Editorial: Theory and Scottish Exceptionalism

Not even its most passionate informed detractors quite *regret* theory, or dismiss it as a trivial fad. 'There is no doubt in my mind that Theory has really revitalized the study of literature since the Second World War', writes Valentine Cunningham, in a book mainly lamenting the trite, mechanical, tactless readerly habits theory has undoubtedly spread. 'In many respects, reading is so much more alive under the impact of Theory than it was; texts have in many ways become so much more vividly present, so much richer and deeper, in their newly acquired valencies.'[1]

Why, then, has criticism of Scottish literature largely ignored theory? Most obviously, because theory 'defies the narrow syllabus, the list of the readable and studiable drawn up on narrow criteria, especially on some (now) patently obvious ideological basis' (p. 44). Scottish literature can be strangely evasive about its patently obvious ideological basis, partly to affect a mien of respectable academic aloofness (i.e. as no more 'ideological' than English literature). At the level of appearances, omitting to jump on the theory bandwagon helped to bolster Scottish literature's self-image as a separate field of study, subject to different intellectual currents. Several articles in this edition of *IJSL* suggest deeper reasons, and argue that Scottish literature's reluctance to engage with theory owes more to its over-reliance on categories of cultural tradition and national literary history, frequent targets of theory's corrosive gaze. But in a sense we need look no further than the *institutional* politics of the discipline to see why theory has been, with few exceptions, simply and quietly ignored in Scottish literary studies. Viewed against wider horizons, side-stepping theory can be seen as one of Scottish literature's enabling conditions during the period of its establishment as a semi-distinct field – a period overlapping almost exactly with theory's renovation of the wider discipline of English.

What Liam Connell neatly summarises as the 'structural nationalism in the concept of Scottish literature'[2] made a certain evasion of theory inevitable. As Connell notes, 'the development of Scottish literature can be seen to have produced its own marginalization in an academic context' (p. 12), a marginalisation (in relation to English) which functions as a mobilising grievance while

also grounding claims to a separate, quasi-colonised identity. A particular vision of 'English' is crucial to this exceptionalism:

> The development of Scottish literature as a conceptually discrete area of study effectively reconfigured English literature as a narrow, nationally based tradition, which had incorporated writing from its 'peripheries' as the cost of 'any role' for that work 'within the culture from which its author derived.' The formation of Scottish literature as an object of study saw the articulation, both explicit and implicit, of a nationalist rationale that claimed ownership over the writing of Scots and demanded a conceptual repatriation of that writing from English literature … effectively demanding that English literature become a nationalist phrase in Scottish literature's own image. (p. 13)[3]

Constructed this way, 'Scottish literature' is beholden to a foil-discipline which theory clearly jeopardised (and has by now largely dismantled). Writing on Irish nationalism, Terry Eagleton observes that 'all oppositional politics … move under the sign of irony, knowing themselves ineluctably parasitic on their antagonists'.[4] Ideologies of national liberation are nourished by the very oppression they seek to render, with their own necessity, obsolete. In just this way, theory threatens to deprive Scottish literature of its definitional other.

The price of the assumption that Scottish literature is 'given', only waiting to be uncovered and rescued from Anglocentric suppression, has been Scottish literature's need to sustain this straw-man image of 'Eng. Lit.' – obsessed by Eliotic 'tradition', careless of peripheral particularities, smugly hostile to linguistic difference, essentially Leavisite. But this vision of English has been in retreat for forty years, and is all but unrecognisable today. It has been replaced by an energetically self-questioning discipline which comfortably – perhaps even decadently – regards its own canons and cultural prestige as open to all manner of critique, sees 'tradition' as a provisional construct of little structural importance to the field's shape or purview, and locates identity within the field of textuality rather than history. Each of these insights have, of course, been liberally and productively 'applied' to texts claimed by 'Scottish literature', but their implications for the separate *field* constituted under that flag have been largely unheeded. In the effort to achieve separation, theoretical double-standards abound:

> Scottish literary criticism has been far too willing to accept the immanence of 'Scottish literature' without conceding it [sic] constructedness or charting the processes and motivations behind such construction. This is certainly surprising given how frequently the idea of 'English literature' is identified as construct within such criticism. (Connell, p. 16)

From a quite different angle, Scotland turns out to have privileged access to the energies of theory, so long as these are understood to affirm precisely the Scottish exceptionalism which theory would challenge were it encountered as an extrinsic discourse. By positioning theory as *inhering* in Scottish literature – smuggled under the kilt in a gesture of recuperation – the need to engage with theory at the level of critique is passed over in silence. By this pattern the 'marginal' valence of Scottish literature not only exempts cultural nationalism from critique, but re-casts it as a subordinated critical language actually *validated* by theory (conceived as a general repudiation of Eng. Lit.'s blinkered arrogance).

Theory has its disastrous legacies, of course; but endlessly reading 'Scottish texts' as realist artefacts embodying Scottish cultural history, or as imaginative expressions of Scottish psychological accents, is not an impressive alternative. The practice of forcing the text to be handmaiden to something provably 'Scottish' outside itself – as 'reflective of Scottish origins and experience'[5] – has inhibited the critical reception of Scottish writers *as writers*. Viewed in narrowly political terms, the refusal of theory is even more surprising; the (by now) routine insistence that representation, language and textuality are enmeshed in cultural power has obvious relevance to any active literary nationalism.

The 'Irish parallel' is probably too often drawn in this context, but it intrudes suggestively when Cunningham praises the salutary impact of post-colonial approaches, and their construction of various 'criticisms of one's own'.

> You, the Brit or American, are now invited to read 'as an Indian', or 'as an African', to read as they did, and do. The new reading will be for you an eye-opener, a new access to interpretative power with those texts. For the Indian or African it will mean empowerment in the sense of hermeneutic status, political justification, and intellectual, emotional satisfaction. […] Such emergences … undoubtedly provide reading satisfaction to the emergent interpreters, clearly happy to find a fit (often a fit *at last*) between their selfhoods, their emotional proclivities, their ideological and racial dispositions, and so on, and what they are reading – even if the 'fit' is a negative, adversarial one […] Feeling at home in a text and in a theoretical approach … is clearly a good thing. […] Clearly, recognizing the importance, even the necessity, of such a fit as part of the hook, the engagement, the vital contract and contact between text and reader, is of course what puts Irish writing high on the agenda of Irish and Scottish universities… (p. 48)

This lop-sided example – 'Irish writing' in 'Irish and Scottish universities' – is a curious omission; but does it reflect a lapse on Cunningham's part, or Scottish literature's? It could be argued that

the assumed 'Brit' identity of the normative critical reader reflects just how easy 'mainstream' English criticism has found it to ignore Scottish literature's trumpeted emergence (within the register of marginality), and its 'political justifications'. The uncomfortable truth is that focusing its energies on the marking-out of a separate territory for initiates – those trained to recognise and affirm the Scottishness of certain writers, ideas, motifs, and histories; those prepared to 'feel at home' in Scottish exceptionalism – has made Scottish literature more of a curiosity than a challenge to English criticism in general. From the outside, it often seems a school fixated by its own self-perpetuated marginality, and with historical, political and philosophical Scottishnesses at several removes from literary judgement or aesthetic encounter.

Scottish literature needs urgently to engage with modern critical discourse surrounding cultural tradition, literary history, linguistic identity and 'internationalism'. The strength, range and insight of the articles in this issue demonstrate that taking theory seriously has nothing to do with chasing bandwagons, and everything to do with the 'vital contract between text and reader' of which Cunningham writes. He places undue emphasis on the cultural identities of 'emergent interpreters' – 'reading as a Scot' would carry its own essentialist baggage, and acutely so in 'international' settings. But his argument highlights the necessity of giving negative, adversarial approaches a fair hearing, and of acknowledging that one's cherished self-image cannot be sealed off from 'outsiders' and remain intellectually honest.

NOTES

[1] Valentine Cunningham, *Reading After Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 39.
[2] Liam Connell, 'Modes of Marginality: Scottish Literature and the Uses of Postcolonial Theory', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23:1&2 (2003), p. 4. Connell's article is available online at http://perseus.herts.ac.uk/uhinfo/library/people/pdf/pub_717992.pdf
[3] Connell's quotations are from Cairns Craig's *Out of History*.
[4] Terry Eagleton, *Nationalism: Irony and Commitment* (Derry: Field Day Theatre Company, 1988), p. 7.
[5] Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978), ix.

'You can't get there from here':

Devolution and Scottish literary history

Alex Thomson

Because devolution in Britain is an essentially ambiguous and contested process, it poses a challenge to anyone setting out to write critical, that is disinterested, history. In a review of Robert Crawford's *Devolving English Literature*, James Chandler describes 'devolution' as 'the term by which Scottish separatists name what they want to see happen to the legal-political entity "Great Britain"': on this account devolution is the object of nationalist aspirations, the political expression of Scottish cultural autonomy.[1] However technically, as Vernon Bogdanor points out, devolution 'provides for a parliament which is constitutionally *subordinate* to Westminster'; leaving intact the legitimacy of the British state, its value for a nationalist is that of a preliminary step on the way to a quite different political landscape.[2] Like the rhetoric of 'new politics' in Scotland, the very term 'devolution' can be seen as belonging historically to those parties which participated in the Constitutional Convention.[3] What is true of the word is also true of the series of events to which it is appended: its significance and meaning for the historian will depend on the narrative frame within which it is placed. Yet discussion of these complexities and ambiguities has been notable mostly for its absence in the study of contemporary literature, where something akin to a re-nationalization of literary history seems to be taking place, the most obvious symptom of which is the publication of the *Oxford English Literary History* under the editorship of Jonathan Bate, with the possibility of matching multi-volume Scottish, Irish and Welsh literary histories having been mooted by Oxford University Press.

The re-emergence of national literary history is itself worthy of comment. David Perkins has argued that the heyday of the national literary history ran from roughly 1840 to 1940 and 'may be thought an aberration in the 2,400 years of western criticism'.[4] Certainly, literary theory in the

middle of the twentieth century was dominated by the rejection of what René Wellek and Austin Warren, in their classic study *Theory of Literature*, distinguish as 'extrinsic' literary histories. An intrinsic approach to literature focuses on the work of art as an autonomous artefact; an extrinsic approach seeks to explain particular works, or the development of series of works, in relation to social, political or historical events. In their final chapters, Wellek and Warren admit the possibility of something like an intrinsic literary history, in which some aspect of the internal relations of the system of literature is studied as it evolves or develops over time; two decades later, R.S. Crane's discussion in his *Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History* focuses mostly on this notion of literary history, and only in passing on the extrinsic approach, or what he calls 'dialectical' literary history.[5] These distinctions remain useful, even if they cannot be held to consistently, not least if we make the historicist assumption that what counts as 'literature' changes over time, and that therefore the criteria by which we distinguish 'intrinsic' from 'extrinsic' factors will themselves be variable. The revival of historicism in literary studies has tended to make the latter assumption, and consequently to dissolve literary history into something more like anthropology or cultural studies, in which the nation becomes an object of analysis rather than a causal or explanatory principle and the literary artwork becomes an index to a particular configuration of social forces.

Although 'disreputable', in the words of one respectable handbook of literary terms, national literary history has had a surprising persistence, as Linda Hutcheon observes in her essay 'Rethinking the National Model'.[6] Recent revisionist literary histories which have challenged older forms of criticism in the name of the politics of identity have relied on basic principles of the romantic model of national literary history: the existence of distinct literary traditions; the mutual interrelation of those traditions with social or cultural groups; and the parallel development of both tradition and community. Hutcheon sees this as a pragmatic political decision: 'This kind of narrative worked once for nations, and it just might work again: such is the manifest utopian power of evolutionary narratives of progress. This choice is clearly being made despite the risk of both complicity [sic] and the kind of exclusivist thinking that nationalisms have made us so aware of today'.[7] Hutcheon's analysis suggests that the alternative posed by Nietzsche in his well-known essay on 'The Utility and Liability of History for Life' still holds: to the extent that critical historical thinking threatens to dissolve the narrative fiction of an identity persisting through time, it is a threat to the political life of the community.[8] Never has Nietzsche's analysis seemed more timely: once we accept that a nation is an 'imagined community' in Benedict Anderson's well-known formulation, it seems as if the 'truth' or otherwise of a national literature becomes irrelevant, and the only question that remains is whether or not we can persuade someone else of its existence.

'Devolution' in Britain has been largely, and prematurely, interpreted in national terms by writers of literary history. In this essay I will examine the historiography of contemporary Scottish

literature in order to foreground the political and critical principles which underlie this interpretation. The advantage of beginning from discussions of contemporary writing is that two characteristics of literary history which tend to be occluded over time remain visible: the process of selection which cuts the full range of a society's literary production down to manageable proportions; and the dependence of that sorting on a miscellaneous accretion of judgements made on an unstable mixture of commercial, social and aesthetic grounds. The following analysis of the national style in writing about contemporary Scottish literature may also offer a preliminary reflection on the conditions of possibility of literary history as such.

I

That there is a link between devolution and the 'revival' of contemporary Scottish literature has become a critical commonplace on both sides of the border with England. 'Bullish' is probably the most suggestive word by which recent Scottish literary historiography might be characterised. Robert Crawford's description in *Scotland's Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* of 'the strength and diversity of contemporary Scottish literature' as 'astonishing' is exemplary.[9] Although acknowledging that 'the relationship between imaginative writing and society is frequently oblique' (659) and alive to those temptations which mean that 'Scots too readily hymn their literature as straightforwardly "democratic"' (462, cf. 710-11), Crawford forges a direct path between art and politics. In particular, he links the international recognition by which he judges the success of Scottish writing to the decentralization of legislative control over a limited range of policy areas by Westminster to an elected body at Holyrood: 'there are connections between the recovery of a Parliament in Edinburgh and the ambitious course of modern Scottish literature […] Though the word is a slippery one, a "democratic" urge within Scottish writing has grown in strength, going beyond the boundaries of conventional politics, and beyond Scotland itself' (660). Indeed, 'literature has operated in advance of political structures' (661). It's an uplifting story. The vitality of contemporary Scottish writing, stemming from its concern 'to give voice to those apparently sidelined', has helped Scotland overcome alienation and disenfranchisement, and foster a positive 'reassertion of national identity' whose outcome is a 'people's Parliament' (662) which was 'long imagined throughout the twentieth century' (661).

Crawford is not alone in making this claim. In his contribution to the *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, Douglas Gifford divides the history of post-war Scottish fiction into a pessimistic and a 'more positive' epoch, and comments: 'it is tempting to see this change in confidence as somehow related to the 1979 Devolution referendum and the growing assertion of Scottish identity and its varieties that emerged almost in defiance of that quasi-democratic debacle'.[10] Berthold Schoene suggests in the *Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* that

'the failure of the first referendum on national self-rule resulted in an "unprecedented explosion of creativity […] often seen as a direct response to the disastrous 'double whammy' that had been inflicted upon the Scottish people in 1979"'.[11] Nor is this interpretation confined to works which focus on Scottish literature. In his more broadly-conceived *Consuming Fiction: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today* Richard Todd notes 'the compelling connection between the remarkable efflorescence of indigenous cultural activity that began to take place in 1980s Scotland and a crisis arising out of an almost desperate response to external political events'.[12] The only essay to address Scottish authors directly in a collection *On Modern British Fiction* sees the Scottish novel as 'a kind of substitute or virtual polity', hinting like Crawford that aesthetic achievement might be considered the forerunner of political autonomy, making *Lanark* a more important landmark than the establishment of a Scottish parliament: 'The "post-British" Scotland to which the Edinburgh Parliament was a laggard response had long been taking shape in the pages of Scottish novels'.[13]

These comments should be enough to convey a sense of the general structure within which recent literary history has been written. The self-affirmation of the Scottish people is manifest in both a cultural and political revival. Critical recognition and commercial success for a number of authors, either self-identified or marketed as Scottish, is linked to the political process of devolution as the manifestation of more profound upheavals at the level of national self-consciousness.

