra Pound, he did not totally support his motto "make it new" but defended that tradition is suitable as long as it fulfils present requirements. As a result, even if he epitomizes innovation and rupture, Morgan can be conceived as a bridge between tradition and modernity. As a sublime representative of Scottish literature, he is able to make opposites merge, and to explore the possibilities of Caledonian Antisyzygy in a new dimension: Concrete Poetry.

I.2. **Literary Catalysts**

The first feature related to Caledonian Antisyzygy present in Morgan is his literary cosmopolitanism. Although he spent his whole life in his home city, Glasgow, Morgan managed to develop an extremely rich style, product of innumerable international influences. The ones that marked his style and literary development more deeply are the Beat Poets and Concrete Poetry, which helped Morgan cultivate a reactive, innovative and fresh way of writing (Kraszkiewicz, passim).

From the late 1940s to the early 1950s, Morgan considers his works as "rich, verbal, aesthetic" (*Nothing Not Giving Messages* 72). Poems such as "The Cape of Good Hope" portray an existentialist tone. Morgan's works are rhetorical, and lack the lightness and freshness of the early 1960s, as well as the optimistic and modern voice of his late years (Kraszkiewicz 1-2). The turning point of his literary career arrives in the mid-1950s, when Morgan becomes fascinated by the work of the Beat Poets, who

change his view of literature and allow him to feel "some kind of liberation coming" (Nicholson 73). Morgan asserted that "although it's another country and another tradition, Ginsberg, Corso and Ferlinghetti loosened up my way of looking at things" (Nicholson 73). The Beat Poets, also known as Beatniks, is a literary group that developed in the United States in the 1950s, a symbol of illicit sexuality and political defiance. The most relevant features – a referent for Morgan – were the creation of a free and direct poetry, accessible to everybody thanks to the use of everyday language. Through the Beatniks, Morgan discovered other key literary figures such as William Carlos Williams or Charles Bukowski and learned how to identify poetry in the everyday day. He claimed that he "learned for the first time […] that you can write poetry about anything […] The world, history, society, everything in it, pleads to become a voice, voices" (Morgan, *Nothing Not Giving Messages* 114). This is the reason why, at that moment – a crucial moment in the history of his home city – Morgan decided to focus on Glasgow and its people, depicting in his works "more and more of 'the world'" (Morgan, *Nothing Not Giving Messages* 114) and developing a special taste for social denunciation – as will be seen in the analysis of "The Glasgow Sonnets". Following Kerouac – one of the most outstanding figures in the Beat movement – from then on, he defended "FEELING […] not CRAFTINESS and hiding of feelings" (Plimpton 101; capitals in the original).

The second catalyst in Morgan's literary career is Concrete Poetry. In 1962, Morgan started a "friendly and fruitful correspondence" (Morgan, *Unpublished Letter* 1) about poetry with the Noigandres, a group of Brazilian artists exploring an innovative kind of poetry known as "Poesia Concreta" – Concrete Poetry in English. In their manifesto – "Plano Pilôto Para Poesia Concreta" – proclaimed in 1958, they declared themselves liberated from any kind of traditional poetry. Their objective was to relieve

poems from their literary past, by creating works conveying meaning by themselves, and not by similarities to the real world. According to Solt, a Concrete poem must be "an object in and by itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective feelings" (72). Concrete poetry involves a play with words where the text is arranged into a specific physical shape for particular reasons. Thus, the meaning of the poem becomes intrinsically linked to its shape; as stated by Kraszkiewicz, "it simultaneously combines verbal and nonverbal communication through its sound and visual quality on the printed sheet" (8). Other authors such as Gomringer added that readers must take an active part in the creation of the poem, and that each literary work may convey a series of different personal meanings (10). In Scotland, while Concrete Poetry was deeply criticized by important authors such as MacDiarmid – who harshly claimed that these geometrical shapes have nothing to do with real art – other supporters like Morgan managed to spread their fascination to a great number of readers. For Morgan, Concrete Poetry is able to convey "certain effects which would not otherwise be possible" (*Nothing Not Giving Messages* 256). Concrete poems are seen as a means of supporting the essence and meaning of poetry rather than a way to attack it, as might be presumed. Morgan was delighted with this new approach to literature and applied Concrete principles to his own personal style. For him, poetry was more than an object for contemplation, and the link between art and reality should always be maintained. His innovation was the maintenance of semantic elements in Concrete poems, since for him, "the element of wit" only works if poems are linked to reality (Kraszkiewicz 9). Morgan, by following the principles of experimental poetry, tests and examines the limits of form and meaning in order to know how far he can depart from tradition – regarding, for instance, rhyme – maintaining an equally high semantic level. In his quest to achieve it, Morgan gradually began to combine features from both of his catalysts:

the Beat Poets and Concrete Poetry. As a result, he started to compose poems traditional in form, but deeply innovative thematically: the Instamatic poems. They feature a combination of the Noigandres' visual poems – free from feelings or experiences of the author – and the Beatniks' call for real life in poetry. As a result, as Morgan himself states, poems become a "kind of snapshot" (*Nothing Not Giving Messages* 27), which – in the same way as photographs – represent reality without filters, in a completely real way. One of the best examples of this complex style are the "Glasgow Sonnets", which not only constitute sublime samples of Instamatic poems, but also comprise –either in a subtle or direct way – all the previous influences and Morgan's wandering from tradition to modernity.

