

REVIEW

Alasdair Gray, *1982, Janine*, Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2003. \$22.50 CDN/£7.99 UK, xviii + 340 pp. ISBN 1-84195-346-6.

Originally published in 1984 and re-issued by Canongate Books in 2003, Alasdair Gray's *1982, Janine* is a fascinating piece of Scottish fiction. Gray's second novel fits the description of much of his work: 'characterised by an exuberant imaginative energy, which uses fantasy to good-humoured effect, while never losing sight of his darker and more critical sense of the effects of personal, cultural, and political alienation in the modern world.' (pp. i-ii)

Through the lonely sexual fantasies of the protagonist, Jock McLeish, a failed husband, lover and businessman, Alasdair Gray explores the politics of pornography. While *1982, Janine* becomes sexually explicit at times it is really more of a book about power and powerlessness, men and women, masters and servants, small countries and big countries.

Gray's stream of consciousness style takes the reader inside the mind of Jock McLeish who, in a state of insomnia, is trying to entertain himself with his imagination. While McLeish would prefer his mind to stay focussed upon his pornographic fantasies, his mind tends to wander back to his childhood and to his failed marriage. Gray manages to beautifully incorporate lines from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jonson, The Book of Common Prayer, Scott and Burns into the internal monologue.

This edition of *1982, Janine* is introduced by Will Self who warns readers: 'Do not, I beg of you, pick it up lightly; do not, I urge you, be deceived by its come-hither appearance and easy way with words, into believing that *1982, Janine* will let you go before you have been shaken up and rubbed down. Trust me, you will leave go at the end sore and nauseous, in need of balm and

vomit.' (p. xi) While I would not go so far as Self, *1982, Janine* will definitely leave the reader thinking, perhaps wondering if they are truly satisfied with their own life, and possibly feeling a great deal of pity for Jock McLeish, whose tragically unhappy and alcoholic 'mind' they have been inside for the past 340 pages.

The incredibly interesting, unforgettable and nauseating Chapter 11 was one of the most difficult and fascinating pieces of literary work that this reviewer has read in a long time. All in all, *1982, Janine* is an interesting and thought-provoking read, but perhaps not a work to be picked up lightly.

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