The wide currency of this argument is striking, not least for its curious rhetorical structure. Although the statement of the link between literary and political autonomy operates as the enabling condition of the narrative of national literary self-affirmation there is a distinctly hesitant tone about a number of these accounts. For example, when Gifford describes this interpretation as 'tempting', he appears to distance himself from it, but proposes no means of testing its veracity, and offers no alternative hypothesis. Equally, Schoene carefully avoids making a direct connection between politics and aesthetics; enough for his purposes that this claim has already been made, and that the two have been 'often seen' as linked. As if to highlight the point, 'often seen' is itself a citation, taken from Duncan Petrie's *Contemporary Scottish Fictions*. Petrie in his turn bases his assertion that Scotland since the 80s has 'witnessed an unprecedented flourishing of cultural activity and expression' which might be linked to devolution on claims to that end already made by Cairns Craig, Christopher Harvie and Tom Devine.[14] The earliest version of this formula I have found comes in Craig's foreword to the Determinations series he edited for Polygon: 'the 1980s proved to be one of the most productive and creative decades in Scotland this century — as though the energy that had failed to be harnessed by the politicians flowed into other channels'[15]. The first three books of the Determinations series were published in 1989, making the foreword evidence of the cultural phenomenon on which it claims to reflect. Not so

much an argument as an immense rumour, the metaphorical sublimation of political energy into literary production belongs to the realm of the cultural manifesto rather than that of critical history.

This argument is circular partly because it is the circulation of the claim itself that supplies the evidence of the cultural revival to which it purports to attest. As Crawford argues, the 'reassertion of national identity was fuelled not just by political resentment but also by positive developments in intellectual life'. Not only have 'substantial cultural histories […] restated the fact that Scotland was a nation with still vibrant artistic traditions', but literary history was particularly central to 'this nation gathering-effect' (662). Reflecting on what distinguished the new cultural histories from earlier twentieth-century perceptions of failures and gaps in Scottish literary history, Cairns Craig suggests 'the "failed" tradition of Scottish culture as it appears in the criticism of [the 1920s and 1930s] was actually the failure of the critics to engage with Scottish culture in sufficient breadth to have any adequate notion of its completeness or richness'[16] while Gerard Carruthers sees 'a much greater inclusiveness of the various historical and cultural component parts of "Scottishness"' as crucial to what he calls the 'Renaissance' of the 1980s and 1990s.[17] The story of the revival is also that of a reintegration, taken as the necessary ground for a cultural movement that can be both unified and diverse, whose identity is distinctive but whose inclusiveness is boundless.

Because the production of successful literary works, the renewal of the possibility of Scottish cultural history, and devolution as a political process are all testimony to the reassertion of national identity, it makes little difference whether the starting point of the story is the 1979 referendum, the publication of *Lanark* by Canongate in 1981, or Francis Hart's *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey*, the first account of Scottish fiction as a continuous tradition possessing characteristics distinct from those of the English novel, published by John Murray in London in 1978. Once we accept that a nation is not so much a thing we can touch, as a story in which we believe, the historiography of Scottish literature itself becomes an act of determination, part of the continual re-imagination of the nation's forms of life. Or so the story goes: our acquiescence in the assumption that our identity is primarily national is taken for granted. Yet this is precisely what a critical history might test or dispute. The writing of historiography in the national style does not describe the reaffirmation of national identity: it hopes to enact it.

What Wellek and Warren call extrinsic literary history is primarily a narrative form, which consists in manipulating a parallel between two series of events, assumed to be of incommensurate orders. On one side literary production, on the other history, specified in terms of social or political change. In the case of national literary history, these two series are taken to be conjoined via alterations in a third intermediate 'cultural' or 'spiritual' entity, postulated as the ground of both, but of whose existence both series of events are taken to be the only evidence. National identity

here is not so much the product of historiographical analysis as the organising principle of its narrative construction. The link between devolution and literary revival is best understood as a *topos*, a signal between the historian and the reader as to the choice of narrative structure.[18]

Foregrounding the narrative aspects of historiography need not lead us into relativist temptation. Introducing her *Curriculum Vitae*, Muriel Spark insists that she will 'write nothing that cannot be supported by documentary evidence or by eyewitnesses'.[19] As in her fiction, so in her autobiography Spark is concerned with that trait of Miss Jean Brodie's which intrigues and troubles her most perceptive pupil in equal measure: 'Sandy was fascinated by this method of making patterns with facts, and was torn between her admiration for the technique and the pressing need to prove Miss Brodie guilty of misconduct'.[20] Spark refuses the confessional mode which would make autobiography the revelation of those truths of the heart which only the author can tell. In doing so she emphasises that the responsibilities of the story-teller stem not from the difficulty of distinguishing truth from fiction but from the necessity of doing so. If both history and the novel depend on narrative forms, those procedures by which historians agree on the 'facts' are a crucial convention. In other words, the narrative form of history does not turn all history into mythmaking, but demands from us a critical historical practice.[21]

Such a critical history might begin by acknowledging that the choice of the rhetorical framework and narrative patterns to be deployed by the literary historian are not simply an arrangement of material, but supply principles of selection. Wellek and Warren argue that 'there are simply no data in literary history which are completely neutral "facts". Value judgements are implied in the very choice of materials: in the simple preliminary distinction between books and literature, in the mere allocation of space to this or that author.' [22] In the case of Scottish literary history, the mechanisms are revealing.

The principal difficulty is that the identification of a text as 'Scottish', minimal condition for inclusion in a study of Scottish literary history, will always tend to acquire a substantive content. If a wholly impartial account were possible, the grounds for selection of works for analysis ought to be both prior to and distinct from whatever recurrent features or resemblances we subsequently take to be characteristic of Scottish writing. But there is a structural tendency for the principle or principles, in accordance with which the series of works to be considered in the history are selected, to come to stand over and above the series as itself the object of analysis. Put bluntly, the attempt to write an inductive survey of texts chosen on 'national' grounds — however flexibly and subtly we understand that criterion — will always become an analysis of texts in terms of the extent to which they display 'Scottish' traits. Framed in national terms, the study of literature in Scotland will always tend to become the analysis of Scottish literature, and ultimately, of what is 'Scottish' about that literature.

There are two key mechanisms for this slippage. However cautious and scrupulous the investigator, there will always be a temptation to devote more time and space to those authors who best exemplify the national principles, since they provide the measure for the rest of the material under consideration. Moreover, the priority of the national principle as an organising principle will tend to restrict the possibility of a dispassionate consideration of thematic and formal elements of the text, leading either to a privilege of the representational dimension over other stylistic components (all Scotland's books become books about Scotland), or focusing primarily on the most 'typical' components.[23] This is of course also true of other forms of literary history, and it would be wrong to single out Scottish, or nationalist, literary historians as particularly victims of this circle. To focus on a period, a genre or a style will entail the same difficulty.

Literary historians have long been aware of these dangers: in fact most deploy some kind of mechanism to avoid them. For example, Robert Crawford acknowledges that there is a danger of seeing Scottish literature of the 1980s and 1990s as an 'anti-kailyard'. Ronald Frame, taken as an example of 'middle-class Scottish fiction writers writing in English' (690), 'matters all the more' because he is 'not a writer who fits the "gritty working-class" label lazily applied to contemporary Scottish fiction' (691). But the historical mainspring of Crawford's account depends on the artistic success of Scottish writers, and because that success seems to him to stem in large part from a social commitment which blurs at points into a preference for the *volkisch* over the refined, his account naturally prioritises those authors who most explicitly exemplify these principles. Work on contemporary Scottish literature has been admirable in its efforts to include women writers, to compensate for stereotypes of Scottish masculinity, and risks over-exaggerating the significance of writing by ethnic minority authors in its concern to portray Scotland as a tolerant and diverse society. (This may well be a risk worth taking, of course). Crawford's text makes great play of its inclusiveness, and specifically warns the reader against 'commentators [who] treat imaginative writing as if it were straightforward campaigning on behalf of a particular group identity' (705), defending the imaginative independence of black, gay or lesbian Scottish writers often treated as merely exemplary of ethnic or sexual identities, and arguing that it 'would be wrong to ghettoize [works of contemporary Scottish literature], assuming that they have an import only for one sex or gender' (700). But when identity is the principle which organises and motivates the story, it will tend to become its subject. Hailing the alien within has become the boast of Scotland's democratic aesthetic; but for all that 'hyphenated' identity has become the fashion, the Anglo-Scots writer remains on the margins of any history of Scottish literature. So, with prominent exceptions, do the literary exiles. [24]

It is revealing to compare Crawford's strategy to that of Richard Bradford, whose recent *The Novel Today* is explicitly concerned with British fiction, but contains a detailed discussion of the problems facing any attempt to define the Scottish novel. Like Crawford, Bradford is sensitive to

the danger that deriving 'Scottish' identity from a perceived marginality in relation to mainstream British culture may in its turn risk excluding not only those Scottish writers whose identity is further distinguished by virtue of racial difference or sexual orientation, but those whose relationship to 'British' literary culture may be less oppositional. The result is an apparent awkwardness in the construction of his *The Novel Today* which neatly reflects the structural dilemma of Scottish literary history. Under the section heading 'Nation, Race and Place' is a chapter entitled 'Scotland' which treats Alasdair Gray, James Kelman, Alan Warner and Michel Faber, but Bradford balks at including A.L. Kennedy: 'it could be argued that by placing Kennedy's fiction within a particular, albeit recent, tradition of writing where nationality is as much the animus as the framework of the text, our appreciation of her value as a novelist per se is skewed by preconceptions before we read it'.[25] Bradford sees Kennedy, alongside Ali Smith and Candia McWilliam, as novelists whose nationality is largely incidental to their work. Elsewhere William Boyd and Muriel Spark are treated as British writers, while Ian Rankin and Christopher Brookmyre are discussed in the context of genres of popular fiction.

Bradford's approach is certainly more sympathetic towards the views of Scottish writers themselves, who have tended to be sceptical about their identification by critics with a specifically national tradition, about the vogue for Scottish writers amongst London publishers in the late 1980s and 1990s, and even about directly nationalist politics. In an extensive interview published in *Edinburgh Review*, A.L. Kennedy tells Cristie Leigh March that 'Scottish traditions of writing' are 'an irrelevance with most Scottish writers'; talks about her reading of Chekhov, Ibsen, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Eliot, magic realism, and Irish authors before concluding that 'writing is writing'; jokes that 'London publishers are saying, "We must have Scots"' but 'don't really care who you are or what you write'; and comments that she 'can't think of a Scottish writer my age or roundabout that's that aligned', being more likely to consider themselves opposed to politics as such.[26] In the same journal issue Janice Galloway also refers to the '"Scottish" sales tag — […] this mild feeding-frenzy that happened with Scottish writing' and her estrangement from the 'adolescent blokey' image of the stereotypical Scots author.[27] Christopher Whyte has also written about this problem at length, from the perspective of both writer and critic. In 'Don't Imagine Ethiopia' he describes his own hesitations about national tradition, while his *Modern Scottish Poetry* is the first work of Scottish literary history which takes seriously the autonomy of the text in relation to the national paradigm.[28] As Andrew Crumey, himself an outstanding novelist almost entirely ignored by Scottish academic criticism and relegated to a one-line mention in Robert Crawford's history, points out, the criteria by which an author is recognised as contributing to 'Scottish' literature depend largely on happenstance and the shifting agendas of publishers, journalists, cultural institutions and prize committees.[29]

The decision to situate 'Scottish' writing as a possibility made available within a larger and more increasingly 'British' cultural field allows us to acknowledge two key issues for which the narrower view will it find difficult to account. The first is the extent to which genre and style is as much a function of the British or international literary marketplace as it is the expression of national traditions. The second is the way that 'Scottish' has itself come to function as a marker of 'literariness' in the contemporary circulation of cultural value. Where previously aesthetic value had been treated as dependent on a relation to literary 'modernity' seen as alien to 'Scottishness', the critical identification of Scottish literature as oppositional in the 1980s allowed for a dialectical switch.[30] In his survey of the contemporary British novel, Steven Earnshaw draws attention to that 'curiosity to read about "new" areas of experience, which has always been a feature of the novel' which 'will also induce the documentation of whatever is 'new' in society, particularly "sub-cultural" experience: for example Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) and the subsequent rash of novels based on drug- and rave-culture'.[31] But literary fashions pass; the breath of Scottish air which once seemed to freshen on the cheeks of publishers and reviewers can quickly become a puff of stale rhetoric; and the valorisation of contemporary Scottish writing as gritty urban realism can be neatly inverted into the image of an anti-kailyard.

Bradford is correct to propose a distinction between questions of identity and questions of style, and in doing so he points to a more concrete base for literary history. Crawford and others have followed publishers and Scottish cultural institutions in treating 'Scottishness' as a flexible category which ought not to be linked too closely to blood and belonging: opportunism going hand-in-hand with multiculturalism. Seeing 'Scottish' characteristics of a text as a stylistic question can also help us avoid over-reliance on those mechanisms of identification. Although literary history need not specify rigorous criteria by which a text should be considered Scottish or not, it would be wrong for the historian not to take some sort of distance from the complex sorting mechanisms by which their object of study has been and is still being constituted as the product of embedded histories of critical, commercial and artistic decisions. Recent Scottish literary history has rarely been supplemented with detailed social history or an analysis of the literary marketplace, perhaps because neither popular taste or the publishing world can be easily differentiated from broader 'British' cultural and commercial conditions. But when the function of 'Scottishness' has become so central to the marketing of books we need to be wary not only of attributing too much significance to its impact on aesthetic decisions by authors, but also of using it uncritically as the explanatory or structuring principle in the construction of literary history.

The writer of any literary history faces a crucial preliminary decision as to the scope of their project. Whether they are pursuing an intrinsic history, in which case the basis for selection of texts will be a formal literary characteristic, or an extrinsic history, when the decision will depend upon an extra-literary category such as period, territory or identity, they will also face decisions

concerning difficult cases, those texts whose inclusion or exclusion will confirm the original and constitutive decision. Finally they will face the perpetual dilemma of the literary historian: how to do justice to the autonomy of an aesthetic work when the organising principle of your own project is heteronomous in relation to the work of art. In the study of contemporary literature, the identification of a text as 'Scottish' leads inexorably to a series of characteristic tensions in discussion of it, manifest either in the omissions and silences of the less self-aware (or more bluntly political) critic, and in the reservations and apologies of the more cautious and self-conscious.

What's really extrinsic about extrinsic literary history is that the legitimacy of these inevitable exclusions rests on a decision which cannot be justified within the terms of narrative literary history itself. To set the discussion of literature in a national context is both to assume and imply the priority of national tradition over other contextual forces shaping the work of art. This in turn both presumes and tends to reinforce the authority of national community as an organisational principle in political life.