II. The "Glasgow Sonnets" as Social Critique: Reconciled Oxymora through Caledonian Antisyzygy

The "Glasgow Sonnets" is a collection of ten Petrarchan sonnets written by Edwin Morgan and published in 1972. In them, the author's new style, emerged from the influence of both the Beat Poets and Concrete Poetry in the form of Instamatic poems, is raised to a new level, where sorrow and suffering constitute a silent yell. Throughout the collection – and probably as an influence derived from the former literary movement – Morgan develops William Carlos Williams' conception of the poet as a witness compelled to tell what happens around him, being the city of Glasgow the target of his focalization. Morgan himself (*Nothing not Giving Messages*) claimed that the composition of the "Glasgow Sonnets" was "like using a very good silent automatic camera disguised as a pair of eyes" (253). The "Glasgow Sonnets" depict no fiction, as Morgan follows Williams' motto "no ideas but in things" (qtd. in Copestake 105). In the sonnets the report of real facts is paramount. However, Morgan does not just confine himself to the portrayal of the urban and social circumstances of the time – which he examined and experienced personally – but aims to take an active role in the denunciation of that reality and produce an effect on the reader, sowing the seeds of revolution and change. In the ten 14-line poems that constitute the "Glasgow Sonnets", the representation of Scotland in general and Glasgow in particular has nothing to do with the romanticized views of other authors like Burns or Scott, even though their traditional sonnet form might suggest a connection. The sonnets are determined to show the actual social, political and economic situation – the Glaswegian crisis of the 1960s and 1970s, and its recession, deindustrialisation, demolition and reconstruction, derived from the nationalist political aspirations established in London. As stated by Barry, Glasgow early 1970s were marked by the establishment of a new monetary economic policy, promoted by Friedman and Heysenck – in the central government –, and focused

on the control of inflation. Thus, the Keynesian ideal of full employment defended in the 'Butskellite consensus' was substituted by an industrial nationalisation and a consequent deindustrialization that sank Glasgow into a deep economic crisis (233). The great majority of Scottish industries were either relocated in other places or controlled by London or abroad. This recession was widened into a whole political crisis, since, although the monetarist policies promoted by the Labour Party were "highly supported by the Scottish Left" (Barry 236), inflation control standardized national economic stability at the expense of the suffering, unemployment and poverty of Scotland. This crisis became even more acute when policies were applied by subsequent Conservative governments – such as that of Margaret Thatcher – which never received a majority of votes in Scotland. As a result of the 'abuses' committed against Scottish people, a social crisis flared. It reached its peak in 1971, when, as described in Nicholson, the unionist Jimmy Reid organized a multitudinous 'work-in' as a protest against the closure of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (77). Although a relative success was achieved in 1972, when financial support for the shipyard was guaranteed, the negative effects are undeniable: "between 1950 and 1972 saw membership of the Clyde Shipbuilders' Association fall from twenty-nine to thirteen" (Nicholson 77). This social crisis was even worsened by the slum clearance applied in the city from the 1950s to the late 1970s, which, apart from providing Glasgow with a radically different shape under a "process of demolition and rebuilding" (Barry 237), deprived people of their homes and relocated them in other areas, turning Glasgow into a 'ghost town' crowded by abandoned factories and buildings.

This sorrowful situation constitutes the content of the "Glasgow Sonnets", and, as will be clarified later on, is exhaustively explained – either in a direct or a subtle way – in all of them. Throughout the collection, Morgan, following the principles of one of

his catalysts, The Beat Movement, develops a social aim: to denounce the situation of his home nation. Morgan uses the depressing condition of a concrete city, his natal Glasgow, to denounce the underprivileged and powerless position of the whole nation in relation to the central government. In other words, throughout these ten sonnets, the author wants to denounce the pitiful situation of Scotland and its role as 'duster' (Sonnet V), by the description of a concrete location: Glasgow. Bad policies are leading Scotland to economic and social ruin, and the "Glasgow Sonnets" are not only a grieved call to stop the situation by making readers aware of the powerlessness of Scotland in a national frame and the abuses that its people are suffering, but also, through a helpless and desperate tone, a subtle appeal to separation and a plea for reaction. Morgan's political and social ideals are framed in instamatic poems, presenting a fusion between literature and society which gives rise to shocking pictures translated into words. In fact, and although social denunciation prevails as the central point of the whole collection, several apparently unconnected – or even opposed – points are related, and complement each other. It might be said that an extremely deep complexity lies beneath the so called social critique. Indeed, social critique acts as a wrap, a façade from where different sets of apparent oppositions merge. As the title of this section suggests, the "Glasgow Sonnets" constitute a reconciliation of different oxymora through Caledonian Antisyzygy, a proof of both the complex reality of the time and the even more complex nature of Morgan's style. The reason – explained below in depth – is that the apparent oppositions that can be found throughout the sonnets and that may be considered as samples of the binary nature portrayed in Caledonian Antisyzygy, are wisely fused under Morgan's magisterial technique. As a result of all this, and although the analysis of the social function as the spine of the collection is going to receive special emphasis, three levels of merged oppositions are going to be explained: firstly, the contrast

between the sonnet form and the poems' content; secondly, crisis and hope in the city of Glasgow, and, finally, Morgan's use of language.

