

Re-establishing Complexities: Researching and Teaching Scottish Literature inside/outside Scotland

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Relation is the knowledge in motion of beings, which risks the being of the world.

Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

*It seems this is a world of change, where we,
observing, can scarcely fix the observed
and are unfixed ourselves*

Edwin Morgan, 'Memories of Earth'

The title of this essay may seem overambitious: even though Scotland is a small nation, its literary history, spreading over fourteen centuries and interconnecting with numerous other cultures, represents a vast enough territory to defy the competence of any individual scholar. Having recently positioned my critical work in this field (which, as is always the case, has its origins in autobiography and in the need to come to some understanding of one's personal history¹) in an academic account of *Why Scottish Literature Matters*², I wish now to provide a general discussion and a broad framework for considering some of the major issues and challenges related to this specific area of studies, along with a few, hopefully constructive, observations on theoretical and methodological issues. Given the wide-ranging debate on the status of Scottish literature in its country of origin, I make no claim to exhaustiveness, and have referred to a limited but representative selection of scholarly studies which deal with the same or bordering topics.

I will start by questioning the 'traditional' boundary that still divides scholars and students who work from within this specific cultural system (Scots by birth or residence), and those who

approach it from an outsider's perspective. Insofar as this distinction is pragmatic and refers to a different degree of involvement in 'fieldwork', it is undoubtedly a functional one and obviously applies to any specialist who ventures into a 'foreign' territory and confronts the wider and more up-to-date competence of a native/resident scholar. However, any further emphasis on insider/outsider beyond this pragmatic level will only confirm the lingering prejudice that Scottish literature is merely a locally relevant expression, as opposed to 'universal' literary traditions or authors, whose relevance (or canonicity) has been sanctioned by (inter)national readership and academic recognition. Scottish literature *is*, of course, a local expression, to the extent that *any* cultural expression (or, indeed, any form of knowledge) is; that is, it is located in time and space. But like all cultural artefacts it is also the outcome of encounter and hybridisation; as theorised by Homi Bhabha, cultural identity always emerges in the contradictory and ambivalent in-between space of 'enunciation'.³ This is precisely the area where the distinction between insiders and outsiders blurs and loses its functionality: if today the notion of cultural purity is untenable, so is the assumption that *any* culture can represent an exclusively 'local' expression (or, conversely, a purely cosmopolitan one). If each culture weaves a plurality of intersecting paths with other cultures, then the complex web of these interconnections can be fully revealed only through a plurality of approaches and perspectives.

The process of minorisation undergone by Scottish literature — which has nothing to do with its qualitative or quantitative 'smallness' or with its incapacity to travel beyond 'locality', and was rather determined by the interconnected dynamics of the constructions of Britishness, Englishness and Scottishness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries — has been the object of innumerable and often discordant critical investigations. Scotland today, however, is no longer a 'trapped minority': the restoration of its Parliament is a tangible signal of a profoundly changed political and cultural attitude in Britain (in tune with what is happening in most European countries), marked by a greater degree of attention to (sub-)national and regional specificities. Unsurprisingly, however, the search for new interpretative categories and critical approaches — much needed in this changed and changing context — is still hindered by the prejudices and

perceptions attached to its problematic history, both at a popular and at an academic level. A native specialist of Scottish studies may still be perceived reductively, in his/her own country as well as abroad, as a 'nationalist' (with all the negative connotations that this term often implies, as we shall see); similarly, a non-native scholar's involvement in this field may seem animated by an 'ethnographic' impulse. Historically, of course, all this is largely justifiable, as it was indeed a nationalist claim that vindicated the devolution of the Scottish tradition from that protean label — 'English' literature — which, for a long time, assimilated Conrad, Eliot, Joyce, and Byron without reference to their distinct national origins. The emphasis on self-representation and a concern with 'authentic' identity undoubtedly represented a crucial line of resistance for many Scottish writers and intellectuals in the twentieth century and a necessary phase in Scotland's quest for cultural independence. And yet, can/should there be today another way of justifying the study of Scottish literature beyond or beside the 'local'/'national(ist)' context in which it has been firmly based as a subject of study? Would it be advisable to de-nationalise (or to de-define) the study of Scottish literature, as many Scottish scholars have suggested in the past ten years? ⁴