Liam McIlvanney describes Scottish novelists as 'unacknowledged legislators': however a close look at the rhetorical structures of the literary historian suggests that on the contrary, it is the critic whose interpretative framing 'invents' the nation, and that this process will be indifferent to the particular political indications of the text, or of the author. Recognising that the strength of much recent Scottish writing has come from its concern to interrogate the implicit cultural politics of its own narrative form, McIlvanney comments that 'It would be wrong to reduce the novelists to the cheerleaders of a resurgent nationalism'.[32] Not least, one might add, because a suspicion of the politics of narrative will inevitably lead to a suspicion of nationalism as the pre-eminent narrative politics. But their suspicion itself becomes typically 'Scottish'. So the critical circle closes around its object of analysis. Cairns Craig seems more willing to admit the dependence of national literary histories not on authors, but on critics: he has argued that 'since every nation is an "invented nation," every artist is, potentially, the inventor of the nation — and every critic the true interpreter of our only history, that of the creation and recreation of our imaginary communities'.[33]

II

The 'national style' in literary historiography offers neither a social history of popular taste nor a comprehensive account of cultural production; consequently it cares little, and can tell us less, about what most Scots actually read or write. Smuggling in political principles masquerading as aesthetic categories, the national style remains remarkably close to its romantic roots: tending to

collapse aesthetics into the social by identifying the literary vanguard with the spirit of the nation or by reading the state of national confidence from the confidence of its artists and intellectuals. The example of devolutionary literary history suggests that we have not come as far as we might think from Herder, long seen as the founding father of national literary history:

> Just as entire nations have one language in common, so they also share favoured paths of the imagination, certain turns and objects of thought, in short, one *genius* that expresses itself, irrespective of any particular difference, in the best-loved works of each nation's spirit and heart. To eavesdrop in this pleasant maze, to tie up that Proteus — whom we commonly call *national character* and who surely expresses himself no less in the writings than in the customs and actions of a nation — and to make him talk: that is a fine and high philosophy. In works of poetry, that is, of the imaginative faculty and of the sensations, such a philosophy is most safely practiced, since it is in these that the *entire soul* of the nation shows itself most freely.[34]

These basic principles underlie the works we have been examining. A nation is a spiritual and explanatory principle, to be deduced in circular fashion from those institutions and the imaginative writing that best exemplify it. As in the contemporaneous work of Madame de Stael, 'extrinsic' literary history consists in drawing parallels between the characteristics of groups of literary works and the characteristics of the society which has produced them. This society is conceived as both internally homogeneous and as differentiated from its neighbours with regard to institutions (social, religious, political) and language. The perception by twentieth-century critics of a 'failure' of Scottish literary tradition stemmed for the most part from Scotland's insufficiency in relation to these criteria. But developments in literary theory have allowed critics to rewrite this insufficiency as an exemplary critique of what they describe as the idealism or essentialism of the romantic model. The recent renewal of confidence in the possibility of asserting a continuous narrative history of Scottish literature derives from wider changes within the discipline of literary studies, as much as it does from extrinsic social or political conditions.

'Theory' is a notoriously imprecise term, whose abstract use is largely confined to literary studies. It is best seen as that intermediary intellectual formation which serves to link the emerging discipline of aesthetics and developing discourse of history in the eighteenth century: to bridge the gap between formal and historical approaches to the work of art. This historical and social orientation is what distinguishes 'theory' in its general and expanded sense from developments in rhetoric and poetics. In the case of Scottish literary history, theory has largely served two functions.

The first has been to legitimate Scottish literature as an object of study. Particularly in the period between 1979 and 1997, 'theory' has been deployed to challenge the perception, characteristic of writers and intellectuals of the early part of the twentieth century, that because Scotland was no longer at the forefront of industrial modernity, Scottish writers could not be exemplary producers of the most modern literature. In particular the idea of the 'postmodern' allowed literary historians to disaggregate aesthetic questions from a philosophy of history which only moved in one direction, as it had for Eliot when he asked 'was there a Scottish literature?'.[35] As sociology and cultural history became less certain that nations and states, cultural and political systems need be aligned, to paraphrase David McCrone, Scotland was catapulted from the 'margin' to the centre of postmodern sociological concern. [36]

A second tendency — more evident since the initiation of devolution in 1997 has apparently confirmed the existence of the Scottish nation as a valid object of study — has been to use theory as a salve for the problems I have already discussed, which derive from the formal structure of any attempt to give a literary history organised by reference to the writer's cultural identity. This second appeal to theory is made in order to reconcile the act of violence by which Scottish literature is seen as a closed and unified field with the diversity and tolerance demanded by liberal multiculturalism. Bakhtin has been a particular point of reference because the model of language he develops to understand works of art looks attractive if projected onto the nation.[37] Rejecting the 'essentialist' idea of a unified national tradition modelled on 'linguistic purity and homogeneity', Cairns Craig draws on Bakhtin in *The Modern Scottish Novel* to argue instead that:

> the nature of a national imagination, like a language, is an unending series of
> interactions between different strands of tradition, between influences from within and
> without, between the impact of new experiences and the reinterpretation of past
> experiences: the nation is a series of ongoing debates, founded in institutions and
> patterns of life, whose elements are continually changing but which constitute, by the
> nature of the issues which they foreground, and by their reiteration of elements of the
> past, a dialogue which is unique to that particular place.[38]

Even if we accept that the aesthetic plays a role in the construction of nationhood, we may be reluctant to accept a historical account that models the nation on the work of art, and threatens to collapse political, social and cultural histories into a single line. Craig's claim to take account of diversity within tradition looks much more like the reinterpretation of nationhood according to an aesthetic view in which the vitality of the whole depends on the healthy tensions between its various parts. This is a sophisticated reinterpretation of the romantic national model, as a more recent article which defends Herder from the charge of essentialism seems to acknowledge.[39] Yet in continuing to insist that the correct context in which to study a work is a national one, and

that the locations to which traditions are tied in their 'uniqueness' are distributed as nations, the appeal to diversity rests on a limiting act of exclusion.

The Scottish literary historian who advocates 'theory' has two aims. One is the continuation of the twentieth-century Scottish intellectual's battle against kitsch and potentially oppressive stereotypes of national identity, and stresses the internal diversity and heterogeneity of Scottish literature and society, which threatens to reduce to a monolithic monoglot 'Scot'. The other is the defusing of the potentially violent self-assertion of nationalist identity when set against other groups, by insisting on the internationalist or cosmopolitan character of Scottish writing. Crawford's democratic Scottish aesthetic is exemplarily internationalist. Similarly, Berthold Schoene cites Bhabha in hoping for 'an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*'.[40] Eleanor Bell too locates the challenge for Scottish literary history in the need to 'critique the often undesirable effects of identity-thinking'.[41] The paradox of being 'national' yet 'anti-nationalist' is the challenge faced by any national literary history which seeks to face up to its political responsibilities.

Bell cites Schoene's response to the short-lived journal *Scotlands*, itself committed to a pluralist vision inspired by Bakhtin: 'While ostensibly acknowledging and even promoting cultural diversity, [the idea of plural Scotlands is] still a territorial, historically pre-encoded and hence potentially essentialist term which serves to identify, isolate and exclude both internal and external 'aliens' by clearly distinguishing what is Scottish from what is un-Scottish'.[42] Both are sensitive to the problem that the embrace of 'theory' may turn out to be a way of renewing nationalist exemplarism: the lament over Scotland's exceptional failure to become a modern nation has been replaced by a celebration of its centrality to a post-theoretical worldview. Other critics are going further in this direction, and recent work has cast doubts on the value of earlier claims about the use of post-colonial theory, and of Scotland as the heteroglossic model for a Bakhtinian literary history.[43] These are valuable warnings of the perils of theoretical nationalism; and it may be that the best version of a Scottish literary history for which we might hope would play out within this dialectic of mythologizing and demythologizing approaches. However the implications of my earlier argument are that the potential violence of nationalist literary histories cannot be redressed when the historian begins by assuming the existence of something like a national tradition. No amount of 'theory' will solve this problem: indeed, it is possible that it will make things worse.

The use of 'theory' to prop up romantic nationalist positions should not surprise us because 'theory' in this distinctive and modern sense, as Rodolphe Gasché has argued, still owes a great deal to its conceptualisation in German Romantic literary theory, which in turn depends on a specific relationship between the national and the universal:

> Theory proceeds by gathering the manifold in a totalizing glance achieved by exhibiting precisely what the elements of the manifold have in common and hence makes them comparable. That which a manifold of elements, above and beyond their obvious material differences, hold in common and which permits their unification is of the order of formal universality, also called the universally human by the early Romantics. It thus comes as no surprise that the Romantics, Friedrich Schlegel in particular, conceived of comparative criticism as theory and theory period, as do many today.[44]

The birth of an historical discipline of aesthetics draws on two strands in eighteenth century literary thought, combining the emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual work with the growing awareness of the historicity of aesthetic judgements. Ernst Behler also sees the Schlegels as crucial precursors of modern 'theory' in this regard. Because they view historical studies as the 'science of the becoming real of all that which is practically necessary', to develop a correct aesthetic theory requires the discovery of that law which makes the variation of artworks necessary and therefore rational.[45] Literary history requires theoretical knowledge because the consistency of its object depends on at least a minimal conceptual identity, which must necessarily surpass any of its empirical manifestations. Literary theory requires history because only the dissemination of works across time and space can confirm the invariance of the law underlying it. Only from the basis of the speculative synthesis of these two requirements can we treat an artwork as autonomous rather than merely exemplary, and do justice to the historical evolution of art.

Or to put it another way: the Jena Romantics already face our contemporary dilemma that historicism, which threatens to dissolve literary history into a history of cultural epochs — with the consequence that it can tell us nothing about what differentiates one artwork from another — confronts a nominalist criticism which cannot forge anything other than contingent links between one artwork and another. Theoretical literary history offers to supply intermediate categories between the particular work and the universal standard, based on the relation between the work and cultural differentiation by nation and language. Culture, autonomy and freedom, can only be predicated of humanity as a whole: but they can only be realised in national contexts, of which the Greeks become the pre-eminent example.

If Gasché is correct that modern literary theory, like its romantic predecessor, depends on this totalizing perspective, deriving from the modern theoretical revision of Aristotle, we might not be surprised to find at the end of a brief critical examination of some aspects of national literary historiography nothing other than its comparative complement and completion. In the Introduction to *Scotland's Books* Robert Crawford welcomes the work of Pascale Casanova, whose *World*

Republic of Letters seeks to develop precisely the kind of all-inclusive interplay between comparative and national perspectives that animates the relationship between literary history and theory in the romantic line, and that pairs it with the politics of national exemplarism. Casanova has written of a 'criticism that would be both internal and external; […] a criticism that could give a unified account of, say, the evolution of poetic forms, or the aesthetics of the novel, and their connection to the political, economic and social world'[46]. This grand totalizing synthesis might in its turn remind us of the modern theoretical project's theological inheritance: Geoffrey Hartman hints at an even longer pedigree for these ideals when he writes that 'the nationalization of art is a cultural analogue of the Fall […]; and true literary history, like true theology, can help to limit the curse and assure the promise'.[47]

David Perkins suggests that both the theory and practice of literary history 'ultimately shatters on this dilemma. We must perceive a past age as relatively unified if we are to write literary history; we must perceive it as highly diverse if what we write is to represent it plausibly'.[48] Recent theoretical work in Scottish literary studies has largely been concerned with a synchronic version of the same problem: of reconciling the unity imposed by the decision to work within a national frame with the diversity that that national framework itself denies, since neither the stylistic and generic possibilities available to writers, nor the commercial considerations and constraints under which they labour, need be nationally-specific. Their adoption in a particular instance is as likely to depend upon a combination of factors, of which identity may very well be neither the largest nor the most pressing. In this light the neglect of social and cultural conditions of literary production by historians working in the national style is in part the deliberate omission of facts which threaten the autonomy of the national narrative.

III

My conclusion could be put colloquially: you can't get there from here. The earnest hopes of the Scottish literary theorists are directed at the resolution of structural problems endemic to literary history as a narrative form. But because they are structural, they simply can't be resolved without removing the national frame, since they stem from a prior decision as to which form of literary history is the most appropriate. This decision is partial: all national literary history is nationalist literary history. Certainly, to write the history of contemporary British literature from a Scottish perspective might draw attention to unexamined orthodoxies in English literary history, but as soon as such a history moves from scepticism to affirmation it must run the risk of relapsing into alternative dogmas. A nationalist history may be oppositional, but it can never be critical. The comparative solution to which we are directed by advocates of 'theory' compounds the problem, since in projecting an ideal horizon within which the deficiencies and partialities of literary

histories are redeemed, it continues to assume both the validity of taking cultural identity as a basis for political organization, and the ultimate equivalence of what might be incommensurate cultural situations.

It is the success of Scottish literary studies rather than its failures which threatens to become a trap. The literary historian, whose task depends on grouping texts in accordance with some narrative schema, will always be at odds with the literary critic who wishes to do justice to the particularity of a work of art. But not all narrative histories are either as disinterested or as accurate as each other: and when it comes to contemporary writing the revival of Scottish literary history has rested on a principle of assumed difference which falsifies the actual conditions of literary production in Scotland, and directs attention towards some styles or authors at the expense of others. There are good reasons to be concerned that a re-nationalization of criticism of contemporary British writing is bad for everyone. It distorts our understanding of texts by presuming rather than testing cultural difference, by repeatedly reducing Scottish writers to a narrow concern with identity, by foregrounding questions of national tradition at the expense of stylistic movements running across British writing, by treating national differentiation as more important than social stratification, and by falsifying the largely British (and increasingly international) context of publishing, criticism, and reception of texts.

There is a larger paradox lurking underneath the question of the link between devolution and literary history in Scotland, which would require further investigation. Richard Bradford is correct to see that something like a 'national style' in literature is possible, and that not all Scottish writers will choose to use this style in all, or any, of their works. Bradford is wrong in seeing the political significance of Kelman and Gray's writing in nationalist terms, as their fiction poses problems of political and aesthetic autonomy which cannot simply be resolved into questions of national or cultural expression. Indeed, the passage of the 'national style' from literary fiction into literary history may turn out to have been the very condition for the aesthetic success of those works on which the devolutionary literary histories of contemporary Scottish writing are based. The much-vaunted revival of Scottish literature since 1979 may in fact be nothing of the sort: that is to say, it may not be a *Scottish* revival.

The exhaustion of the national style in Scottish fiction derived from a growing perception of its injustice to the complexity of Scotland's situation, and an awareness of the iniquitous position of the intellectual whose lament for the absence of an imaginary national self-identity leads him or her to condemn the society that has failed to meet that standard. The re-emergence of the national style in literary history was enabled by the promise of justice extended by contemporary literary theory. The new emphasis is on the heterogeneity of tradition, and independence has been recast as an interdependence in relation to other cultural formations. But the minimal

condition of a Scottish literary history remains the assumed validity of the narrative identity of Scotland in time. This political imperative drives recurrent patterns of selection and evaluation which threaten to undermine the critical responsibilities of the historian.

My emphasis on the narrative dimension of historical writing should serve to indicate that I do not believe these are problems which can be overcome by turning towards a more 'scientific' model of literary history — although I have suggested that a more critical approach might take the sociological and commercial contexts of literary production as seriously as the challenge posed by the singularity of the artwork to its appropriation by a historical narrative. Indeed, one might rather look in the other direction: what I have been describing is a problem of the relationship between the form and content of a historical narrative, and perhaps literary history might look to novelists for more critical stylistic models.[49] There is however a minimum first step towards responsible literary history: to acknowledge that there is nothing natural about the national narrative; to admit that not only the object of a literary history but also its narrative form will always rest on prior decisions about the proper ends of literary and historical education; and to accept that these decisions should be declared and defended, which is to say, opened to critical challenge.

NOTES

[1] James Chandler, 'Devolutionary Criticism: Scotland, America, and Literary Modernity', *Modern Philology* (1994), pp. 211-219, (pp. 211-2).

[2] Vernon Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[3] On the rhetoric of 'new politics' see James Mitchell, 'New Parliament, New Politics in Scotland', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 53 (2000), pp. 606-621.

[4] David Perkins, 'Literary history and historicism' in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism v. 5 Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 338-361 (p. 343).

[5] Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* [1949] (Harmondsworth, 1963); R.S. Crane, *Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971).

[6] Lee Patterson, 'Literary History', in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds., Critical Terms for Literary Study, (Chicago, 1990), pp. 250-262; Linda Hutcheon, 'Rethinking the National Model' in *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory*, eds. Linda Hutcheon and Mario Valdez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 3-49.

[7] Hutcheon, p. 13.

[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Utility and Liability of History for Life', trans. Richard T. Gray, in *Unfashionable Observations*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 85-167.