II.1. The Sonnet: Form and Content

The collection known as 'Glasgow Sonnets' seems to be contradictory regarding its form and content. Focusing on their form, they constitute perfect examples of decasyllable Petrarchan sonnets following the scheme 'abbaabba' in the octave, and 'cdcdcd' in the sestet. Sonnets are traditional samples of poetic high-style with a positive subject matter, but in this case, and as Corbett states, these structures are used as "polemics, social observations which provoke anger at the poverty and deprivation which they portray" (125). He further adds that the combination of form and content may be considered as illogical, since although the form suggests "a subject matter of weight and value" (125) it is actually applied to the less favoured Glaswegian citizens, the outcasts, "often neglected by the more privileged in society" (125). Other authors such as Dunn go even further. Dunn (75) conceives the title mainly as an oxymoron, due to the negative connotations attached to Glasgow in the 1970s – an industrial, or rather deindustrialized decadent city. However, this juxtaposition of contrasting ideas is not as antithetical as it seems, and in fact has been used by other well-known authors such as Hardy, whose sonnets convey a sense of sadness and even deal with death.

The author's attainment was to adapt tradition to modern times. Morgan himself claimed, "I like, I think, even the idea of change more than I like the idea of tradition" (*Nothing Not Giving Messages* 131). Although the author recognized not to be particularly interested in traditional literature, he did accept its existence and its undeniable effects on today. He did not reject tradition, but defended the necessity of adjusting it to current necessities. And his current necessities were – as he claimed in relation to some authors such as Neruda or Brecht, translated by himself – the portrayal

"of a political dimension as well as an aesthetic dimension" (Dósa 38). In an interview for *The Dark Horse Magazine* in 1997, Morgan defended that each literary work requires a concrete approach in order to be successful. Thus, although writing sonnets about the social and political crisis may seem challenging, he used them not only because the rigid structure "concentrates your mind on what you are doing", but also because their complex rhyme and syntax contributed to reinforcing the harshness of their content (Cambridge 34): "a grimmer political awareness of industrial decline" (Nicholson 75). In a beautiful metaphor, Nicholson establishes that " 'Glasgow Sonnets' preserves the outline of a Renascence practice, but strips out its conventional furniture and designs instead Scottish interiors" (75). This is how Morgan reconciles an apparent opposite. In Lorca's words, "poesía es la unión de dos palabras" – in this case the union of form and subject matter – "que uno nunca supuso que pudieran juntarse, y que forman algo así como un misterio" (qtd. in García-Posada, 1981: 334).

II.2. The city of Glasgow: Crisis and Hope

The "Glasgow Sonnets" constitute one of the most urban-focused works along Morgan's literary career. As explained before, from the early 1960s – as an influence from the Beatniks – Morgan developed a special taste for the description and portrayal of cityscapes in his works; concretely for the depiction of Glasgow and the tremendous changes it was 'suffering'. In his essay "The Poetry of the City" (1996), he justifies that, for him, "the city is just as capable of stirring a writer's creative imagination as the world of nature is" (qtd. in Williams 146). Because of that, in the creation of his complex representation of the city, important influences can be appreciated. As explained above, Morgan became a witness, a reporter of what is around him as an influence from Williams. Besides, the negative effects of modernization in his home city, made him focus on late 19th century literature, and develop – as sometimes can be

appreciated in the tone of the "Glasgow Sonnets" – a kind of naturalistic approach, similar to that of Dickens, Baudelaire and Dostoevsky, in London, Paris and St Petersburg, respectively. But the author who captivated Morgan and propelled his interest in urban poetry was the Beat Poet Allen Ginsberg. For Morgan, Ginsberg "was an urban poet looking at the underside and underworld of a city" (Farquharson 16) and reporting openly what he sees, and it was precisely what Morgan wanted to achieve.

In "The Poetry of the city", Morgan explains that, for him, each city is both Heaven and Hell at the same time. Because of that, it is common to find throughout Morgan's production the portrayal of 'the two faces of the city'. Even in the "Glasgow Sonnets" where the hellish portrayal of Glasgow is devastating, we can find subtle samples of heaven depicted in the form of light. Barry claimed that Morgan's representation of the city as heaven appears when "effects of light conspire to produce an ethereal visual effect" (233) – for instance the 'loops of light' described in sonnet VIII – 'the flyovers breed loops of light / […] / clean unpompous, nothing wishy-washy' – or the 'Glittering stars' which 'cram / the higher spaces' in Sonnet II, explained in depth later on. For Barry, these effects are very much related to Joyce's epiphanies, since they imply a revealing moment characterised by deep insight. In this sense, the epiphany portrayed in the "Glasgow Sonnets" deals with the idea that from these bright allusions there is hope, possibility of change. Despite the sorrowful atmosphere and the deep crisis in which Glasgow was immersed, its citizens can extract a positive message, conveyed in a very refined way: despite the hellish crisis, there is heavenly hope. These – tiny – positive and – predominantly – negative connotations cannot be considered as opposites residing in the same city, but as merged features that complement each other.