There is no simple, univocal reply to these questions. On the one hand, Scotland's history of cultural marginalisation within the United Kingdom is too recent, and still relatively little known outside its borders (unlike, for example, Ireland's), to be passed over — a 'nationalist' project is indeed still necessary, both to coax into visibility the many issues, authors or texts that an anglocentric literary criticism has overlooked or stigmatised as 'provincial' for almost three centuries, as well as to highlight those networks of *reciprocal* making that bind Scotland to England, to Europe and — via the British Empire — to the rest of the world. In a way the 'identity question' is still a cogent one in this part of the world. On the other hand, it is equally undeniable that in its narrowest application this approach can only accentuate Scotland's isolation, as it undoubtedly has in the recent past. The 'eclipse of Scottish culture', as it was effectively described by Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull in 1989⁵, was only partial in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Ossian, Scott and Stevenson, for example, certainly went a long way to make representations of Scottishness travel well beyond their national borders), when writers

deftly and precariously negotiated with the 'centre' a limited cultural independence. The eclipse, however, became indeed total in the twentieth century: a high toll paid to the decline of the Empire and to the end of the *status quo* of the previous two centuries. The supra-identity that had accommodated national difference within the United Kingdom — Britishness — became, in many ways, an empty shell. The need for a new meaning and for a devolved articulation of Britishness was lucidly articulated by Hugh MacDiarmid in one of his most famous essays, which called for a de-centred British canon and prophesied the role of the (ex-)colonies 'writing back to the centre' in the demise of 'English ascendancy' as early as 1931:

... it is a pity that English literature is maintaining a narrow ascendancy tradition instead of broad-basing itself on all the diverse cultural elements and the splendid variety of languages and dialects, in the British Isles. (I do not refer here to the Empire, and the United States of America, though the evolution of genuine independent literatures in all of these is a matter of no little consequence and, already clearly appreciated in America, is being increasingly so realised in most of the Dominions, which is perhaps the cultural significance of the anti-English and other tendencies in most of them which are making for those changes in the Imperial organization which will deprive England of the hegemony it has maintained too long.)⁶

Constructing Britishness had involved, for previous generations of Scottish writers, an act of 'translation' that constantly worked to produce a tense 'space in-between'— a complex dialectic between conformity to the centre and the recognition and recuperation of difference. The twentieth century marked the end of this process of negotiation and the beginning of a militant and confrontational re-definition of Scottish identity, in an (understandably) embittered antagonism with the centre. The eclipse of Scottish culture and literature in the twentieth century is then largely ascribable both to the fact it lacked the institutional support and financial resources that a nation-state can more easily ensure, and to the pressing demands of an emerging Scottish

national canon, which was being constructed along exclusive and defensive lines. If it was certainly fortunate that Scottish cultural nationalism never fostered violent actions or terrorism, the virulent tones that at times marked the complex dynamics of the debate on the definition of literary Scottishness still have to be fully revealed and evaluated. For example, the marginalisation or neglect on ideological grounds of 'European' writers such as Ossian/Macpherson (evident in some contemporary Scottish literary histories⁷), Sir Walter Scott (at times regarded with mixed feelings by Scottish Renaissance writers⁸), or even Edwin Muir (sidelined by MacDiarmid's visionary authority) encouraged, until recent times, a clear-cut schism between the Scottish and the 'British' canon. The former has mainly comprised those writers whose Scottishness has been perceived as 'authentic' in their native country, while the latter has included 'generously' those whose relevance was seen as transcending local expressions and whose national origin could be, therefore, easily omitted. On the one hand the notion of 'authenticity' was used as a line of resistance against anglicisation, in a radically antithetic re-mapping of Scottishness, on the other a postcolonial as well as poststructuralist deconstruction of authenticity and identity encouraged the formation of a more flexible and inclusive canon. What was perceived then as the 'particularism' of Scottish Literature inevitably clashed with the 'universalism' of the 'English' tradition. Ironically, (post-)modern perspectives worked to reinforce the well-known Victorian prejudice, epitomised by Matthew Arnold:

The real Burns is of course in his Scotch poems. Let us boldly say that much of this poetry, a poetry dealing perpetually with Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners, a Scotchman's estimate is apt to be personal. A Scotchman is used to this world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners; he has a tenderness for it; he meets his poet half way.⁹

Ethnic contempt of this kind is undoubtedly a matter of the past (at least at an institutional level), but for all of Hugh MacDiarmid's efforts, Scottish culture may still be regarded diminutively as a strictly 'national'/'local' concern. Beveridge and Turnbull published their book on the eve of a

new wave of international popularity for Scottish literature, which owed much to a host of talented writers (Irvine Welsh, James Kelman, A.L. Kennedy, Alan Warner, to mention just a few), but at least as much to a general change in British political and cultural attitudes in the 1990s. However, if the latest generation of Scottish writers have, at last, gained international visibility, with their work circulating widely in translation and being the object of critical investigation, much of Scotland's extremely valuable literary output from the twentieth century remains largely unknown to the international public of readers and scholars. While a conspicuous number of Scottish writers from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century (from Duns Scotus to the Makars, from George Buchanan to Thomas Carlyle, from Margaret Oliphant to Arthur Conan Doyle) have received world-wide critical attention throughout the past century, today an awareness of the so-called 'Scottish Renaissance' (Scotland's 'vernacular Modernism') is confined to a minority of English studies specialists: a most ironic (and sad) fate indeed for a generation of writers who firmly believed in Europe and committed themselves to revealing the existence of a traditional (pre-Union) Scottish affinity for the continent. This prolonged erasure of Scottish Modernism has 'ethical' as well as epistemological implications: how reliable or adequate is — for example — a general evaluation of 'British' Modernism that does not take into account the 'vernacular cosmopolitans' of the Scottish Renaissance? How appropriate is it to exclude from it writers and intellectuals who, like Catherine Carswell and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, were based and published their work in England, or who, like MacDiarmid, had an intense exchange with the London elite of cosmopolitan Modernists? And yet, histories of 'English' ('British'?) literature have commonly operated this exclusion. This is just a section of the larger territory where the (Scottish) 'local' experience could fruitfully contribute to a much needed re-writing of British cultural and literary history, but it is undoubtedly a telling one.

The theory and practice of Scottish Literature has located itself in a complex area of tensions connected with Scotland's political predicament: a stateless nation since the time when European nation-states began constructing themselves as centralised and exclusive entities, an English 'internal colony' (or a 'trapped minority') and yet also an active partner in the building of

the British Empire, it stepped 'back into history' with the restoration of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, making its vindications of cultural independence known to the world at a time when the world was witnessing a frighteningly diffuse resurgence of nativist, extremist nationalisms. The spectres of Rwanda and of the former Yugoslavia provided eloquent examples of how minority ethnic, cultural and/or religious identities might become destabilising and destructive of the common bonds of 'civil society'. This only confirmed what generations of liberal and (neo-)Marxist scholars and intellectuals had theorised in the previous decades: in the 1990s nationalism became, for many intellectuals, unquestionably identified with a 'pathological' (or irrational) expression of the widespread anxiety over cultural identity in an increasingly globalised, hybridised world, that has deconstructed and exploded notions of authentic essences and absolute differences. The roots of such distrust in 'nationalism' are distant and complex, but the Marxist disavowal of the nation has undoubtedly been a major factor. Lenin's slogan indicates both the force and the crudity of the orthodox position: 'Combat all national oppression? Yes, of course! Fight for any kind of national development, for 'national culture' in general? Of course not!'¹⁰ The impact on subsequent generations of neo- or post-Marxist intellectuals of these ideas can hardly be overestimated, especially in Scotland, where interwar cultural nationalists endorsed socialist doctrines, thus undertaking a problematic process of negotiation between two clashing ideologies. There is no doubt that Marxist ideology contributed to unsettle and to problematise Scotland's rising nationalism: an outcome — with the benefit of hindsight — not totally undesirable. In more recent times, political theorists have announced almost unanimously the death of the nation as a *fait accompli* — by now an empty symbol, it is doomed, according to many, to be replaced by different political configurations in the new millennium. Among them, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have convincingly argued that power has become delocalised and diffuse and is to be found not in the ascendance of any individual nation-state, but in the operations of transnational markets that are irreducible to national territoriality.¹¹ Cultural and literary studies have similarly distanced themselves from this 'obsolete' category, while post-structuralism and postcolonialism have delegitimised nationalism as a superseded form of collective identity, inviting us to transcend it or to forget it *tout court*. Scottish literature then has