[9] Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature*, (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 661. Further references to this work are given in the text.

[10] Douglas Gifford, 'Breaking Boundaries: From Modern to Contemporary in Scottish Fiction' in *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature,* eds. Ian Brown et. al. 3 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), vol. 3, p. 237.

[11] Berthold Schoene, 'Introduction: Post-devolution Scottish writing' in *Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 1-4, (p. 1).

[12] Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 134.

[13] Liam McIlvanney, 'The Politics of Narrative in the Post-War Scottish Novel', in *On Modern British Fiction*, ed. Zachary Leader, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 181-208, (pp. 186, 185).

[14] Duncan Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 1.

[15] Cairns Craig, 'Series Preface', *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, Determinations (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989).

[16] Cairns Craig, 'The Criticism of Scottish Literature: Tradition, Decline and Renovation', *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, 3, p. 51.

[17] Gerard Carruthers, 'Scottish Literature: Second Renaissance', in *Cambridge History of Twentieth Century English Literature*, eds. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 668-684, (p. 668).

[18] See Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* [1948], trans. Willard R. Trask, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) for discussion of the topical nature of cultural discourse, and an example of the generalisation of this specific rhetorical figure to literary forms considered more broadly. For a discussion of the topical nature of historical narrative see Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology*, trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolucri, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

[19] Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae: Autobiography*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 11.

[20] Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 72.

[21] On the relationship between history and narrative see for example: Arthur C. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* vol.1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, (Chicago: University of Chicago

Press, 1984); Jacques Ranciere, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[22] Wellek and Warren, p. 40.

[23] R.D.S. Jack raises similar concerns in his introduction to *The Mercat Anthology of Early Scottish Literature, 1375-1707,* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1997).

[24] c.f. Stuart Kelly, 'Canons to the left of him, canons to the right of him: Kenneth White and the constructions of Scottish literary history', *Grounding a World: Essays on the Work of Kenneth White*, eds. Gavin Bowd et. al. (Glasgow: Alba editions, 2005), pp. 186-196.

[25] Richard Bradford, *The Novel Now: Contemporary British Fiction*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 173.

[26] A.L. Kennedy, interview with Cristie Leigh March, *Edinburgh Review*, 101 (1999), pp. 99-119, (pp. 106, 105, 109, 111)

[27] Janice Galloway, interview with Cristie Leigh March, *Edinburgh Review*, 101 (1999), pp. 85-98 (p.92).

[28] '"Don't Imagine Ethiopia": Fiction and Poetics in Contemporary Scotland', in *Nations and Relations: Writing Across the British Isles*, eds. Tony Brown and Russell Stephens, (Cardiff: New Welsh Review, 2000), pp. 56-70; *Modern Scottish Poetry*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

[29] Andrew Crumey, 'The Public Image: Scottish Literature in the Media', *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, pp. 34-42.

[30] For an example of the persistence of the former position see Allan Massie's introduction to Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1982).

[31] Steven Earnshaw, 'Novel Voices', in Literature and Culture in Modern Britain: vol. 3: 1956-1999, eds. Clive Bloom and Gary Day, (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p.72.

[32] 'The Politics of Narrative', p. 186.

[33] Cairns Craig, 'Scott's Staging of the Nation', *Studies in Romanticism*, 40 (2001) pp. 13-28, (p. 28).

[34] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), pp. 119-120.

[35] In his review of Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919), 'Was There a Scottish Literature', in *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939*, ed. Margery Palmer McCulloch, (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), pp. 7-10.

[36] 'Phrasing Scotland and the Postmodern', in *Scotland in Theory*, eds. Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 69-82.

[37] For further discussion of the use of Bakhtin in Scottish literary criticism see Matthew McGuire, 'Cultural Devolutions: Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Return of the Postmodern', in

The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature, pp. 310-318, and Alasdair Renfrew, 'Brief Encounters, Long Farewells: Bakhtin and Scottish Literature', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 1, (2006).

[38] Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 30-31.

[39] Cairns Craig, 'Scotland and Hybridity', in *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth Century Scottish Literature*, Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie and Alastair Renfrew eds., (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 229-253.

[40] Berthold Schoene-Harwood, 'Emerging as the others of our selves' – Scottish multiculturalism and the challenge of the body in postcolonial representation', *Scottish Literary* Journal, 25.1 (1998), pp. 54-72, (p. 57).

[41] Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: 2004), p. 142.

[42] Bell, p. 143.

[43] On Bakhtin see the works cited in n. 32. On the use of the postcolonial see Liam Connell, 'Modes of Marginality: Scottish Literature and the Uses of Postcolonial Theory', Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, 23.1&2 (2003).

[44] Rodolphe Gasché, *The Honor of Thinking: Critique, Theory, Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 182.

[45] 'The Theory of Art is its own History: Herder and the Schlegel Brothers', in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer ed., *Herder Today: Contributions from the International Herder Conference* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 246-267 (p.258).

[46] Pascale Casanova, 'Literature as a World', *New Left Review*, 31 (2005), pp. 71-90, p. 72.

[47] Geoffrey Hartman, 'Toward Literary History', *Daedalus*, 99:2 (1970), pp. 355-383, p. 373.

[48] David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 27.

[49] I tend to agree with David Perkins that the 'postmodern' taste for historical compendia which foreground their own incompleteness is not a wholly satisfactory solution; indeed the current vogue for this mode might be taken as confirmation that modern 'theory' is doomed to repeat the romantic dialectic between fragmentary presence and absent totality.

Scotland as Theory:

Otherness and Instantiation from Mackenzie to the Last Minstrel

Caroline McCracken-Flesher

Most attempts to define situatedness are embedded in failure and confusion.

David Simpson

Should Scotland situate itself within theory? The call for papers leading to this issue of *IJSL* invites contributors to consider whether Scottish literature must orient itself according to a theoretical discourse achieved elsewhere.[1] Editors Bell and Hames ponder the past and present of 'theory's impact in a "structurally nationalist" field of study'. They challenge us to determine whether a theory energised by its eruption in a larger world must collide with a literature defined by place, or whether theory will deal Scotland only a glancing blow. Perhaps that has already happened, and Scottish literature is reeling from the effect. Yet such effects in Scottish literature may manifest a belated cause for Bell and Hames inquire 'What is the state of Scottish literary studies "After Theory"?'. 'Theory' may constitute a moment that changed the world and disrupted even Scottishness, but it may be a moment that has passed. Alternately, Hames and Bell hint that far from being behind the curve of theory, Scotland may have situated itself outside of it, or operate as a critique upon it. Scottish literature may have pursued 'an ambitious deconstructive project of its own, based on historical reassessment of the very "framing" or incorporating discourse, English Literature, which would enforce the obligatory engagement with "theory"'. However, given that it stands opposed to a discourse apparently '[universal] . . . and [dominant] in the cosmopolitan intellectual market', must Scottish literature operate as inherently or assertively anti-theoretical? From one perspective it should be. As Hames and Bell observe, 'a provincialisation of critical theory [may be] necessary, especially in a country attempting to

reconstruct its "native" intellectual bearings'. Might Scotland, resistant to theory, yet situate itself as a theoretical variety? Or given these roiling possibilities, they wonder, should 'the seeming "acceptance" of theory be mistrusted?'

Such questions seem essential at a time when David McCrone's 'stateless nation' verges toward the nation as state.[2] What will be gained or lost; what moment will now never come, or can be achieved tomorrow? Might a Scotland that has cannily evaded theory, or suffered under it, today chart its separate course and situate itself as an elsewhere that is nonetheless theoretically Somewhere?

Yet posed from within the moment of post-structuralist theory, these questions may miss a contestatory possibility whose moment has already begun. Michael Gardiner argues that since the 1960s Scottish literature has not just situated itself as resistant, but manifested resistance as generic disruption—a reworking of literature *as* theory.[3] Bringing into alignment R. D. Laing's idea of 'existence [as] a flame which constantly melts and recasts our theories' (83), and Alexander Trocchi's notion that 'suspension of categories leads to immediacy of experience' (78-79), Gardiner theorises that Scottish discourse since the sixties responds to contemporary stresses by erupting into otherness: genres bend in the crucible of experience. Scotland is 'forced into *becoming*' (5); it is thus 'formally forward-looking' (5). For Scotland, as a resistance literature, 'The time to "decide about" theory has passed; the theory has already been done' (116). And since Scotland, with all the urgency of its particular experience, has been 'doing' literature as theory for some time, we might infer that Scotland as theory stands in the vanguard for an England yet to discover its role as a '*minor* nation' (5, 11).

But might not Scottish literature, as resistant, have precipitated itself as theory at a much earlier date? Where Gardiner suggests that theory and literature can helpfully conflate in the moment of Scotland's coming into difference, this article contends that they already have—long ago. Drawing on postcolonial theory for a place -colonial yet post- from the moment of its instantiation in 1707, it will suggest that the shifting problematics of Scotland's situation have often produced Scotland *as* theory *in* literature. From this perspective, Scotland is not so much subject to the theory of others, as always reconstituting itself as an innovative theoretical enactment available to others through literature. Indeed, as a literature rendered theoretical by its response to the uniqueness of its multi-valent situation, Scottish literature offers to make true that mantra repeated a generation ago by anxious professors to confused students: the theory is already in the text.

For Gardiner, recent literature constitutes itself as theory in belated response to the Scottish Enlightenment. Having struggled ineffectually and merely oppositionally against categories of

time, place, and language defined by the Enlightenment and poorly deployed through the nineteenth century, Edwin Muir and Hugh MacDiarmid give way to Alexander Trocchi (ch 2; ch 4). The Scottish Enlightenment, Gardiner implies, might have produced a heritage of theory, but it produced instead 'the separation out of academic disciplines and objects of study via a nexus of vision/knowledge and the attempt to master each in the new British Union' (1). Scottish literature enacts or reacts against the later David Hume, who is seen to represent logical positivism with its categorization of spaces, moments, and ideas that opens gaps between subject and circumstance, and between self and other. But reading through a Deleuzean lense, Gardiner also sees Hume as binding self and circumstance through contingent experience: 'Culture . . . is in Deleuze's Hume a reflection of the passions (sympathy), which transcend and thus fix the mind' (13). Because 'Imagination tries to extend its own stability infinitely, making essential use of association. . . . "reason is imagination which has become nature"'. Reason itself 'should [then] be seen as contingent'. Herein lies the problem for Gardiner. Humean philosophy enacts a 'double-sidedness [that] rings throughout Scottish theory' (14). 'As a result' (and with an added impetus from John Macmurray), 'Scottish literature since the early 1960s, like Scottish polity, has struggled to get back *in touch*' (15). For Gardiner, Hume both invites and postpones any literature that might constitute a theory of proximity and specificity—until the 1960s.

David Hume: Relating to the Self

Susan Manning recognises more play in Hume's difference, and a greater and earlier effect on the politics that is literature.[4] Here, we might remember that Hume was not only post-Union, but that his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) was published on the verge of rebellion (1745).[5] Manning generalises: 'the "metanarrative of the Enlightenment" reviled by postmodernists, almost never exists without internal opposition and (at least possible) fragmentation, even in its most positive exemplars' (17). Hume's *Treatise*, under pressure of its recent political circumstances, demonstrates the point. While implying the possibility of unifying thought, it nonetheless foregrounds the mind as constructed from disparate experience. Manning unpicks Hume's implications: 'Our *experience* even of "the union of cause and effect" under analysis resolves itself into a customary association of ideas. . . . The "secret tie or union" which directs the imagination is, then, the aggregative process of association: contiguity rather than causation is the "connective tissue"' (40). Manning sums up the implications for the self: 'As long as we acquiesce unthinkingly in the fiction, then, we remain "whole" to our own perception. But once reflect on the process of this "self-composition" and it dissolves, like a conjurer's act interrupted' (40). The early literature of Union, she goes on to suggest, leans toward Hume's paratactic and federative notions rather than his unifying dynamic.

For Manning, this philosophical and political reconstruction of literature as theory has been fulfilled—but primarily in the overtly federative systems of America. I would suggest, however, that Hume's theory changes, first, his own literature. At a time when philosophy *was* literature— one (less salutary) example being Hume's attempt to purge his scotticisms—Hume's *Treatise* must adjust its structure in order to deal with the ramifications of its theory. In 'Sect. 7. *Conclusion of this Book*', Hume turns to autobiography: 'before I launch out into those immense depths of philosophy, which lie before me, I find myself inclin'd to stop a moment in my present station, and to ponder that voyage, which I have undertaken, and which undoubtedly requires the utmost art and industry to be brought to a happy conclusion' (171-72). But the great infidel invokes no divine or even novelistic comedy to achieve resolution. Rather, autobiography allows him to install sociability, with all its disparate experiences—its differences—within the fictions of personal narrative. Under stress from 'the *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason . . . ready to reject all belief and reasoning . . . [seeing] no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. . . . I am confounded'—the contingency of experience leaves its print of impossibility on the self (175). But when selving seems least attainable, 'Most fortunately it happens . . . nature herself suffices . . . either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends' (175). The self, adjusted by society, remains a fictive possibility. This problematic story of self-hood, rewritten as a narrative of the self through contact with society, manifests the literary as precipitated into theory (and vice versa) under pressure from the vagaries of philosophical experience. And if Hume's philosophy must produce itself in literature thus pressuring that literature into an enactment of philosophical difference, then there is no rupture between David Hume and the 1960s manifestation of literature as theory.

This is the more obvious if we do not restrict ourselves to the Eliotic and Leavisite notions of canonicity that Gardiner notes have routed Scotland's ability to understand her own texts through delimiting (and English) expectations.[6] Redirecting our gaze to texts of high popularity—if low official value—we can register that a constant and shifting encounter between Scottish literature and experience, producing literature as a difference in theory, stretches at least from Hume through Mackenzie and on through Scott to the authors Gardiner now foregrounds. Perhaps the Scottish mass market looks to literature for oppositional notions of self that paradoxically bind Scots into their own as well as a larger society.

Henry Mackenzie: Relating Beyond the Text

Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) may be one such text.[7] Post-Union and post-rebellion Mackenzie produces an apparently non-Scottish text—unlike Maureen Harkin, I find no evidence to locate the hero as a Scot.[8] Yet the hero, who represents lack as, in fact, the heart of that text, points toward a way of making meaning and implying significance beyond the novel. Within the novel, Harley manifests incapacity; in his encounter with the world, he constantly falls into tears that may indicate his sensibility, but that invite judgment according to the more competent society surrounding him. At his death, however—at the moment of his failure within the world—Harley's incapacity translates into excess, for the never understandable and now inaccessible Harley is figured through an evaluative relation required of a reader who must intuit yet cannot grasp his meaning. An ungraspable meaning is intensified by attempts to grasp it such that it seems too substantial for appropriation. By the operations of a fragmented text, and the response required of an invested but incapable reader, Harley has transcended his circumstances. Perhaps under pressure from Mackenzie's situation as pro-Union and yet a Scot, operating within a genre fixed into categories by the efforts of (for instance) Dr. Johnson, the text structures itself to perform a different kind of value. Mackenzie declared his work to be deliberately 'as different from the entanglement of a novel as can be' (xiii). To read Mackenzie's novel is to enact a theory of relationality—an intense sociability across the impossibilities of a text—that implies an excessive meaning elsewhere.