Focusing on the crisis and the devastating atmosphere that constitutes the basis of the poetic collection, the social critique developed by Morgan can be divided into different levels that range from public to private, that is, from the depiction of Scotland and its role in the UK in general, to the city of Glasgow and its individual people in particular. This change of focus is arbitrary and does not seem to observe a particular progression throughout the collection – probably as a simile of the chaotic Scottish situation. However, my essay is going to follow the national-individual evolution in order to clarify the social critique. The broadest degree of criticism focuses on the unbalanced relations of power between Scotland and England in a national frame, and the supremacy of the latter. It is explained in Sonnet V, where the poetic speaker does not only clarify that national policies are 'transferred/ from Whitehall to the Clyde' – i.e. from London to Glasgow – but also censures the central government's hypocrisy, and the mistreatment of Scotland, who is subject to decisions taken hundreds of miles away (Barry 235). The policies of nationalization promoted by the 1970s governments implied both the deindustrialization of Glasgow and the relocation of its ship industry in other places, and a deep economic crisis and the reorganization of the economic hegemony in Scotland. In Sonnet V, Morgan makes reference to the work-in promoted by Reid in 1971 as the last attempt to stop this process of deindustrialization. However, the economic consequences derived from the monetary policies were as serious as inevitable. As is shown in Sonnet VI, the discovery of oil fields in the North East of Scotland accentuated the economic crisis of Glasgow even more, since from then on wealth was guaranteed by this area, and the decadent industry of Glasgow was not necessary to the national economic stability: 'The North Sea oil-strike tilts east Scotland up,/ and the great sick Clyde shivers in its bed'. The devastating effects of this economic crisis are seen in Sonnet III, were a family wanders looking for

accommodation in precarious conditions. In this sonnet, readers can appreciate a sense of hierarchy, in which a landlord cheats and takes advantage of a poor family. In fact, if they read in between the lines, readers may conceive the landlord as an embodiment of the English authorities who, 'bored with snooker', 'stripped the neighbouring houses' – i.e. abused Scottish people. This poetic speaker concludes the sonnet by condemning the economic policies, and describing them as 'Filthy lucre!'.

Focusing on Glasgow as a city, the collection criticizes the demolition and reconstruction policies developed in the 1960s, which deprived Glasgow from its original shape and turned it into an unrecognizable 'garden cit[y]' (Sonnet VIII). The process of demolition is beautifully described in Sonnet IX – concretely in its octave – by means of an extended metaphor of a digger. The poem depicts a personified digger 'killing' a personified city. This digger is presented as a huge and powerful force capable of destroying everything: 'It digs its pits to a shauchling refrain'; as a threatening and tireless monster that 'groans and shakes, contracts and grows again', 'hoist[ing] a bleary fist at nothing, then/ at everything'. The digger 'murders' the buildings in a city – the soul of the city – and their pieces are freed weeping, 'in flaps and squalls of pain'. In this period, diggers transformed Glaswegian districts like 'Dalmanrock, Maryhill, Blackhill and Govan' – portrayed in Sonnet IV – into wide terraces where new skyscrapers were built under a process of reconstruction. These policies are censured in sonnet IV, ironically, through the allusion of a poem by MacDiarmid: "Glasgow 1960". This poem was published in 1935 and depicted a future utopic Glasgow in the 1960s. Morgan, through an ironic, nearly sarcastic tone, reflects that this utopia has become in fact a dystopia, that any MacDiarmid's prophecy has become true, and that in fact, it seems that no time has passed, since the current crisis of Glasgow is similar to that of the 1930s. The situation is so critical, that for Morgan "the

flow of soul has ceased/ to matter", and poets must focus on the suffering of people. Going back to the process of reconstruction, as has been explained, Glasgow underwent a process of slum clearance from the 1950s. The demolished buildings led to the construction of a new city based on pedestrianisation, which deprived Glasgow of his original shape. This fact is explained in Sonnets VII and VIII. In Sonnet VII, Morgan condemns the new architecture of Glasgow, full of 'riverside walks', since it implies the loss of Glasgow's essence. Industry is not ugly, it is identity, it is past, it is roots, it is tradition. It is Glasgow. These policies are focused on the creation of homogeneous buildings characterised by architectonic styles that have never appeared in the city before. The new 'pink piebald façades' built in Glasgow do not represent its historical past, and this is the reason why Morgan conceives its builders as 'sticky-fingered mock-Venetianists'. As a result, deprived of its structure and its industry, the city has become a 'gutted double fake'. The critique of new aesthetics promoted in Glasgow throughout this sonnet, may be metaphorically related to the new aesthetics promoted in Scottish literature; Morgan supported renewal in both of them, but deeply criticized a total clash with tradition. The criticism of reconstruction reaches its climax in Sonnet VIII, when Morgan describes the new shape of Glasgow as a 'garden cit[y]'. For him, it is the 'flimsiest oxymoron'. Deconstruction provides the appearance of 'vistas' and the possibility of seeing 'stars at night', but these facts do not have positive connotations in Glasgow. Glasgow is industry, and its beauty is precisely its distinction from other cities – and from the romanticized Scotland. Because of that, the author condemns imitation; for him, 'the life that overspill is overkill to', and the concept of 'Less is more' – referring to the pedestrianisation and open-air spaces in Glasgow – does not work in this city. In the conclusion of this sonnet – concretely in the last tercet – Morgan defends the bus, the car, and industry as part of Scotland. Because of that, Scottish literature –

represented by means of the 'ukiyo-e'[1] due to its pictorial nature (Instamatic Poems) – must go beyond nature, beyond the idyllic Scotland – embodied in the sonnet by Lochnagar – and focus on urban reality.