been suspended in a theoretical impasse regarding the competing claims of (anti-imperial) cultural nationalism, on the one hand, and those of postnationalism/cosmopolitanism on the other.

This impasse is well known to scholars of postcolonial studies, where it is often regarded as a sanctioning of the long-standing division between the emergent Third World nationalisms and the 'cosmopolitan' West. Recent criticism has, in fact, attempted a mediation between these antagonistic stances by investigating ways in which, as Leela Gandhi has suggested, 'cosmopolitanism [might] begin to speak intelligibly, seductively, to ... a located yet self-critical nationalism.'¹² What is then needed, in ethnically fragmented Europe as well as in the 'Third World', is a redefinition and not a demise of nationalism. In this context Scotland, with its problematic status of 'First World' country and of former 'colony', of stateless and non-ethnic nation may represent a useful paradigmatic case. Indeed, what has been perceived as a *cul-de-sac* — as I have suggested in *Why Scottish Literature Matters* — can inspire new insights into the ongoing critical debate on ways of 'reading the global in the local' — of striving for *glocality*.

Within academia, Scottish literature as a devolved area of studies has faced scepticism, for a long time, on two key fronts. The first has been represented by 'conservative' English literary specialists who, following in T.S. Eliot's footsteps, have selectively conceived of 'tradition' in linear and organic terms. In this context criticism is a form of judgement which 'reproduces value through the preservation of the canon and by propagating an understanding of literature and art grounded in selective tradition',¹³ and which is bound to marginalise Scotland and all those cultures which cannot boast an ancient and (assumedly) uninterrupted line of development. There is a strain of conformism that runs through the academic world (a 'school', as we all know, may be the site for radical innovation or, alternatively, for self-celebratory conservatism), which can explain the resilience of such outmoded views throughout the twentieth century. However, the re-mapping of 'English literature' into a new and more comprehensive disciplinary area called 'English studies' (ESSE, the European Society for the Study of English, was founded in 1990) led,

among various things, to a timely recognition of Scottish studies as an individual and fully dignified field, as well as (at least in intention if not always in fact) to a devolved view of 'British and Irish' literature(s). Even this positive turn had, however, some negative consequence. The inclusion of *Anglo-Scottish* literature in the huge ESSE galaxy of intersecting fields, ranging from linguistics to literary and cultural studies and extending to include all English-speaking countries (whose dazzling heterogeneity has indeed brought about the 'deterritorialisation' of England's culture and language theorised by Deleuze and Guattari¹⁴), albeit strategic, has also problematically further marginalised the Gaelic tradition as a relevant component of Scottish culture. More crucially, the second front was (and still is, to a certain extent) that represented by postcolonial studies: some of the reasons for this long-standing exclusion or marginalisation have already been hinted at. Interestingly, in the same year when Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull's critical inquiry was published (the first to make explicit reference to a postcolonial theorist — Frantz Fanon — in reference to Scotland's 'inferiorism'), another study, bound to have a tremendous impact on postcolonial scholars and students for at least a decade, appeared on the shelves of academic bookshops. In *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) Scotland's specific role as an imperial agent is seen as an obstacle to its acceptance in the emergent postcolonial canon, even though the Scots (as the Welsh and the Irish), according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 'were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonised peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as post-colonial'.¹⁵ The authors, in fact, articulated quite accurately Scotland's problematic stance: this often quoted passage, however, was taken as a final verdict of exclusion from the postcolonial canon. Scotland's complex predicament, in fact, precisely because it resists simplification (coloniser *or* colonised), can today provide a timely challenge to the rooted orthodoxies of postcolonial studies, in line with those theorists who, since the mid-1990s, have advocated a representation of 'the postcolonial subject as neither Anglocentered nor Other', thus encouraging "the scrutinizing and remodelling of past inventions, the rehistoricizing of the space and identity of the subject."¹⁶ In this context, the reconstruction of the routes and connections of 'Scotland's Empire' (as it has been termed, not without — alas — a hint of national pride), is shedding new