I may seem to offer an unlikely elevation for Mackenzie's text. As Ralph E. Jenkins notes it has been set outside the canon as interesting only to 'two kinds of reader: the modern scholar who is concerned primarily with historical questions, or the occasional atavistic reader who likes a good cry'. [9] And historically, readers did cry—to the point of their own embarrassment. They were, in fact, required to cry. The *Monthly Review* declared: those 'who [weep] not over some of the scenes . . . [have] no sensibility of mind'.[10] Not surprisingly then, Lady Louisa Stuart recalled 'my mother and sisters crying over it. . . . And when I read it . . . I had a secret dread I should not cry enough to gain the credit of proper sensibility'.[11] Yet in 1826 she admitted: 'I am afraid I perceived a sad change in it, or myself—which was worse; and the effect altogether failed. Nobody cried, and at some of the passages, the touches that I used to think so exquisite—Oh Dear! They laughed'. But what looks like a failure in the text interestingly turns Lady Louisa not so much against the novel, as toward a consideration of readers' relationships. This, she considers, 'is a theme well worth [Walter Scott's] handling'. That is, *The Man of Feeling* operated as a test of sensibility for a British audience on its publication, but over time, as the reader's first overheated and generically determined response to the text fades, it stands forth as a test of a different kind—a question posed about readers, texts, and meanings. I suggest that *The Man of Feeling* presents itself in fully Enlightenment terms as a data set—but one that requires a practice beyond crying, and implies a theory.

Mackenzie's novel depends on how we bring together its pathetic fragments. The author was well aware of this dynamic, writing to a cousin: 'You remember a Miss Walton; you have nothing to do but to imagine (Harley) somehow or other wedded to her & made happy;—so must all stories conclude you know; the Hero is as surely married as he was born; because marriage is a good Thing & made in Heaven'.[12] Mackenzie's declaration, rendered doubly ironic by the realities of his text (Harley expires at the merest hint of Miss Walton's reciprocal feeling), points to a making of meaning and an immanence of significance well beyond the conventions of textuality within Sensibility.

Even as Mackenzie provides moments intensified by their separation from narrative and that thus invite emotional over-investment, he equally thematises the wrenching and rending—and thus the necessary suturing—that constitutes the gaps on which these moments depend. Maureen Harkin, in one of the most thoughtful and challenging readings credited to Mackenzie's under-rated novel, reads across *The Man of Feeling*'s intensely felt ruins, fragments, and failures an emphasis on loss and lack: 'The novel habitually, even obsessively, tends to characterise all forms of change in terms of loss and the decadence of modern manners' (329; 324). For her, although the novel 'lends, or attempts to lend, the position of the sentimentalist a prestige and dignity it had not heretofore possessed, making sentimentalism respectable. . . . In ennobling the man of feeling . . . Mackenzie essentially succeeds in rendering his position peripheral and powerless' (329). Readers may be invited to compensate for Harley, for they are encouraged to notice that 'Harley is operating below [their] level . . . he offers a foil rather than a guide to further interpretive activity', but ultimately the novel insists that 'literary texts can only speak to those who already possess the right "inclination"' (330; 335). That is, 'Mackenzie [abandons] the notion that literary experience constructs social practice' (336).

I would argue, however, that by enacting literature as lack, *The Man of Feeling* requires the *reader* to operate as foil, sensing and supplementing textual gaps not with anything so reductive as meaningful narrative, but with an implication of excess immanent elsewhere. Literature *is* a social practice, for to read is, importantly, to register the possibility of meaning by elaborating the function of relationality through the self and in the absence of text. We locate ourselves the more intensely around the idea of Harley because there is nothing there.

Numerous critics have sensed this phenomenon in Mackenzie's novel. To Ralph E. Jenkins, Mackenzie 'juxtaposes separate incidents without providing narrative transitions, and the reader is expected to see the contrasts or parallels and draw the right conclusion' (Jenkins, 15). For Mark Wildermuth, '[Mackenzie's] own literary criticism indicates that he expects novels in general to appeal to judgment as much as to passion. The fragmentation of form or the emphasis of character over plot need not preclude an inductive structural paradigm in a novel'.[13] And April

London notes that '*The Man of Feeling* testifies at once to its author's keen awareness of the prestige attaching to the classical modes and to his sense of the extensions of meaning that the novel's less prescriptive understanding of genre allows'.[14] Yet each presents Mackenzie's literary effect as a kind of calculation, a balancing out of data, context, and predictable readerly behaviour.

We must turn to Mackenzie's textual gaps to provide the theory that constitutes the point. One gap, interestingly neglected by criticism, opens the case, and indicates the further possibilities of the text. Critics routinely observe instances where the fracturing of the novel's form intensifies a moment and invites sensibility, or where Harley himself, as a stupendously naïve subject, potentially cracks open a sentimental situation (he is constantly being taken advantage of). But what of a moment when the text points to a fissure that refuses to gape? Rushing to meet Miss Atkins, Harley races back upstairs to get her address: '"What a wretch I am!" said he; "ere this time, perhaps——" 'Twas a perhaps not to be born:——two vibrations of a pendulum would have served him to lock his bureau; but they could not be spared' (54). Were this *The Vicar of Wakefield*, disaster would surely ensue, and pathos be required. But here, Mackenzie continues through an unusually coherent sequence of chapters running from 25 to 29, that contain numerous nested stories—and never returns to the bureau, lying open to criminal London. Why raise the possibility if not to evoke sentimental tears by it? Such a choice invites the reader to register a gap; imagine a supplement; note its failure to materialise; understand the immanence of meanings elsewhere; and ponder the relationship between self and text (produced yet unfulfilled by narrative) that allows such awareness.

Mackenzie's many narrators similarly require us to recognise our own relationship with the text and how that points to significance through the reading self as a textual construct. Harley comes to us not as narrative, but through relationships. We first encounter him by means of a hunter whose inadequacy connects him to Harley in the detritus that represents a biography—Harley's life is already fragmented as scrap paper in the form of gun wadding. 'My dog had made a point', the narrator remembers: 'It was a false point' (3). 'There is no state where one is apter to pause and look round one, than after such a disappointment'. So he does, and sees an old house, and the melancholy Miss Walton. His friend produces Harley's history, abandoned (presumably) by its author, and now reduced to tatters in process of the shoot. 'I don't believe there's a single syllogism from beginning to end', the friend remarks (5). Harley's story is in pieces, lacking the coherence of plot, and even the symptoms of cause and effect. What holds it together for us is its relation to the inadequate huntsman—who effectively called it forth.

Within Harley's story a friend offers him a series of relationships to unrealities. Having visited Bedlam, Harley must now meet 'one of the wise' (35). But here again, the fragments of

experience foreground the phenomenon of relationship. The supposedly wise gentleman has experienced disappointment. Now he abjures any connection to the world. His discourse fractures community into 'I' and 'you'. Addressing all as one, and thus Harley as all, he declares: 'You have substituted the shadow Honour, instead of the substance Virtue. . . . You have invented sounds, which you worship. . . . Truth . . . you are at pains to eradicate. . . . your philosophers . . . impose on my judgment'—and so on for four pages, or really more, for in the middle 'a considerable part is wanting' (39-42). The diatribe is such that the passive Harley actually feels moved to intervene. 'Sir!' he attempts, only to be silenced (39). But the silencing of Harley here points both to the inappropriateness of the speaker's lecture when directed to him, and to its role in situating us in relation to the 'wise man' and the text. We stand at once proximate and apart, subject to critique, implicated alongside the speaker in the critique (for have we not judged Harley?) and inferring critique and meaning beyond the bounds of the text.

The novel's conclusion makes clear this deployment of textual fragmentation as enactment of a theory of readerly relationality. Harley connected past to present to make a new future when he viewed a decayed school and orphaned children then subsequently related them to his friend Edwards in a re-established society. He declared: 'let us never forget that we are all relations' (97). Relationship is not just a fact but an activity. Now a narrator reads Harley's grave: 'It is worth a thousand homilies; every noble feeling rises within me! Every beat of my heart awakens a virtue!' (133). His view begs a question '—but it will make you hate the world.' '——No', he replies: 'there is such an air of gentleness around, that I can hate nothing; but, as to the world—I pity the men of it' (133). The fragments that represent Harley's life both manifest and produce a range of narrators—including 'the Ghost' who may answer but more likely ask the question here. As they both fail and accumulate, these narrators imply the difficulty of the text. Such difficulty constitutes the text as a lack that gestures toward excess—our primary narrator even notes (and this echoes Mackenzie's own comment): 'Harley's own story . . . I found to have been simple to excess' (xiii; 126). The simplicity of Harley's story poses a difficulty that requires the excessive efforts of inadequate readers—the men of the world—attempting to force coherence from limited textual realities. The story, then, is 'wadding' in the fullest sense: it is the overplus that—when sparked through the reader—projects lack as unavailable meaning. And what is unavailable seems all the more substantial.

Walter Scott: Author-itative Relations?

Post Ossian and post *Minstrelsy*, lawyer Walter Scott came under pressure to maintain a double life as national author.[15] Macpherson had asserted the nationality of authorship yet incautiously problematised it; Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders* had embraced the problematics of

Macpherson's text, offering wilful and highly successful reconstructions across poetic gaps, and had situated the author perhaps too centrally for security within the Scottish community as it was beginning to imagine itself. But Scott could theorise himself differently according to Mackenzie's novelistic practice. Scott knew well that Mackenzie was no mere man of feeling, inadequate to experience. He recognised his friend to be 'alert as a contracting tailor's needle in every sort of business, a politician'.[16] Setting Mackenzie against Fielding, Smollett, Richardson and even Sterne, Scott notably credits this 'Scottish author' with 'the rare and invaluable property of originality'.[17] Mackenzie's literature operated as and produced a difference—something other. I would suggest that through a text and a hero figured as lack, Mackenzie had demonstrated how absence might imply more significance than presence ever could. In *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), Scott builds from Mackenzie a further iteration of literature as theory. This time, what is inaccessible seems not just excessive, but excessively authoritative.[18] If Mackenzie through his literary practice suggested a theory of excess via relationality, Scott puts authorship within a relation that cannot contain or direct it, and which it then must exceed and may control.

The poem begins unpromisingly—but in a mode that we know from Mackenzie may produce more. The minstrel seems to figure lack and loss.

> The way was long, the wind was cold,
> The Minstrel was infirm and old;
> His wither'd cheek, and tresses gray,
> Seem'd to have known a better day;
> The harp, his sole remaining joy,
> Was carried by an orphan boy.
> The last of all the Bards was he. . . .
>
> Introduction.

Dissolution seems imminent. Indeed, we have no reliable way to fix the minstrel in the world from which he appears bound to fade. The poem assembles geographical markers aplenty—Newark, Yarrow. Amid these the minstrel moves, yet nowhere can he stay: he passes; he gazes; but admitted within the gates, seems 'wildered'. Moreover, the minstrel cannot be placed precisely in time. We know that 'Old times were changed, old manners gone; / A stranger filled the Stuarts' throne', and from the fact that 'The bigots of the iron time / Had call'd his harmless art a crime' we infer an era post Cromwell and at least post William and Mary. But even the clues that the minstrel remembers 'King Charles the Good, / When he kept court in Holyrood' and 'The hour my brave, my only boy, / Fell by the side of great Dundee' fail to situate him precisely within a moment by which he can be defined (Introduction; Canto Fourth v. 2). And this may be the point: 'His tuneful brethren all were dead; / And he, neglected and oppress'd, / Wish'd to be with them,

and at rest' (Introduction). The minstrel projects himself outside of this world. But does he do so as belated—'The last of all the Bards'—or, as I suggested in *Possible Scotlands*, as the latest thing?[19] Is the minstrel, as inaccessible, somehow also ineffable?

The answer may lie in the story he tells. In the past, the Lady of Branksome tower enters her secret bower. Heir to 'a clerk of fame', she has been taught to conjure: 'to her bidding she could bow / The viewless forms of air' (Canto First v. 11; 12). The ineffable and inaccessible appears at her command. However her invocation produces a discourse she cannot control. River and Mountain spirits foretell the conclusion of border strife only in the person—implicitly through the marriage—of the Lady's daughter. Given this unacceptable prediction, the Lady invokes a superior power in the form of the wizard Michael Scott's mystic book. Presumably, she aims to wield this discourse to more acceptable effect. And certainly, the book seems accessible. William of Deloraine retrieves it, then his blood serves to open it. But already the book has fallen from the Lady's control. She does not fetch the book; it is not her power that opens it; in the moment of its opening, it is in the hands of another. That other, the goblin page, instantaneously experiences the wizard's discourse as constituting a power of transformation—he reads a spell that 'had much of glamour might, / Could make a ladye seem a knight' (Canto Third v. 9). But 'He had not read another spell, / When on his cheek a buffet fell, / So fierce, it stretch'd him on the plain, / Beside the wounded Deloraine' (v. 10). Even when the wizard's book is in hand, it cannot be possessed or controlled. Indeed, represented through a spell of transfiguration, the book implies mutability, inaccessability, an overplus of meaning-making in the spaces between persons (the Lady and the goblin) and utterances (the Lady's spell, and that of the book). This space is occupied by Michael Scott.

The wizard epitomises lack: he is dead and buried—but in a mode that dreadfully implies his continued vitality as subject to and agent within diabolical power. The watching monk tells Deloraine: 'I dug his chamber among the dead, / When the floor of the chancel was stained red, / That his patron's cross might over him wave, / And scare the fiends from the Wizard's grave' (Canto Second v. 15). Michael Scott lies below that most lively of saints, the warlike St. Michael, and constitutes a hub of fiendish activity. Moreover the opened grave reveals a wizard only debatably dead: 'Before their eyes the Wizard lay, / As if he had not been dead a day' (v. 19). In fact, when 'Deloraine, in terror, took / From the cold hand the Mighty Book . . . / He thought, as he took it, the dead man frown'd' (v. 21). Worse, Deloraine and the monk are hounded from the scene by 'Loud sobs, and laughter louder . . . And voices unlike the voice of man; / As if the fiends kept holiday, / Because these spells were brought to day' (v. 22). But which fiends? Those who seek the book, or the fiendish Michael Scott, immanent as absence whether invoked or not—the author as ineffable author-ity?

In fact, when the Lady imagines that she invokes Michael Scott, and already when she calls up the spirits of river and mountain, the power of the absent wizard is moving in the land. The prophecy of the spirits is fulfilled through the use of the book not by the Lady, but by the goblin. The goblin, active throughout the time of the tale, is in the service of Michael Scott. The Lady simply operates to access the book and make it available for use by the Wizard's occulted representative. When the prophecy is fulfilled in the marriage of daughter Margaret with the goblin's putative owner—the knight to whom the goblin has attached himself—both 'page' and book are called home:

> The elfish page fell to the ground,
> And, shuddering, mutter'd, 'Found! found! found!'

<div align="center">XXV</div>

> Then sudden, through the darken'd air,
>   A flash of lightning came. . . .
> When ended was the dreadful roar,
> The elvish dwarf was seen no more.

<div align="center">XXVI</div>

> Some heard a voice in Branksome Hall,
> Some saw a sight, not seen by all;
> That dreadful voice was heard by some,
> Cry, with loud summons, 'GYBLIN, COME!'
>   And on the spot where burst the brand,
>   Just where the page had flung him down,
>   Some saw an arm, and some a hand,
>   And some the waving of a gown. . . .
> . . . . Deloraine. . . .
>   . . . . he darkly told . . .
>   That he had seen, right certainly,
> *A shape with amice wrapp'd around . . .*
> And knew—but how it matter'd not—
> It was the wizard, Michael Scott.

<div align="right">(Canto Sixth)</div>

The authority of the poem resides in an absence always capable of speaking difference against and within the reductive determinations of a given moment.

That absence erupts within a deliberate generic difference. Like the minstrel, claiming to speak an earlier time, Walter Scott invokes the past to disturb a comfortable present. His preface to the first edition claims that the poem 'is intended to illustrate the customs and manners which anciently prevailed on the Borders'. The scenes of the time are 'highly susceptible of poetical ornament'. But since scenery and manners were 'more the object of the Author than a combined and regular narrative, the plan of the Ancient Metrical Romance was adopted, which allows greater latitude'. That is, situating his tale in the past, Scott understands the forms of present and past, chooses those suited to the past, but through them accesses change in the present: 'The same model offered other faculties, as it permits an occasional alteration of measure, which, in some degree, authorises the change of rhythm in the text. The machinery, also, adopted from popular belief, would have seemed puerile in a Poem which did not partake of the rudeness of the old Ballad, or Metrical Romance'. We need only look back to the supposed eruption of Michael Scott to see the effect: structure and a society that supports minstrel and Lady, and Lady and Goblin, and Goblin and Michael Scott, slip together, pointing to the immanence of authorship through the oddity of text.