Finally, the last level of analysis focuses on the Glaswegian individuals, concretely, on the suffering of its working classes. In Sonnet I, the arbitrary change of focus, from general to particular that appears in the "Glasgow Sonnets", is developed in a gradual way. In it, there is a progression from external to internal. In the opening octave, readers are faced with a panoramic view of an outside space, characterised by harsh climatic conditions – e.g. 'mean wind' (1) – and the description of a decrepit building with broken windows, cracks and rats – e.g. 'cracks deepen, the rats crawl'(8). In the sestet, however, we find focalization on one concrete window, and the action, or rather lack of action, inside it. Here, readers are faced with the living conditions of a poor, unemployed man that can be understood as a metaphorical embodiment of Scottish society. His weak 'coughs' may represent the weak spirit and protests of Scottish people, and the 'poor air', the tough environment that is typical of Scotland at the time. The lack of importance of these working classes in an official stage is depicted by their treatment as people without names. However, the reader cannot ignore their sorrowful situations, thanks to the portrayal of a harsh, naturalistic imagery that sets the sonnets closer to the 19th and early 20th centuries realism. We find, among others, references to filth, drunkenness, and lack of morality, in 'roses of mould' (Sonnet I), 'ragwoman's dram' (Sonnet II), and 'a shilpit dog fucks' (Sonnet II), respectively. In Sonnet X we also find focalization on one concrete individual, a 'schoolboy reading *Lear*'. In fact, the sonnet seems to wink at Shakespeare's play symbolically, Scotland becoming the

[1] Ukiyo-e: (Japanese: "pictures of the floating world") is a genre of woodblock prints and paintings developed in Japan from the 17th to the 19th centuries, and which constitutes one of the most well-known artistic elements of the Edo Period (1603–1867). These paintings normally depict beautiful women, kabuki actors and sumo wrestlers, scenes from history and folk tales, travel scenes and landscapes, flora and fauna, and erotica (*Wikipedia*).

embodiment of Lear. Scotland is suffering the consequences of irresponsibility, passivity, and misjudgement. Scotland has delegated its power to a 'foreigner' – its industrial power to both England and other countries – instead of working for development from within, and now, Scotland is paying for the consequences. But this is not the end. Awareness of the situation is the key to success. In the sonnet, the child 'can see' the consequences of inappropriate sequences, and this is the first step to change the situation and achieve a better future. Despite the heart-breaking panorama, there is a possibility of hope.

In this sense, it is necessary to go back to Morgan's concepts of city as Hell and city as Heaven – and so, Glasgow as crisis and Glasgow as hope. Although the "Glasgow Sonnets" are focused on the portrayal of the sorrowful situation of the city in the 1970s, the distressing reality is accompanied by bubbles of light that indicate hope despite horror. This contrast is not only seen in the previously mentioned 'loops of light' of Sonnet VIII, but developed throughout an entire sonnet: Sonnet II. In it there is reference to filth – 'A shilpit dog fucks grimly' – determinism – 'weans never make the grade' – alcoholism – 'the ragwoman's dram' – and poverty – 'coats keep the evil cold out less and less'. However, above this raw reality 'Glittering stars press', and their blinking – which is compared with a distress signal (SOS) – can denote not only a warning about a necessary change, but also hope, since as has been explained, Morgan associated glittering lights with positive connotations.

In Sonnet VI, Morgan depicts the role of the poet as merely symbolic, materially powerless "Without my images the men/ ration their cigarettes, their children cling/ to broken toys, their women wonder". The only thing he can do is to denounce this crisis and make people reflect, react, act; and this is precisely what Morgan is trying to achieve throughout the "Glasgow Sonnets". As Barry defends, Morgan does not

criticize development and change, but he does criticize the abuses, mistreatment and powerlessness of Scotland (239). His denunciation aims to tackle the incorrect policies applied in recent years, which threaten Scottish development harshly. "This is not a story of refusing to 'budge', or embracing the past rather than the present, but of not wanting to end up as the duster for some distant body's blackboard" (Barry 239). Morgan's criticism does not only apply to public organisms, but also to the actual Scottish citizens who remain passive. This fact is portrayed in Sonnet V, where the poetic speaker states: "We have preferred/silent slipways to the riveters' wit./ And don't deny it – that's the ugly bit". Morgan defends Frost's motto "It's not what you do to the facts that's important, it's what the facts do to you" (Cambridge 40), in order to make people aware that no matter the harshness of reality, they have to fight for solutions. Passiveness makes Glaswegian citizens as guilty as the central government. Because of that, Morgan sows the seeds of revolution, and encourages readers to take an active role in the process of recovery. As he claims 'stalled lives never budge' (Sonnet X), but 'the thing is now' (Sonnet VI), and '[people] have nothing to lose but [their] chains' (Sonnet IV).

II.3. Language

The contrastive, even dual nature of the "Glasgow Sonnets" can also be seen in its language. Along the poems, readers do not only face different kinds of discourse merging, but also the combination of Scots and English words, whose use opened at the period an either/or debate full of controversy. As has been previously mentioned, the Scottish Renaissance promoted the creation of a Scottish literature that raised the prestige of Scots Gaelic through its use in high literature under a process of whole cultural regeneration (Barry 235) – known as the Lallans Movement. However, other

authors such as Morgan or Finlay only focused on the adaptation of language to the new times and personal necessities, being deeply criticized by the supporters of this regeneration. The real polemics in the use of language prevailing in the 1970s are faintly introduced in the collection, concretely in Sonnet IV – "We never got/ an abstruse song that charmed the raging beast". Here, as suggested by Barry, the term 'beast' may refer to a collection by Finlay titled 'Glasgow Beasts', published in 1961, and which was tremendously criticized by the leader of the Scottish Renaissance, Hugh MacDiarmid, who referred to the language used in Finlay's collection as 'the language of the gutter' (235).