light on networks of reciprocal making as well as on patterns of imperial destabilizations and reformations of cultural identities in Scotland and in the world. They will also contribute, hopefully, to challenge the (defensive) nationalist rhetoric of Scotland's 'democratic intellect'. An important, first step in this direction is represented by James Robertson's *Joseph Knight* (2003),¹⁷ a challenging meta-historical novel that reconstructs both the legal odyssey and the personal story of a slave who followed his master from a Jamaican sugar plantation and eventually won his freedom in a Scottish civil court in 1778. Robertson certainly provides a pioneering literary figuration of Scotland's involvement in slavery, vis-à-vis the repression of the '45 Jacobite rebellion.

Academic scholarship has an influential, and yet not exclusive role in the promotion of literature. As far as Scotland is concerned this general statement is even more truthful. Who studies Scottish literature today? The answer is not so obvious for those who do not reside in Scotland or are not familiar with its educational system. Scottish literature is *not* studied in Scottish secondary school, where students concentrate their efforts on a revised 'English' curriculum, based on an increasingly de-centred canon, no longer explicitly measured on the ideal Englishness of its authors, and inclusive enough to accommodate (occasionally) individual Scottish texts/authors. The majority of Scots, therefore, do not acquire an awareness of their national literary heritage at school and, above all, they are not taught to perceive it as a distinct, 'national' tradition, unlike what happens in Ireland, in other European 'small' nations, like Iceland or Denmark, or in any ex-British colony. The recent popular debate in the Scottish media concerning the possible introduction of Scottish literature in the curricula, following the presentation of a petition to the Scottish Parliament on January 18th 2006, has brought to light once more this vexed and very crucial question. The issues at stake are many, from that of the preservation of cultural heritage to that of (national) self-image. Or quite simply, as pointed out by Donald Smith: 'It is a basic education principle that learning begins with one's environment and then moves out'.¹⁸ Scottish literature, however, *is* taught at Scottish universities (the only Chair in Scottish Literature, it should be remembered, is that of the University of Glasgow) both as a

degree course and as an individual subject: a limited number of native students, joined by a growing number of overseas students, today may choose to study it at undergraduate and/or postgraduate level. Outside Scotland, academic courses on this subject (or on individual Scottish authors) have been available for a long time in many universities across the world, mostly within the 'English studies' curriculum.¹⁹ It is then appropriate to state that Scottish literature, as a subject of study, is only partly institutionalised.