This accounts, too, for the perplexities of the bardic competition at the wedding of Margaret and her English knight. In place of paeans to marriage, the bards fresh from battle offer tales of betrayal ending, in succession, with an invocation to 'Pray for their souls who died for love'; the image of 'The gory bridal bed, the plunder'd shrine, / The murder'd Surrey's blood, the tears of Geraldine!' and 'The dirge of lovely Rosabelle' (Canto Sixth v. 12; 20; 23). The truth lies not in the predictable romance. Rather, the disruptive and productive meaning is in the minstrelsy. In fact, it is not the meaning that matters, but its remaking. Marriage is meaningless: Author-ity is the opportunity.

Through his restructuring of the modes of minstrelsy in verses and Ladies, goblins and wizards, Scott established the author himself according to the relations of the text. He thereby, and well in advance of the 'Author of Waverley', expressed in literature a theory of the ineffable otherness and occulted authority of authorship.[20]

Relating Differently? New Relations

In these three circumstances, it seems that the past as well as the present constitutes a case for Scottish literature as literary theory. Hume, Mackenzie, and Scott, each in very different

moments, but each under pressure of experience, consolidate that experience within a textual problematics both structural and thematic. Is this genre-bending a phenomenon of textuality in general? Or is experience in Scotland in particular impressed upon text, as Gardiner suggests, by the sheer urgency of the local situation (5)? Gardiner is careful to claim for Scottish literature only its priority: he anticipates a 'tidal wave of resistant literature which will arise in England' (11). I too am reluctant to make any claim for *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*.[21] But it does seem from the nature of genre-bending practiced by these three authors that, because of their situations in a Scotland -colonial and yet post-, they develop a literature that theorises resistance to the assumption of situatedness—and it is situatedness, the relation between texts in traditions, on which the notion of a literary canon depends. No wonder Scottish literature fits neither the traditions of text nor those of theory.

David Simpson notes that we seek 'a fantasy of true knowing'.[22] We are 'under the influence of a rhetoric that seems to promise certainties where there are only ambiguities' (54). The Enlightenment, he observes, 'even as it proposed the task of specifying the nature of situations . . . knew that to speculate about situatedness is to think about everything that is around one' (3). 'The declaration of one's situatedness is [thus] often an admission of one's limits rather than a claim to authority' (28). Could it be that the pressure for Scots as post-Enlightenment subjects to situate themselves within literature has required a bending of genre such that the genre of Scottishness is to point to the inappropriateness of situatedness, and its inaccessibility? Julia Kristeva argues that rather than dividing ourselves from the other, we must recognise the other in ourselves.[23] Post Freud, she says, 'foreignness . . . irrigates our very speaking-being, estranged by other logics. . . . Henceforth, we know that we are foreigners to ourselves, and it is with the help of that sole support that we can attempt to live with others' (170). Through its complex pressures, might Scottish literature enact that we are always out of place, playing within shifting relations, and thus 'strangers to ourselves'? Might it show what power emanates from a self situated inevitably in the otherwheres of literature, arising only yet awe-fully in relation to what is not?

Yet we must ask whether, even then, the genre-bending that arises within a literature uncomfortably situated as Scottish is any different from that of more obviously postcolonial situations. And at a moment when postcolonialism reels under its inability to avert a world newly colonial (see the anguished musings in a recent *PMLA* over imperial America), is any postcolonial dynamic capable of generating effective critique? [24] The theorising enacted through a Scotland at once first world, not quite second, but in its own perceptions sometimes oddly aligned with the third, may yet imply that postcolonialism has hopes of changing power dynamics from its constant eruption as critique through genre-bending in complexly situated and subjected literatures. Might it point to an excess always inaccessible through the genres of canonicity and the codes of

power, and only available to those capable of recognising and enacting relationality as otherness? Might it show that in the most unpromising circumstances, postcoloniality inevitably precipitates theory as a type of resistance?

And we must also ask, turning the light now uncomfortably upon Scotland, can this matter—and can such meaning-making continue—for a Scotland with a new Parliament? As Scotland strives to manoeuvre from otherwhere to a centre of its own designation through newly available and cunningly wielded political power, will Scotland's literature necessarily cease in its role as theory? Lacking the primary pressure of its otherness, will Scottish literature become untheoretical, merely canonical?

Michael Gardiner notes that Alan Warner's post-Parliamentary *The Man Who Walks* yet registers resistance:[25] 'the walker in *The Man Who Walks* makes history by encountering the resistance of the upwards slope of a hill, on a comically dubious quest, nevertheless pointedly low-tech and ploughing on' (10). Indeed, I would note that the novel figures in part Warner's resistance to the Parliament itself. In an interview on his 1995 novel *Morvern Callar*, Warner declared: 'When you don't feel politically represented, you get angry. . . . I think that Scotland is headed for independence; it's just a matter of time.'[26] But in *The Man Who Walks*, the nephew (interestingly under pressure to perform for a local radio station actually off the air) suggests that every situation spawns its resistances. To him, the new Scotland suffers under 'our pimp, our own wee parliament, big hotel in the sky for our representatives. . . . like the grandest of old Parisian brothels' (204). 'It was packaged long ago' (205).

Ali Smith, in her aptly named *Hotel World*, punning on her characters' interaction within a vaguely situated Global Hotel, similarly, if more positively, registers the pressures of the moment in a genre-bending that goes beyond the necessity of ending.[27] Here, voices pass, meet, collide, miss. They are the voices of the outside: illness, social ostracism, even beyond death. Together, they patch together a fragmentation that is itself life. Between the gaps, they point toward a literature that continues to be theory from Scotland. They relate a message from otherwhere (237-38):

> remember
> you
> must
> live
>
> remember
> you

most

love

remainder

you

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As Smith suggests, better enjoy the journey!

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NOTES

[1] As cited on ScotStInt, 4/2/07. The same issues arise, though slightly differently posed, in the IJSL website call for papers: www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/CFPtheory.htm.

[2] David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[3] Michael Gardiner, *From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

[4] Susan Manning, *Fragments of Union: Making Connections in Scottish and American Writing* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2002).

[5] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[6] Gardiner deplores Edwin Muir's reading of the Scottish literary landscape for deploying T. S. Eliot's terms of 'tradition and the individual talent' and echoing F. R. Leavis's attachment to the organic (p. 23). The problem could be traced back via Matthew Arnold to Dr. Johnson.

[7] Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[8] Maureen Harkin, 'Mackenzie's Man of Feeling: Embalming Sensibility', *ELH*, 61.2 (Summer 1994), 317-40 (p. 321).

[9] Ralph E. Jenkins, 'The Art of the Theorist: Rhetorical Structure in *The Man of Feeling*', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 9 (1971), 3-15 (p. 3).

[10] *Monthly Review* 44 (1771), p. 418. Quoted in Harkin (p. 319).

[11] Louisa Stuart to Walter Scott, 4 September 1826, *The Private Letter-Books of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Wilfred Partington (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), p. 273.

[12] Henry Mackenzie, *Letters to Elizabeth Rose of Tavistock*, ed. Horst W. Drescher (Munich: Aschendorff, 1967), p. 41. Quoted in Jenkins, p.13.

[13] Mark E. Wildermuth, 'The Rhetoric of Common Sense and Uncommon Sensibility in Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*', *Lamar Journal of the Humanities*, 23.2 (Fall 1997), 35-45 (p. 40).

[14] April London, 'Historiography, Pastoral, Novel: Genre in *The Man of Feeling*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 10.1 (October 1997), 43-62 (p. 43).

[15] James Macpherson, *The Works of Ossian* (1765); Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border Consisting of Historical and Romantic Ballads, Collected in the Southern Counties of Scotland; With a Few of Modern Date, Founded Upon Local Tradition* (1802).

[16] *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. W. E. K Anderson (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1972), p. 33.

[17] *Biographical Memoirs of Eminent Novelists and other Distinguished Persons*, II (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1843), pp. 11; 9.

[18] As we await the Edinburgh Edition of Scott's poetry, I cite the text easily available in the Wordsworth Poetry Library: *The Works of Sir Walter Scott* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1995).

[19] Caroline McCracken-Flesher, *Possible Scotlands: Walter Scott and the Story of Tomorrow* (New York: Oxford, 2005), ch. 1.

[20] Scott published his novels anonymously. After the success of *Waverley*, readers sought more of the same and Scott adopted the by-line 'Author of Waverley' to identify his texts. From an early date, thoughtful readers recognised Scott as the author, but his anonymity enhanced his authority. See the 'Introductory Epistle' to *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), and Caroline McCracken-Flesher's *Possible Scotlands: Walter Scott and the Story of Tomorrow* for data and a full working out of this idea.

[21] Arthur Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything in It* (New York: Crown, 2001).

[22] David Simpson, *Situatedness or, Why We Keep Saying Where We're Coming From* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 3.

[23] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia, 1991).

[24] 'Editor's Column: The End of Postcolonial Theory? A Roundtable with Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Gaurav Desai, Mamadou Diouf, Simon Gikandi, Susie Tharu, and Jennifer Wenzel', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 122.3 (May 2007), 633-651. Editor Patricia Yaeger situates the problem: 'Occurring, as it did, between the end of the cold war and 9/11, can the institutional consolidation of postcolonial studies be understood as a kind of peace dividend?' Or 'Does the post-9/11 return to an expansionist, Manichaean foreign policy imply a failure of postcolonial studies?' Yaeger admits: 'I do feel a certain despair in this regard: our critiques have proved inadequate to obstruct or reroute the imperialist, racist logic of fighting over there to maintain power over here'. But, she continues, 'this idea of a failure of postcolonial studies seems too simple' (634).

[25] Alan Warner, *The Man Who Walks* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002).

[26] Larry Weissman, 'A Drink or Two with Alan Warner', www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0497/warner/interview.html. Accessed 3/12/04.

[27] Ali Smith, *Hotel World* (2001; London: Penguin, 2002).

Scotland - The Event; or, Theory after Muir

Matthew Wickman

> There is a paradox of the homeland… Just as great rivers have, as their
> being, the impetuous breaking apart of any obstacle to their flight towards
> the plain … so the homeland is first what one leaves, not because one
> separates oneself from it, but, on the contrary, through that superior fidelity
> which lies in understanding that the very being of the homeland is that of
> escaping.
>
> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*

In July of 2004, *Scotland on Sunday* ran an article under the headline 'McConnell "destroyed Scotland the Brand"'. 'One of Scotland's leading businessmen has condemned Jack McConnell's "crass" and "arrogant" handling of the nation's image abroad, suggesting the First Minister has damaged trading opportunities rather than enhancing them'.[1] McConnell did so, argued Maitland Mackie, chairman of Mackie's Ice Cream, by undercutting the fledgling corporation's efforts to market Scotland internationally. 'The idea of Scotland the Brand was to place a distinctive "made in Scotland" logo on Scottish products', whereas McConnell funded a £300,000 campaign sponsoring the Saltire as Scotland's international image. Images divided against themselves are simulacra which shall not stand, and having expended its resources on aborted packaging Scotland the Brand liquidated its assets and went out of business.[2]

As David McCrone, Angela Morris, and Richard Kiely observe, Scotland the Brand was born of the rage for heritage sweeping through Scotland and much of the West in the last quarter of the twentieth century. This modern-day 'cult of the past' actually has its roots, they argue, 'in

nineteenth-century Scotland and the revolution in the writing of history brought about by Sir Walter Scott'.[3] Heritage itself is a Scottish brand. Of course, intellectual historians like Tom Nairn might wryly observe that the *failure* of Scotland the Brand is a truer emblem of nineteenth-century Scottish heritage. The failure here is two-fold, however: it follows from a dysfunction of Scotland's national identity—in Nairn's famous thesis, the tartan-and-kailyard effigy of a genuine *Volksgeist*—but also from theories like Nairn's seeking to explain that dysfunction. Nairn may have rightly acknowledged in 1997 that he had underestimated the resilience of Scottish nationalism two decades earlier in his landmark book *The Break-Up of Britain*, but the collapse of Scotland the Brand equally challenges Nairn's later thesis that global capitalism (i.e., 'Internationalism') and its appurtenances (e.g., market-driven images) have historically fueled national identity.[4] The truth is, Nairn's two arguments really are not so different, but not only because they probe the relationship between nationalism and modernisation. Each in its way recapitulates Edwin Muir's (in)famously despairing vision of Scotland's cultural bankruptcy: whether imagined for the substance which is not there (e.g., the tartanry which Nairn bewailed in 1977) or for the vacuous images which are (e.g., Scotland the Brand), Scotland amounts to a 'blank', a 'Nothing'.[5]

Muir's remarks drastically undersell Scottish culture, of course, but perhaps for that very reason they have been too defensively dismissed in Scottish criticism. After all, nothingness is often more than it appears to be, especially in twentieth-century thought. For example, it is a key component of ontology, the study of being which accords meaning to notions like heritage and national identity—of what it means to 'be' Scottish. Jean-Paul Sartre made nothingness the existential precondition for being, by which he meant the emergence of a fully conscious and self-realised human subject in a world defined by 'nothing' but that subject's choices.[6] Martin Heidegger defined nothingness as the anxious backdrop—the unsettling quotidian sameness—against which the hidden truth of being suddenly appears.[7] Muir's reflections might be compared with these others in a facile way (e.g., the Scottish writer must assume [Sartrean] responsibility for his work given the absence of a meaningful tradition; the bland colours of Scotland's literary past [a Heideggerian might say] makes the astonishing literary production of the Scottish Renaissance that much more vivid). But Muir's vision delimits more than this: for him, nothingness—'a blank, an Edinburgh'—is not a general ontological category, but rather a *historically Scottish* one. This is the McCrone-Morris-Kiely argument inverted: emptiness finds a special home in Scotland; the nation 'is' the icon of a desolate crofter's village or an abandoned Glasgow tenement. Such images have long served as a corrective to the happy Highlandism of tartanry and bagpipes, but they are images nevertheless, and distortional ones at that.[8] And yet, their accession to the status of reality principle in work by Nairn and T. C. Smout in the 1970s (that is, during the era of the onset of the 'cult' of heritage), to say nothing of the grunge chic in literary representations of Scotland (e.g., in work by James Kelman, Irvine Welsh, and others[9])

enables us to pose these questions: In what ways has emptiness become part of the heritage of modern thought? And what does it mean to trace the origins of this emptiness, as Muir does (and as McCrone, Morris, and Kiely do), to the time, place, and memory of Scott?

These are questions for literary criticism, but also for theory, and fittingly so: Muir imagines his survey as theoretical. '[T]he object of this book is not criticism. I wish merely to define the position of the Scottish writer, and then to inquire by what means he can come to completeness, what help Scotland can give him in doing so, and what obstacles she puts in his way' (14). These are provocative but contradictory questions when put to Muir's own treatise, for the 'obstacles' of which he speaks clearly serve as the impetus behind his argument. But such conflict is endemic to theory, which implies a vision (from the Greek *theorein*, meaning 'to see'; related to *theatron*, or theatre: 'seeing place') derived from a particular vantage point but aspiring to universality. For instance, psychoanalysis is a theory about the mind (*all* minds) growing out of nineteenth-century neurology; structuralism is a theory about language (*all* languages) rooted in the ambivalent mimicry of the hard sciences in linguistics; Muir's treatise is a theory about the aesthetic vagrancy of Scottish writers (*all* Scottish writers) anchored in Muir's own mythic sense of existential displacement.[10] As theorist, then, Muir sees more than his circumstances presumably should allow but less, perhaps, than he claims; as Paul de Man would say, blindness perpetually shadows Muir's insights.[11] Or, in this case, blindness *spawns* Muir's insight: the dissociation of sensibility purportedly stultifying Scottish culture and foreclosing any unity of thought and feeling actually inspires Muir's own impassioned reflections on that subject.