Although Morgan rejected a radical turn to Scots, and defended that writing in English may contribute to a wider spread and recognition of the Scottish tradition, he shared in part the idea that using local vocabulary would help Scottish authors to make an identity different from that of the English literary tradition (Cambridge 41). Morgan does not lead the use of regional language to the maximum and refuses to represent the city by reproducing its dialect, but introduces Scottish words when appropriate. In the "Glasgow Sonnets", readers can find several examples of this Scottish dialect, especially when the poetic speaker introduces the Glaswegian inhabitants and their lives (Williams, n.p). Among the most relevant ones, we find 'shilpit' and 'weans' in Sonnet II, which mean 'scruffy' and 'children', respectively; 'hoose' in Sonnet III, referring to the English word 'house'; 'greeting', which means 'welcoming' in English, but which is related to the Scots idiom 'shedding tears' in this case (Sonnet IV); or 'stanes' and 'banes' – also in Sonnet IV – which share their origin and Old English form with the English words 'stones' and 'bones' but which developed in a different way[2]. These

[2] The Present Day English (PDE) words 'stone' and 'bone' come from OE: 'stān' and 'bān', respectively. In fact, these words were the same in both languages, English and Scots Gaelic, having their origin in the Proto-Germanic '*stainaz' and '*bainam', respectively. However, whereas <ā> was not modified in the

local words – which belong to Glaswegian slang – harshly collide with the general cultivated style of the sonnets characterised by a high-tone – dominated by the denunciation discourse, but where readers can find both lyrical and political passages. Amongst the most outstanding lyrical parts, readers can find beautiful images associated with the conception of 'city as heaven' and the possibility of hope, for instance the "Glittering starts" in Sonnet II; and others, equally moving but referring to the depressing situation: "On the wrecker's ball the rains/ of greeting cities drop and drink their fill" (Sonnet IV), or "women wonder when/ the doors will bang on laughter and a wing/ over the firth be simply joy again" (Sonnet VI). Focusing on the most politically charged parts, in Sonnet IV Morgan recalls the 1848 Communist Manifesto, 'So you have nothing to lose but your chains' in order to make readers react against the current situation. Moreover, there are other examples that echo the well-known political speeches which became so trendy along the democratization of Europe. These speeches, as well as some of Morgan's sonnets, use rhetoric questions not only to put an emphasis on the topic treated, but also to draw spectators' – in this case readers' – attention to a concrete issue. A clear example is 'And who wants to distil?' in Sonnet VIII, where the author calls for reaction against the artificial reconstruction of Glasgow; but there are others such as 'Surely soup-kitchens have gone out?' in Sonnet IV, which use irony in order to criticize the precarious conditions of the 1970s that are reminiscent of the social inter-war period.

The aim of the "Glasgow Sonnets" is to create a social critique through the merging of apparent opposites, and this fact is reinforced by means of linguistic elements. The lyrical, political, and social tones that characterise the collection, are

north of Britain, in the South and middle England its pronunciation changed, which led to a change in spelling. As a result, a word such as OE stān became "stone", since there was a retraction of the vowel and the place of articulation went back [a:] > [o:]. The same happens with OE bānys whose pronunciation and form was maintained in the north – and so in the Scots Gaelic – but changed in midland England.

interrelated linguistically. In order to explain this fact, it is necessary to go back to the contrast between form and content that the "Glasgow Sonnets" portray. The gentle rhythmical and alliterative patterns that are supposed to bring musicality to the 'positive' message of sonnets, are modified in the "Glasgow Sonnets" in order to fulfil their social denunciation. Thus, the rhythm of the collection – rather than being totally iambic – becomes pugilistic, mechanical, in order to reinforce the harshness of the situation: 'But stalled lives never budge' (Sonnet X). Besides, there is a constant introduction of run-on-lines throughout the entire collection, which act as a metaphorical representation of the rift in the development of Scotland due to incorrect policies; for example: 'the position/ is simple' in Sonnet III, or 'ill/ to hurt ye' in Sonnet IV. This real harshness is also conveyed by means of alliterative patterns which, though rich and introduced as an influence from other Scottish poets such as Dunbar, Henryson or Douglas (Cambridge 35) – predominantly evoke negative situations – with the exception of the lateral sounds: /l/ introduced at the beginning of Sonnet VIII, which refer to the lighting effects produced by the motorway, similar to popping bubbles. For example, in the first three lines of Sonnet IX, there is a combination of plosive sounds - /k/, /b/, /t/, /g/ - with fricative – /ʃ/ - or even affricate - /dʒ/ - sounds which evoke the noise produced by a digger in the process of demolition. In Sonnet IX, by contrast, the alliteration is produced by the repetition of the vocalic sounds /e/, /ə/, and /a:/. They aim at reproducing the echo emerged after the process of demolition, and which characterizes the new 'garden-cities'. This sense of nothingness is also described in Sonnets I and III, through the alliteration of plosives - /p/, /b/, /k/, /t/ - and laterals - /w/ - that suggest the echo of deconstruction.