Specialist investigation of Scottish literary and cultural matters in all probability will continue irrespective of the Parliament's decision; the issue at stake today, for many commentators, is not so much the continuing interest of the (inter)national academic elite (which, after all, concerns itself with the study of many 'dead' languages and cultures) but — more crucially — the survival of Scotland as a national community. The haunting questions then are: can a literature live outside state recognition? Can an 'imagined community' survive outside the literary imagination? Edwin Morgan has recently provided a straightforward (if vaguely essentialist) reply to the second question: 'Forget your literature? — forget your soul./ If you want to see your country hale and whole/ Turn back the pages of fourteen hundred years.'²⁰ However, if the second question encourages a reasonably firm negative answer (if not in Morgan's terms, certainly in Homi Bhabha's, as indeed literature is the privileged site for the construction of national identity²¹), the first invites a more complex response. Interestingly, Scottish literature finds today a much firmer recognition in non-institutional contexts, first and foremost in an ever expanding specialised book market. Any bookshop north of the Tweed today will display a sizeable Scottish section: regular visitors to this country have, in fact, witnessed a gradual spreading out of the shelves dedicated to national culture and history in the course of the past ten years or so. The International Edinburgh Book Festival devotes each year a whole series of events focussed on local authors and publishers, while the *Scottish Review of Books*, the literary supplement of the *Sunday Herald*, probably reaches a larger reading public than any specialised literary journal or magazine did in the past. Even occasional, popular initiatives, such as the recent guide to *100 Best Scottish Books* (2005),²² which provocatively reclaims as 'Scottish' disparate works as Joseph Conrad's

Heart of Darkness (first published by *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*) and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (for its evocation of Hebridean landscape), or the BBC series of four documentaries on 'The Great Ossian Hoax' (2006), rescuing Macpherson from over two centuries of oblivion, seem to contribute to keeping alive (as well as to problematising) the idea of a national literature in the imagination of Scots and non-Scots alike. Such growing and increasingly authoritative Scottish presence in the book market has reverberated internationally to well-established literary supplements/journals such as the *TLS* and *The New York Review of Books*, which regularly devote special issues or individual reviews to Scottish authors, and has also strengthened the translation market. Among the contemporary Scottish novelists available in Italian translation, by way of example, I can mention (and this is just a random list, neither representative nor exhaustive): Leila Aboulela, Allan Cameron, Andrew Greig, Jackie Kay, A.L. Kennedy, Ken MacLeod, Allan Massie, James Meek, Denise Mina, Alan Warner, Irvine Welsh, Candia McWilliam, Ali Smith.

That the demand for and the interest in Scottish literature appears not to have been at all affected by the above mentioned lack of institutionalisation may be regarded as proof that schools and universities are just one element of the wider and complex network that makes and supports 'literature'. Furthermore, the diffuse sense of inadequacy that seems to lie behind the exclusion of national literature from the school curricula contrasts, for example, with the celebration of Robert Burns as the 'National Bard' — possibly the most pervasive of Scotland's cultural icons. The highly iconic value of literature in the construction of the Scottish 'imagined' national community is confirmed and sanctioned by that most striking example of allegorical architecture in the new Scottish Parliament. The Canongate Wall is inscribed with twenty-four quotations by famous Scotsmen (sadly, no woman appears among them), most of whom are literary authors. Two of them are significantly overrepresented: predictably, Robert Burns is quoted twice and Hugh MacDiarmid (undoubtedly the most formidable 'inventor' of Scottishness in the twentieth century) up to three times. This unique tribute to Scottish writers as the most active, (un)witting contributors to the imaginative construct of the nation is reinforced by Andrew Fletcher of

Saltoun's well-known assertion (also inscribed on the wall) that 'if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation.'²³ For the contemporary tourist or uninformed passer-by, the interpretation of the de-contextualised quotation is of course entirely free: Saltoun might have identified in the literary text a higher (or more complex and humane) form of national identification than that provided by legal and political institutions, or he might have surmised the manipulative power of literature, by far more effective than the coercive one provided by the law. While it is very likely that s/he will more optimistically opt for the former reading, the threat represented by the latter is a reality that should not be underestimated.

Where lies the future of Scottish studies? Hopefully in a wider and more articulate debate, both at home, in Britain and around the world. Scotland may have at last achieved 'visibility' and international status, but so far it has achieved very little in terms of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari described as the power of 'minor' literatures to fracture 'major' or dominant discourses. That is, it has largely failed, not due to inherent faults or shortcomings, but rather to strikingly unfavourable political and cultural conditions, as the present article has attempted to highlight, to 'write back to the centre', and thus to destabilise claims of 'English' hegemony within the British canon.