And yet … perhaps because of the provocative tensions by which it is riddled, I wish to pursue the tacit implication of Muir's treatise: Scotland's paradoxically productive emptiness makes it a consummate place of theory. It is central to such an argument, of course, to define what this (non-)emptiness is. The example of *Scott and Scotland*, of something born from the putative 'nothing' of its heritage, certainly bespeaks the particularity of Muir's own historical moment, both in the obsession with alienation characteristic of modernism and also in the influence of Eliot's criticism.[12] But it also more generally evokes notions of 'the event' in twentieth-century theory. The category of the event possesses a long philosophical history which attains unusual urgency after the 1960s (making Muir a provocative forerunner). There, as in Sartre's and Heidegger's ontologies, reflection often turns to the paradox of productive nullity and to the contradictorily vital emptiness of theory itself. But as recent work by Ian Duncan, Cairns Craig, and others makes clear, 'events' are not merely the offspring of continental existentialism; they also emerge, in a different way, from Scotland's intellectual history. With Muir's observation serving as a touchstone, my aim in this essay is to adumbrate these dynamics. More specifically, and with Muir's argument in mind, I will do so in light of the lingering effects of the Age of Scott, which not only leave their imprint on failed nationalist icons like Scotland the Brand, but also on Derridean

deconstruction and on other, similar efforts to reconceive the 'heritage' of western thought. Muir may be right: Scotland may be empty, and historically so. But this may be precisely what explains the unusual, if all too often unremarked and underexplored, significance of Scottish literary studies in the international arena of modern theory.

I

Theory too is often accused of emptiness. Its critics have bashed it insistently over the past twenty years, calling it jargon-laden, programmatic, tin-eared, patriarchal, elitist, ideologically complicit, and passé. These complaints eventually grew so loud that *Critical Inquiry*, the leading American theory journal, convened a special conference in 2003 to discuss the future of the field. In his letter of invitation, W. J. T. Mitchell, the journal's editor, asked the participants to consider accusations of theory's irrelevance, its perceived turn from revolutionary engagement to soft humanism, the fate of literary studies generally in a climate of new technological media, and other items. The *New York Times* covered the event—hardly a typical occurrence in the American academy—and summarised it with the headline 'Latest Theory Is That Theory Doesn't Matter'. Mitchell angrily dispatched a letter to the editor—which the *Times* chose not to print—disputing that conclusion: 'Theory may not matter right away, in the short run, but over time it matters a great deal… Theories of literature, language, culture, and the arts, like theories in any other field, take time to percolate down to practical application… The very theorists who your reporter quoted as saying theory doesn't matter have themselves produced theories that have made considerable difference in the way people read, write, think, and behave'.[13] In other words, Mitchell argued, theory may begin as relatively nothing, but it bears substantial fruit. This is as much a function of position as timing, as Mitchell implied in his own contribution to the summit, which he described as 'medium theory', and which consisted of 'a picture of theory … locate[d] somewhere between the general and the particular' (332) as an intervening force between ideas, disciplines, media of communication, and material practices. Theory possesses no language of its own, but rather mediates between other languages—other discourses and disciplines—and changes how we view them. In Sartrean fashion, Mitchell dialectically converts what Muir would call 'nothing', theory's lack of an authentic theoretical language, into an existential condition of theory's infiltrative power.

This move is unlikely to persuade scholars of Scottish literature that Muir is actually paying the Scottish literary tradition a backhanded compliment in labeling it empty. Likewise, one might easily argue that the notion of theory-as-languageless-agent-cum-mediator makes a virtue of necessity, exchanging theory's diminishing academic capital as counterfeit justification for its enduring existence. And yet, even if we were to concede the disputable point that theory's best

days are behind it, we might pause here first to consider the place that theory would even wish to claim in a modern world its practitioners have denounced for a variety of totalitarianisms. These include fascism (Adorno), biopolitical oppression (Agamben), ideology (Althusser), environmental terrorism (Bate), barbarism (Benjamin), class hegemony (Bourdieu), misogyny (de Beauvoir), error (de Man), metaphysics (Derrida), power (Foucault), repression (Freud), violence (Girard), irrationality (Habermas), amnesia (Heidegger), monolithic capitalism (Jameson), phallocentrism (Kristeva), compulsive injustice (Lyotard), corrosive skepticism (Ricoeur), Eurocentrism (Said), dehumanising technocracy (Virilio), class warfare (Williams), and a host of other ills. The diversity of these theorists and philosophers, representative of a much vaster conglomerate, makes virtually any consensus among them startling. But the chorus here that the world is too much with us puts a different spin on Mitchell's argument. The role which Mitchell ascribes to theory, a role evocative of Muir's paradoxically perspicuous—non-dissociated—treatise, has actually become a tacit ideal in modern thought. Theory moves with the speed, stealth, and (it wishes) force of a guerilla brigade precisely because of its discursive, disciplinary homelessness.

An analogy suggests itself here between theory and Scottish literary history—one which is likely to be more appealing 'in theory' than it is in the practice of Scottish literary criticism: Scot Lit is to Eng Lit what theory is to discursive 'knowledge'; each plays empty impetus (in Robert Crawford's terms, 'inventor') to its other.[14] Each, that is, informs the system which appears to exclude it. Such is the place of the 'empty' body of work, theoretical and/or Scottish, which nevertheless makes its presence felt. This principle finds perhaps its most rigorous exposition in Georg Cantor's late nineteenth-century set theory in mathematics, wherein every set contains some void element which transcends it; more recently, Alain Badiou (to whom I refer in my epigraph) has converted this idea into a theory of subjectivity and being.[15]

But mathematical abstraction is one thing, nationalist sentiment something else: what nation embraces an identity of emptiness? Putting it that way, it is easy to see why theory in its post-1960s incarnations has seemed to garnish Scottish criticism more often than it has been fully absorbed into it, exceptions duly noted.[16] The same is probably true of most national literatures, including American literature despite the suffusion of theory throughout the American university system. However, the situation seems more poignant in Scottish studies inasmuch as theory represents the double subordination of Scottish texts to non-Scottish contexts and of literary studies generally to a globalised (and primarily a French, German, and American) intellectual public sphere. This is hardly appealing to proponents of Scottish literature who desire recognition for the legitimacy of the field institutionally in schools and universities across the UK and beyond, including in Scottish universities, and even in something as modest as the status of a separate 'division' within the Modern Language Association. The (necessarily and rightly) self-promotional

quality of Scottish studies seems more redolent of Scotland the Brand than of Mitchell's vision of theory as unmoved mover, or, from a different perspective, as sleeper cell.

Hence, there is something disturbingly uncanny for Scottish literary studies about a claim like Mitchell's regarding the reasons why and the way in which theory matters—a claim that portrays theory as the unacknowledged legislator of the world. The almost perverse pleasure which theory takes in its embedded anonymity seems better suited for subversion than political recognition. No wonder it remains a fond intellectual centrepiece of a besieged American liberalism.

Perhaps for this very reason, theory places Scottish literary studies in an uncomfortable bind, especially for scholars in the field who are inclined favorably toward nationalism but not necessarily toward theory. The excerpt from Derrida's *The Other Heading* which served as a prompt for this special issue of *IJSL* is an illustrative case in point.

> Nationalism, national affirmation, as an essentially modern phenomenon, is always a philosopheme… It aims to justify itself in the name of a privilege in responsibility and in the memory of the universal and, thus, of the transnational. The logical schema of this argument, the backbone of this national self-affirmation, the nuclear statement of the national 'ego' or 'subject', is, to put it quite drily: 'I am (we are) all the more national for being European, all the more European for being trans-European and international; no one is more cosmopolitan and authentically universal than the one, than this "we", who is speaking to you'. Nationalism and cosmopolitanism have always gotten along well together, as paradoxical as this may seem… No cultural identity presents itself as the opaque body of an untranslatable idiom, but always, on the contrary, as the irreplaceable *inscription* of the universal in the singular.[17]

On their surface, Derrida's remarks provocatively situate nations within international communities; with respect to Scotland, for example, his logic undoes the false binary between independence and union with which Westminster paints Scottish self-determination as 'provincial'. This fact alone lends the excerpt a manifesto-like quality for a journal with the mission statement of *IJSL*. That said, readers familiar with deconstruction detect something overly familiar, even clichéd, about Derrida's formulation. It isn't that Derrida is wrong, or that his words do not apply provocatively to Scottish literary studies, but rather that he is redundant: nationalism serves as the pretext for yet another elaboration of deconstructive methodology, taking its place in a long list of similarly-configured *topoi* from fields like linguistics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, law, literature, aesthetics, the physical and human sciences, and religion, and pertaining to subjects

like death, monetary currency, translation, femininity, technology, secrecy, spectrality, memory, friendship, and many others (or, as it were, non-'others'). This follows from the tenets of deconstruction, in which the key semantic component of a term like 'nationalism' is never its root, 'nation', but rather its suffix, '-ism'. National-'*ism*' is a concept (a 'philosopheme'), and concepts for Derrida all reproduce the generalising, 'logocentric' features of metaphysical constructs. As Derrida began arguing vehemently in the 1960s, such constructs suppress the play of differences and the effects of contingency; they are literally meta-physical, above or outwith the world. National-ism thus nullifies differences of language, custom, and history between individual nations, rendering these nations simultaneously sovereign and subordinate—chartering them to act in their own names, but subjecting these nominative acts to the monolithic grammar of legitimacy which accords them separate-but-equal status. Here, as always, deconstruction divulges the philosophical workings of The Man. But a similar 'Manly' quality adheres to Derrida's own work, which detects and unbinds metaphysical structures with compulsive, even mechanical inexorability.[18] The case of nationalism is therefore merely the different-in-same of the recurrent logic of deconstruction. This is both the strength and weakness—the rigor and blandness—of Derrida's insight.

Hence, deconstruction does not *promote* Scottish (qua 'Scottish') studies as much as *disseminate* them into a linguistic stew of united nationalisms. And yet, we might gaze a little more closely at the form of this dissemination. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida lays out what he calls 'the *heritage* to which' all metaphysical constructs belong. Implicitly reiterating David Hume's observation that all governments originate in usurpation[19], Derrida ventures a similarly Humean-conservative thesis that metaphysical constructs are nevertheless necessary to philosophy as well as to the practice of everyday life. However, in doing so he enunciates the programme of a deconstructive apparatus of writing, 'grammatology', which he claims structures all representation. Given the dependence of metaphysics on representation (for its internal logic as well as its exposition), grammatology establishes an 'intimate relationship to the machine whose deconstruction [it] permit[s]; and, in the same process, designate[s] the crevice through which the yet unnameable glimmer beyond the closure' of writing by metaphysics 'may be glimpsed'.[20] Deconstruction exposes the differences, the cracks and fissures, in the metaphysical façade of conceptual wholeness (for instance, in the '-ism' which converts nations into essences). It thus assumes the place, in Muir's terms, of the 'blank', the 'nothing', through which we perceive the 'glimmer' of a post-metaphysical landscape.

The recovery here of Muir's logic prompts us to hold our gaze a moment longer. According to the tenets of deconstruction, were we to name the post-metaphysical vista which grammatology opens (thereby converting that previously undisclosed region into a proper noun and implicitly subordinating it to a grammatical structure), we would reanimate metaphysics all over again. It

may be true that 'writing' destabilises every metaphysical construct, but such constructs are also the outcome of writing. This is, to use Derrida's word, the 'heritage' of Mitchell's canny placement of theory at the empty centre of discourses of power. But (deconstructive) theory thus becomes a system of interminable analysis compulsively reinvigorating a relationship of core and periphery— one which is all too familiar to students of Scottish cultural history. The dynamic goes something like this: though counted as 'nothing', grammatology structures the Empire (the 'machine') of metaphysics at the same time as it imbues the subordinate elements of this Empire—the differential linguistic components—with the capability of subversion through play. But inasmuch as these deconstructive particles of representation escape the centre of conceptual authority, establish the latter's periphery as the axis of an imagined alternative, and then eventually reconstruct metaphysics out of sheer pragmatic necessity (since for Derrida such constructs are inevitable), then deconstruction undermines the Empire only to re-establish it on defamiliarised grounds. In essence—and here is the punchline, as it were—grammatology compulsively repeats Scott's narrative of *Waverley*, and more generally of eighteenth-century Scottish—'British'— Unionism. And Scottish nationalists know only too well how that story ends.[21]

This is a 'heritage' of Scott's which McCrone, Morris, and Kiely seem not to have imagined. Perhaps it explains why critics of Scottish literature often resort to milder forms of play like Bakhtin's relative to language and Homi Bhabha's to national identity[22]: such theories offer the young Edward Waverleys of romantic difference a greater likelihood of escaping the gravitational pull of England (Scott) and metaphysics (Derrida); with these alternative theories, presumably, one might more fully imagine an independent but still international 'Scotland'. Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller even edited a collection entitled *Scotland and Theory* which charts multiple roads to that complex destination.[23] But as Bell observes elsewhere, there is something self-defeating about this preoccupation with home, something essentialising and reductive in presuming to know in advance just what 'home' is.[24] Attention to 'native' Scottish traditions inadvertently helps Derrida make his case: to claim a text, idea, or social dynamic as uniquely Scottish is to convert place and people into 'philosophemes', that is, into mere exhibits of what is eternally self-same, 'essentially' *Heimlich*, and hence universal. This is why, as Derrida has it, provincial nationalism of any sort is 'always already' international/metaphysical despite even its most fervid separatist intentions. Derrida's '*Waverley* narrative', its grammato-logic, encompasses *all* Scottish studies from the instant they define themselves as 'Scottish' studies.

So, where does this leave us? In an all-too-familiar place, or so it would seem. 'Scottish' studies may be partly responsible for western thought (e.g., for heritage and, more obliquely, for its metaphysical reinscription), but this makes them no less empty in their nationalism and their internationalism, in their engagement of and their resistance to theory. Derrida's observations

render Muir's thesis impregnable by converting refutations of it into the redundant emblems of an unremarkable metaphysics.

This, at least, is the logic linking Derrida and Muir. To be sure, the sweeping generality of this logic defies common sense and alternative readings of the Scottish literary tradition, to say nothing of the energy surrounding Scottish studies over the past quarter century (that is, during the reputed era of 'heritage'). But if we hold momentarily to this 'empty' argument, if indeed we *try* to say 'nothing' of Scottish literary history—if we permit Muir the last word, as it were—then we may usefully find ourselves returning to the contradiction between the substance of Muir's polemic and the force of its enunciation, an antinomy reducible to the poles of 'nothing' and 'something'. We might recall here the question Heidegger poses relative to being—'Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?'[25]—and put a series of similar questions to Muir: If *Scott and Scotland* succeeds in making its point, if it is 'something', then why is it immune to the 'nothingness' of the tradition out of which it works? Isn't the forceful, lucid articulation of 'dissociation' disqualified by the very idea of dissociation? What is the language, the tradition, the heritage of such evocative emptiness? Quoting again from Heidegger, 'How is it with [Muir's] nothing?'[26]

II

To answer this question, we might briefly turn our attention from theory to literature. When compared with the exotic land- and seascapes of *The Sea Road* and *Voyageurs*, Margaret Elphinstone's 2006 novel *Light* seems to be about next to nothing. Unlike those other texts, this one is not set over many years and against the backdrop of eleventh-century Rome, Iceland, and Vinland or amidst the vast frontier of early nineteenth-century North America. *Light* tells the story of the impending displacement of a non-traditional family from a small island a few miles off the Isle of Man. One member of this family, Lucy, keeps the lighthouse on the island, and has done so since her brother Jim was drowned during a storm. That lighthouse, however, is due for replacement by a newer model constructed by the 'Lighthouse Stevensons',[27] and with that model will come a new lighthouse keeper, forcing Lucy, Diya (Jim's Indian widow), and Diya's three children off the island. The action, most of it understated, is set over the course of only a few days, at the conclusion of which the family leaves its home. The End.