The reason for all this linguistic complexity is that, once again, Morgan blends apparent opposites together – lyricism and denunciation – and tries to make them merge

following the principles of Caledonian Antisyzygy. Morgan accepts that poetry and the current society are almost an oxymoron; he accepts the "helplessness" (Barry, 2000: 235) of poetry at the time, but justifies himself and the role of the poet not only stating 'poets words are ill/ to hurt ye' in Sonnet IV – i.e. not only justifying poets' help and not mock or attack – but also creating a social poetry – a social critique – defending the new role of lyrical literature: to defend and support society. Thus, although poetry should not be deprived from its lyricism, it must approach people, their dialects, sorrow and protest. Poetry must escape MacDiarmid's sophistication and attend people's real needs, and the best way to achieve it is by means of a direct language, which can be understood by the entire Glaswegian society, and which is capable of making them aware of their real needs.

III. Conclusion

As a conclusion, if someone comes across the sonnets without having knowledge of the political and historical situation of Scotland in the second half of the 20th century, he/she will definitely feel alienated. The high-tone in which they are written, and the complexity and connotative strength of the language make them difficult to follow, not only for the non-native speaker of English, but also for the native speaker born outside Glasgow. Besides, as stated by Williams, "the choice of the sonnet form creates a useful frisson with his subject matter – as tradition jostles with urban decay" (146); they are traditional in form, but "experimental, exceptional and unorthodox" in content (Dunn 77). But the complexity of the work goes even beyond. The harshness and almost naturalistic atmosphere portrayed in 'Glasgow Sonnets' sets them closer to authors such as Charles Dickens or Victor Hugo – and their portrayal of London and Paris, respectively. However, the criticism of modernisation and the industrial world is not the aim of the sonnets. Indeed, the poems emphasize the concept of the "vanishing city" used by Barry (239). 'Glasgow Sonnets' focus on the reality of Glasgow in the 1960s and 1970s – a decayed city under the policies of deindustrialization, deconstruction and rebuilding in order to introduce a reflection on Scottish powerlessness and their 'proletarian' role in the national sphere. We have seen it for example in Sonnet V, when the author portrays London as the official decision-taker, and Scottish people as "their duster". As is explained by Barry (239), Morgan is not "refusing to 'budge', or embracing the past rather than the present", but trying to make Scottish people aware of their lack of authority in relation to Whitehall, the consequences of incorrect policies and the necessity of change. Morgan is aware that the role of the poet is symbolic and that he is not able to change the situation on his own: "Without my images the men/ration their cigarettes" (Sonnet VI). However, through a set of poems depicting the

sorrowful situation of Glasgow, he is able to express a silent yell, and the support of reaction, recovery and change.

The social function and sublime social denunciation portrayed in the "Glasgow Sonnets" constitute only one of the numerous achievements by Morgan. The collection represents a brilliant sample of Instamatic Poems which emerge as the result of Morgan's synthesis between tradition and modernity. He was irretrievably linked to his national and his literary past, dominated by the principle of Caledonian Antisyzygy; however, he manages to raise this principle to a new dimension, by applying it to his revolutionary style, a kind of neo-modernism which combined the freshness of the Beatniks, and the complexity of Concrete Poetry. Morgan – who prided in being considered a "risk-taker" (Cambridge 35) – by describing the depressing and disheartening social and economic situation of Glasgow at the time through the traditional form of the sonnet, builds a beautiful oxymoron difficult to achieve; but not only that, indeed, Morgan is able to reconcile this oxymoron through the principles of Caledonian Antisyzygy, making opposites merge under a sublime cohesive work. This is something reserved to the biggest masters of literature, a fact that makes his work unquestionably magnificent, unique.

In an interview in *The Dark Horse Magazine* in the summer of 1997, Morgan uttered a statement about James Thompson that could, indeed, be referred to himself:

> The way in which he writes about these things is so impressive, so strong, so imaginative, that there's a kind of paradox really. […] He's been called a great pessimist, but can you really call a man who writes a great poem a pessimist? You're conquering something, you're conquering the material you're using, you're conquering form, you're conquering alienation. […] It's a creative triumph. (Morgan, qtd. in Cambridge 36)

Despite the depressing situation and the harsh social criticism portrayed in the collection, Edwin Morgan was capable of introducing a hopeful message for the

Scottish society; but not only that, the creation and reconciliation of opposites throughout the collection allows Morgan to achieve what he defined as a ‘creative triumph’. The melting of his creative imagination and a completely realistic approach, gives rise to a magnificent work which allows Morgan to conquer several literary traditions and forms by means of an apparent social denunciation. In the “Glasgow Sonnets”, Edwin Morgan, by ‘conquering’ Instamatic poems, Scottish reality, and Caledonian Antisyzygy, sows the seeds of a revolutionary change.

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Appendix

"The Glasgow Sonnets" (Morgan, 'Glasgow Sonnets' 92-96)

i.

A mean wind wanders through the backcourt trash.
Hackles on puddles rise, old mattresses
puff briefly and subside. Play-fortresses
of brick and bric-a-brac spill out some ash.
Four storeys have no windows left to smash,
but in the fifth a chipped sill buttresses
mother and daughter the last mistresses
of that black block condemned to stand, not crash.
Around them the cracks deepen, the rats crawl.
The kettle whimpers on a crazy hob.
Roses of mould grow from ceiling to wall.
The man lies late since he has lost his job,
smokes on one elbow, letting his coughs fall
thinly into an air too poor to rob.

ii.