If the twentieth century was marked by Scotland's largely solitary 'acts of cultural independence', it is now undoubtedly time for a radical re-evaluation of its cultural complexities, *in relation* to other cultures. First of all to English culture — Scotland may eventually opt for complete political independence in the future, but the intense cultural exchange, in both directions, spread over several centuries (further intensified after 1707) between the two countries has been neglected, for opposite and yet identical ideological reasons, on both sides of the Tweed. To the present day, the most substantial and solid 'bridge' across the two banks remains that thrown by David Daiches's *A Critical History of English Literature* (1960), a textbook read and studied by generations of students (including the author of the present article) all over the world, which had the immense merit of presenting an *integrated* view of 'literature in English'

in Britain and Ireland. That vision needs updating today, for the benefit of *all* English studies specialists. Similarly, in a wider context, Scotland's imperial experience has too often been described (with a more or less cryptic imperial pride) in terms of Scottish 'influence' or impact on other countries. But how much of those countries' cultures (and not only material wealth) influenced and deeply changed Scottish culture? Once more, whole (crucial) chapters of Scotland's literary and cultural history are still waiting to be written.

Edouard Glissant, the famous French-Caribbean poet, novelist and radical theoriser of the 'Creolization' of the world has poetically explained why he believes that he, like any contemporary poet, always writes in the presence of all the languages of the world ("*j'écris en présence de toutes les langues du monde*"²⁴). Creolization for Glissant entails not so much cross-breeding, but a 'conversation' between languages in which none has a privileged position, and where reciprocal exchanges constantly create new patterns which can never be calculated in advance. In his vision, it is the poets who can make these unpredictable and unknown futures visible through their songs, written in the idiom of *le Tout-Monde* — a poetic language that underlies all the languages.²⁵ Glissant's vision, which reconciles local with global and is distilled through the Caribbean history of pain and fragmentation, poses a crucial challenge to all of us, that of relating our own individual specificity to that of all the other, innumerable (and largely unknown) world cultures. In a different key, but with a very similar approach to Otherness, Edwin Morgan invites us to contemplate inclusiveness and openness in his Science-Fiction poems: the encounter between 'aliens' and 'humans' gradually and subtly changes both groups, blurring and redefining borders that seemed fixed and unmovable:

... What use is order
to a chained world under a painted sky?
If any order's there we'd break it like
A shell to let some living touch emerge.²⁶

There is 'growth, change, flux and delight'²⁷ in their encounter and in the cultural and linguistic hybridisations subsequently generated — a stunning firework of Morganesque poetic invention. In *Sonnets from Scotland* (1984)²⁸ Morgan adopts the aliens' point of view and allows us to see his country from an utterly de-familiarised perspective, but also to witness the impact of Scottish culture, landscape and history on the thoughtful travellers from outer space.²⁹ This is indeed a powerful and extremely effective way of reminding us of the necessity to reconcile the local and the global through an awareness of the balance between global coherences and local differences and of the changes wrought in their relation in the course of time. From 'outer space' Scotland's cultural and literary history will be seen as but one (infinitely small) tessera of a larger mosaic. Its specificity, however, is as essential to the whole as any other of its parts.

Notes

¹ Carla Sassi, 'Teaching Scottish Literature: (Re-)Defining/Challenging Identities' in: M. Rose, E. Rossini (eds.), *Italian Scottish Identities and Connections*, Edinburgh: Notebooks of the Italian Cultural Institute, no.15, 2001, pp. 93-98.

² Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 2005.

³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 2004, p.37.

⁴ See Robert Crawford, 'Dedefining Scotland', in Susan Bassnett (ed.) *Studying British Cultures*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 83-96, and Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland*, Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

⁵ Craig Beveridge, Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture. Inferiorism and the Intellectuals*, Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989.

⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid, 'English Ascendancy in British Literature', in Hugh MacDiarmid, *Selected Prose*, Alan Riach (ed.), Manchester: Carcanet, 1992, pp.67-68. First published in *The Criterion*, 1931.

⁷ For example *The History of Scottish Literature 1660-1800* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), edited by Andrew Hook, includes discussion of Macpherson's work, but no individual chapter is devoted to his contribution. *Scottish Literature Since 1707* (London: Longman, 1996) edited by Marshall Walker, devotes to Macpherson only a few lines (p.73). A timely re-reading of the history of Macpherson's marginalisation in Britain was first offered by pioneering studies such as Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage. A Study of James Macpherson and The Poems of Ossian*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988, and Howard Gaskill (ed.), *Ossian Revisited*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991.

⁸ Scott's romanticisation of the Highlands was a source of uneasiness at a time when 'British' constructions of Scottishness were being questioned. See, for example, George Blake's remarks in *Barrie and the Kailyard School* (London: Arthur Barker, 1951), pp.12-13.

⁹ Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry" (1880), in *The Complete Works of Matthew Arnold*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973, p.182.

¹⁰ V.I. Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", 1913. Originally published in the journal *Prosveshcheniye* Nos. 10, 11, 12, 1913. Quoted from the online edition of his *Collected Works*, at <http://www.marx.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/crnq/4.htm>, last access 6th August 2006.

¹¹ Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

¹² Leela Gandhi, 'Sketch for an Ethics of Cosmopolitanism', in Giovanna Covi (ed.), *Modernist Women Race Nation: Networking Women, Circumatlantic Connections 1890-1950*, London: Mango Publishing, 2005, p. 45.

¹³ Patrick Mcgee, *Telling the Other: The Question of Value in Modern and Postcolonial Writing*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992, p.30.

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- ¹⁴ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, London: Athlone, 1988; and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- ¹⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back. Theories and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge, 1989, p.33.
- ¹⁶ Radhika Mohanram, Gita Rajan (eds.), *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts: Theory and Criticism*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995, p.48.
- ¹⁷ James Robertson, *Joseph Knight*, London: Fourth Estate, 2003.
- ¹⁸ Transcript of the debate at the Public Petitions Committee, 18th January 2006:
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/petitions/or-06/pu06-0102.htm#Col2201>, last access 6th August 2006.
- ¹⁹ For a comprehensive list of scholars currently working in Scottish literature, language, history and culture see 'The Scottish Studies Database', maintained by The Association of Scottish Literary Studies (ASLS):
<http://projects.scottishcorpus.ac.uk/asls/search.php?surname=&research=&institution> last access 6th August 2006.
- ²⁰ Edwin Morgan, 'Retrieving and Renewing. A poem for ASLS', 2004,
<http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/> last access 6th August 2006.
- ²¹ See Homi Bhabha, "Introduction", in Homi Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, London, Routledge, 1990, pp. 1-7.
- ²² Willy Maley (ed.), *100 Best Scottish Books*, Edinburgh: The List, 2005.
- ²³ The quotations on the Canongate Wall are listed in the Parliament website at
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/vli/holyrood/faq/answers/art006.htm> last access 6th August 2006.
- ²⁴ Edouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Paris: Gallimard, 1996, p.40.
- ²⁵ Glissant's theories on language, relation and Creolization have been developed and expounded in several works and across several years. It is worthwhile to mention: *L'Intention poétique*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969; *Le Discours antillais*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981; *Poétique de la relation*, Paris: Gallimard, 1990; *Traité du Tout-monde, Poétique IV*, Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- ²⁶ Edwin Morgan, 'Memories of Earth', in *Collected Poems*, Manchester: Carcanet, 1990, p.331.
- ²⁷ Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland*, London: Macmillan, 1984, p.439.
- ²⁸ Edwin Morgan, *Sonnets from Scotland*, Glasgow: Mariscat, 1984.
- ²⁹ See Marco Fazzini, 'Alterities from Outer Space. Edwin Morgan's Science-Fiction Poems', in Marco Fazzini (ed.), *Resisting Alterities. Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*, Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2004, pp. 225-241.