A shilpit dog fucks grimly by the close.
Late shadows lengthen slowly, slogans fade.
The YY PARTICK TOI grins from its shade
like the last strains of some lost *libera nos*
a malo. No deliverer ever rose
from these stone tombs to get the hell they made
unmade. The same weans never make the grade.
The same grey street sends back the ball it throws.
Under the darkness of a twisted pram
a cat's eyes glitter. Glittering stars press
between the silent chimney-cowls and cram
the higher spaces with their SOS.
Don't shine a torch on the ragwoman's dram.
Coats keep the evil cold out less and less.

iii.

‘See a tenement due for demolition?
I can get ye rooms in it, two, okay?
Seven hundred and nothin legal to pay
for it’s no legal, see? That’s my proposition,
ye can take it or leave it but. The position
is simple, you want a hoose, I say
for eight hundred pound it’s yours.’ And they,
trailing five bairns, accepted his omission
of the foul crumbling stairwell, windows wired
not glazed, the damp from the canal, the cooker
without pipes, packs of rats that never tired—
any more than the vandals bored with snooker
who stripped the neighbouring houses, howled, and fired
their aerosols—of squeaking ‘Filthy lucre!’

iv.

Down by the brickworks you get warm at least.
Surely soup-kitchens have gone out? It’s not
the Thirties now. Hugh MacDiarmid forgot
in ‘Glasgow 1960’ that the feast
of reason and the flow of soul has ceased
to matter to the long unfinished plot
of heating frozen hands. We never got
an abstruse song that charmed the raging beast.
So you have nothing to lose but your chains,
dear Seventies. Dalmarnock, Maryhill,
Blackhill and Govan, better sticks and stanes
should break your banes, for poets’ words are ill
to hurt ye. On the wrecker’s ball the rains
of greeting cities drop and drink their fill.

v.

‘Let them eat cake’ made no bones about it.
But we say let them eat the hope deferred
and that will sicken them. We have preferred
silent slipways to the riveters’ wit.
And don’t deny it—that’s the ugly bit.
Ministers’ tears might well have launched a herd
of bucking tankers if they’d been transferred
from Whitehall to the Clyde. And smiles don’t fit

either. ‘There’ll be no bevvying’ said Reid
at the work-in. But all the dignity you muster
can only give you back a mouth to feed
and rent to pay if what you lose in bluster
is no more than win patience with ‘I need’
while distant blackboards use you as their duster.

vi.

The North Sea oil-strike tilts east Scotland up,
and the great sick Clyde shivers in its bed.
But elegists can’t hang themselves on fled-
from trees or poison a recycled cup—
If only a less faint, shaky sunup
glimmered through the skeletal shop and shed
and men washed round the piers like gold and spread
golder in soul than Mitsubishi or Krupp—
The images are ageless but the thing
is now. Without my images the men
ration their cigarettes, their children cling
to broken toys, their women wonder when
the doors will bang on laughter and a wing
over the firth be simply joy again.

vii.

Environmentalists, ecologists
and conservationists are fine no doubt.
Pedestrianization will come out
fighting, riverside walks march off the lists,
pigeons and starlings be somnambulists
in far-off suburbs, the sandblaster’s grout
multiply pink piebald façades to pout
at sticky-fingered mock-Venetianists.
Prop up’s the motto. Splint the dying age.
Never displease the watchers from the grave.
Great when fake architecture was the rage,
but greater still to see what you can save.
The gutted double fake meets the adage:
a wig’s the thing to beat both beard and shave.

viii.

Meanwhile the flyovers breed loops of light
in curves that would have ravished tragic Toshy—
clean and unpompous, nothing wishy-washy.
Vistas swim out from the bulldozer's bite
by day, and banks of earthbound stars at night
begin. In Madame Emé's Sauchie Haugh, she
could never gain in leaves or larks or sploshy
lanes what's lost in a dead boarded site—
the life that overspill is overkill to.
Less is not more, and garden cities are
the flimsiest oxymoron to distil to.
And who wants to distil? Let bus and car
and hurrying umbrellas keep their skill to
feed ukiyo-e beyond Lochnagar.

ix.

It groans and shakes, contracts and grows again.
Its giant broken shoulders shrug off rain.
It digs its pits to a shauchling refrain.
Roadworks and graveyards like their gallus men.
It fattens fires and murders in a pen
and lets them out in flaps and squalls of pain.
It sometimes tears its smoky counterpane
to hoist a bleary fist at nothing, then
at everything, you never know. The west
could still be laid with no one's tears like dust
and barricaded windows be the best
to see from till the shops, the ships, the trust
return like thunder. Give the Clyde the rest.
Man and the sea make cities as they must.

x.

From thirtieth floor windows at Red Road
he can see choughs and samphires, dreadful trade—
the schoolboy reading *Lear* has that scene made.
A multi is a sonnet stretched to ode
and some say that's no joke. The gentle load
of souls in clouds, vertiginously stayed
above the windy courts, is probed and weighed.
Each monolith stands patient, ah'd and oh'd.

And stalled lifts generating high-rise blues
can be set loose. But stalled lives never budge.
They linger in the single-ends that use
their spirit to the bone, and when they trudge
from closemouth to launderette their steady shoes
carry a world that weighs us like a judge.