But *Light* is most provocative not in its *histoire*, or story, but in its *récit*, or manner of unfolding. For *Light* presents a series of dramatic encounters with the inconceivable; in the parlance of theory, *Light* is a meditation on the event, on the 'something' emerging from 'nothing'. And yet, unlike Muir, for whom Eng Lit is something and Scot Lit nothing, the novel does not present these

terms as a dialectical pair. Uneven in its voice(s) and episodes, *Light* is less *Waverley* than *Rob Roy*, less Derrida than Deleuze and Guattari (which is to say, it is less evocative of grammatology—of battle waged against metaphysical Empires—than of deterritorialisation, of un-homely-ness).[28] Or, better still, it recalls Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the sublime as a set of unforeseeable disruptions to a normative state of privation. Such disruptions are 'what dismantles consciousness, what deposes consciousness, [they are] what consciousness cannot formulate, and even what consciousness forgets in order to constitute itself' as normative in the first place.[29] To the extent that Lyotard defines these disruptions as 'events' which outflank the institutional and metaphysical dimensions of 'thought', he echoes theorists from Blanchot to Badiou.[30] But he provides a unique perspective onto this dynamic by situating it within the tropology of the sublime, and hence in the debatable land between the historical moments of 'enlightenment' and 'romanticism'. So does Elphinstone in her way, setting *Light* in 1831 and embroiling it in tropes and themes which are not only enlightened and romantic, but also—by the 1830s, to say nothing of the early 2000s—marked by an enlightened and romantic heritage. The ambiguous nature of these motifs in the novel makes them events relative to each other as well as to the cultural, literary, and epistemological narratives in which they figure. As we will see, this ambiguity—not to be confused with antisyzygy[31]—is a 'Scottish' quality of rich significance, one of which Muir makes no note.

Any discussion of events necessarily involves the category of time; events denote occurrence. Fittingly, *Light* is at its core a novel about time—about the multiple temporal registers in which things transpire and more particularly about their cataclysmic effects on each other. Diya's daughter Breesha registers this impact one night as she suddenly awakens from a dream. In it, Saint Bride, the matron saint of her island, had appeared to her urging her to do whatever she could to eliminate the surveyors and restore the rhythm of her family's lives. 'Something *was* happening. Something real', Breesha reflects.[32] Elphinstone's italics emphasise the fact that the event here was no mere hallucination; Lyotard, by contrast, underscores the bare experience of occurrence in itself, whether illusory or actual. Indeed, he argues, so startling is our experience of events that we cannot initially conceptualise their meaning: events are not 'a matter of sense or reality bearing upon *what* happens or *what* this might mean… That it happens "precedes", so to speak, the question pertaining to what happens… The event happens as a question mark "before" happening as a question' (Lyotard, 197, original italics).[33] Perhaps this is why Breesha first processes the impact of the surveyors' arrival in a dream, at the limits of consciousness: 'she smelt danger… Because perhaps this was the end of her life here, this unknown thing that she could feel coming towards her… Perhaps the island would not always be lonely, or at peace. Perhaps one day the whole world would change, and no saint would be safe on a lonely island any more' (*Light* 259).

Two aspects of Breesha's limit-experience resonate in the larger scheme of the novel as well as with the theory of the event. First, the conditionality of the future—'*perhaps* this was the end of her life here … *Perhaps* the island would not always be lonely … *Perhaps* one day the whole world would change'—underscores how little the family actually knows about what awaits them. The surveyors' presence happens, in Lyotard's terms, as a question mark before taking the form of a fully-conceptualised question. Second, Breesha's identification with her muse—'no saint would be safe on a lonely island any more'—reveals an important convergence in the novel between natural and supernatural vectors of time. These conventionally dueling registers unite in Archie Buchanan, the young and painfully ambitious head surveyor of the Stevenson team. At a superficial level, Archie embraces a geological paradigm. As he tells Diya regarding her tenuous home, 'what's really *unimaginable* is the time scale' of the island's creation:

> Not just thousands of years: *millions*. Two hundred years ago men were trying to explain the sequence of events—right through from the debris of early volcanic activity to the evidence of previous life we find in fossils—and fit it into the four thousand years calculated by theologians. That meant they *had* to think it was a miracle… But once you admit that the whole thing took [millions] of years, you give yourself permission to believe that the laws of history, or of nature, as we know them have *never* been violated… In other words, when you accept the true time scale, and measure the history of the natural world accordingly, the verra idea of a miracle becomes simply *unnecessary*. [185, original emphases]

What Archie rehearses here in miniature is the narrative of enlightenment: once, men's minds were darkened by superstition; then, science liberated them from ignorance and made progress possible. This narrative figures powerfully in Archie's personal history, having converted him from a poor son in a religious family into an upwardly-mobile explorer of brave new worlds. Indeed, Archie exemplifies Murray Pittock's definition of the Scottish Enlightenment as 'the application of reason to knowledge in the context of material improvement'.[34] Hence, Diya's reply takes Archie by surprise: 'It's a fascinating theory, Mr Buchanan. What gods do you worship?' (185) The question hits Archie with all the force of an event. 'What gods? In his country', Scotland, 'a question like that would have been a hanging matter not so many years since… What *gods*? *What* gods? [Diya] showed neither shock nor incomprehension. She merely looked at him with civil interest, and all the certain ground of Natural Philosophy on which he stood seemed suddenly to shift under his feet' (186). Her rationale is that geology makes individual human life so insignificant that one necessarily turns elsewhere for meaning. And in fact, Archie's narrative of enlightened self-empowerment is one such catechism. Diya's question awakens in Archie the memory of a painful domestic episode in which his father had called him an atheist. Geology has

thus unshackled Archie from home, but at the cost of alchemically converting his science into a virtual religion.

This conversation not only conjures the superstitious residues of secular enlightenment (thus underscoring the religious, doctrinaire quality of science, a point explored at length by anthropologists like Emile Durkheim and James George Frazer[35]), but it also highlights the overlapping modalities of time. And Archie's abstract appreciation of the material forces shaping the island is countered in the novel by a mythical and phenomenological reckoning of the same. Lucy in particular contemplates the physical features of the island as well as its flora and fauna and reflects that '[a]ll these things had been there since long before the lighthouse … perhaps from the very beginning of time itself. When you thought about it that way, the lighthouse … had sprung into existence just in the very last second of the island's history' (152). Sensing her own transience in this place, she feels herself able 'to imagine the island … lying here uninhabited ever since the world was made. Everything the island was, and ever had been, existed inside her head, like the idea of a bird in the yolk of an egg. But nothing was more easily broken than one little egg' (152-53). The island is at once complete in itself and also oddly dependent; self-sufficient in its 'nature', it is contingent in its 'being'. 'Soon [the island] would be gone', Lucy remarks to herself. 'Or rather, they would be gone… Lucy would carry [the island] away with her, inside her head, and no one could take one detail of it from her. But even that … one day Lucy herself would grow old and she might start to forget' (420). What Lucy reflects on here is the difference between geological and ecological objects on the one hand and narratives and signification (including the implicit narratives, the [Durkheimian] religiosity, built into scientific discourse) on the other. The island's existence is rooted in all of them.

This is what Diya perceives in Archie's geological bravado. No 'island' of abstraction, it harbors narrative and conflict; hence, his scientific discourse perpetually borders on becoming something else, especially in his own imagination. 'What could be more humane, more advantageous, more audacious, and more conducive to the greater good of all, than illuminating the coasts of Scotland for all the shipping that had to pass, now and in the future?' (87) Archie sees himself as Prometheus, a mythic torchbearer of enlightenment. 'Mr Stevenson's new lighthouse was not only functionally perfect, but also an outpost of civilisation, a little piece of Edinburgh illuminating the chaos and the wilderness. It seemed like the embodiment of an ideal' (88). And yet, this ideal is rooted less in the brain than in the gut or some other nether region: 'It was always like this: as soon as he got away from Edinburgh Archie began to wake up. It wasn't that he didn't like the world he lived in; it was just that he preferred to be on the very edges of it, and yet somehow bring with him everything that was good about the civilised world. In his experience that was how new ideas were most likely to happen' (88). What Archie craves is a life on the edge, his light venturing into obscurity. If we recall the associations of obscurity in eighteenth- and early

nineteenth-century aesthetic discourse, then we might observe that, more than science, *sublimity* is native to Archie.

According to Lyotard, sublimity is the traditional rubric of the event. The experience of something happening, he remarks, is perpetually attended by 'the feeling that nothing might happen' (Lyotard 198). This is 'the misery' of the artist, who always awaits the next note, line, colour, or word, dwelling like Archie at the edge of obscurity. 'Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe this contradictory feeling' of expectation and emptiness, or, in Muir's language, of 'something' and 'nothing', 'was christened … by the name of the *sublime*. It is around this name that the destiny of classical poetics was hazarded and lost; it is in this name that aesthetics asserted its rights over art, and that romanticism, in other words, modernity, triumphed' (198-99). Such sublimity, overwhelming any preconceived poetics or 'school' of thought, 'is the rigour of the avant-garde'; it is 'the only mode of artistic sensibility to characterize the modern' (199, 200). Modernity is thus by definition a mixed mode, cataclysmic in wreaking havoc on our conventional sense of history. This is how Lyotard is able to appropriate Nicolas Boileau, the seventeenth-century translator of Longinus, and Edmund Burke, the eighteenth-century theorist of the sublime, for a generalised romanticism commensurate with the avant-garde.[36] Elsewhere, Lyotard encrypts these historical inversions into his theory of postmodernism: 'A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant'.[37] In this 'state', art and criticism toil, like Archie, at the edges of the known world, 'working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done… [Postmodernism] would have to be understood according to the paradox of a future (*post*) anterior (*modo*)'.[38]

Sublimity is Lyotard's word for an intensified, a-systemic, and non-linear spirit which enters Western consciousness in the eighteenth century. More than a mere aesthetic category, sublimity—like postmodernism—is metonymic of the mother of all events, the grand disruption (via science, commerce, industrialisation, democratisation, global exploration, print dissemination, etc.) which shook the classical world to ruin and elaborated modernity through a series of aftershocks. 'Sublimity' thus denotes the confusion subsisting in the terms 'enlightenment' and 'romanticism' as hallmarks of this shift. Given the way these forces play out in *Light*, a novel bound up in the symbolic significance of Edinburgh, it prompts the query of whether there was a specifically Scottish sublime. Or, even better, it begs the question of whether 'sublimity' as Lyotard imagines it is even a necessary concept in Scottish history. Indeed, and more incisively still, it compels us to ask whether Lyotard is not straining to synthesise a general concept from a truism of Scottish history, where the terms 'enlightenment' and 'romanticism' dissolve under close scrutiny. In other words, 'Scotland' is functionally synonymous with Lyotard's theoretical notion of the 'sublime.' Granted, Lyotard does not explicitly address Scottish culture, and it seems ungainly

to transmogrify any nation's history into a concept. Still, as Lyotard's influential meditation indicates, 'Scotland' taken as a concept—as Lyotard would have it, 'Scotland, the event'—would bring with it a powerful train of associations. For instance, it would vividly reanimate several facets of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century modernisation (e.g., 'improvement' in the Highlands, rapid urbanisation in Glasgow and Edinburgh, etc.).[39] It would also name a lifeworld rather than a mere aesthetic category, thus painting a broader spectrum of modernity.

Perhaps most importantly, 'Scotland, the event' would fuse the categories of 'enlightenment' and 'romanticism' through which we historicise the postclassical world as well as the subsequent history of its critique. In her landmark *Life of Robert Burns* (1930), Catherine Carswell observed that it makes little sense to distinguish between 'enlightenment' and 'romanticism' in Scotland, arguing that by 1786, when Burns came to Edinburgh, 'the romantic movement had been in full swing' there for a quarter century.[40] More recently, Ian Duncan has expounded on this point, evoking Scottish cultural phenomena ranging from historiography and periodical journalism to vernacular poetry and theatrical experimentation. Contemplating the 'romantic' precursor Ossian alongside the 'enlightened' descendant Scott, Duncan remarks that '[a]gainst th[e] English model' to which it is often subordinated, 'Scotland could only loom as an intermittent, shadowy anachronism, a temporal as well as spatial border of Romanticism. In Scotland, "Classical" and "Romantic" cultural forms occupy the same historical moment and institutional base, rather than defining successive stages or periods'.[41]

Duncan's critique implicitly raises the question of whether broad headings like enlightenment and romanticism, forged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as lenses through which to read the past, are not anachronistic in describing *any* aspect (or nation) of the 'long' eighteenth century (roughly 1660-1830). He effectively exposes the 'English' histories in which Scottish literature often figures as what Lyotard calls grand narratives—sweeping etiological tales or 'just so stories' which fail to account for their own linguistic legerdemain. In Lyotard's estimation, such narratives are insufficiently postmodern, or sublime. But Cairns Craig asks us to think further about whether 'Scotland' and 'sublimity' are conceivable as interchangeable categories, and by extension whether sublimity is truly an apt term in describing a theory of the event. He makes the compelling case that the emancipatory postmodernism which Lyotard derives from the sublime finds its axis in Kantian philosophy, and specifically in Kant's notion that the sublime enables us to transcend the categories through which we typically think. In the terms we have been discussing, the Kantian experience of the sublime is an 'event' which anchors the 'system' of our thought by surpassing it—that is, by validating that system on transcendental grounds.

But for this reason, Kantian sublimity would not really be an 'event' at all, no more than Derrida's grammatology transcends metaphysics; and this realisation has powerful implications for our

understanding of the 'histories' to which Duncan refers. As Craig sees it, the Kantian sublime 'haunts the postmodern as the last possibility of real freedom in a world where freedom … is an illusion'. If postmodernism is, as Lyotard argues, an aesthetic which works outside existing rules of artistic production, this 'outside' is already firmly planted 'within' sublime tropology. 'Postmodernism, in other words, is a late twentieth-century replay of some of the key elements of Kantianism…'[42] Against this transcendentalist tradition, Craig juxtaposes an associationist model proceeding from Hume. This latter paradigm disables the Kantian sublime by skirting the causal relationships on which Kant bases his categories of cognition. As Craig contends, '[i]f Kant has not answered Hume' with respect to the problem of causality, 'then the transcendental argument which locks us into the world as produced by the categories of our own consciousness—the structures of our own language, the narrative forms of history writing and so on—is deprived of its authority. The whole [Kantian] edifice is an illusion…'[43] By this logic, the tradition of association becomes a true 'event' in Western intellectual history precisely because it does *not* posture as a 'sublime' occurrence which, via Kant, reinscribes the presiding 'system' of thought. In the Humean model, there is only displacement without a corresponding transcendence. Indeed, in the place of transcendence, Hume proposes sociability—a proposition which, in Hume's own case, redounds on the club society of eighteenth-century Edinburgh.[44] The *Waverley* paradigm implicitly informing Derrida's grammatology thus gives way to something else—including, doubtlessly, alternative readings of Scott's inaugural novel.

The implications here of 'Scottish' difference (that is, of Hume, Edinburgh club society, and, in Craig's account, of nineteenth-century Scottish philosophers like Andrew Seth) are significant. They not only situate Lyotard's 'sublimity' within history, but they also transform the former's central paradigm. By contrast, 'sublimity' as Lyotard evokes it blurs the distinction between enlightenment and romanticism, modernity and its critique, in a way which nevertheless reiterates the conventions of Kantian transcendence. As Derrida would recognise, this is metaphysics—the sublimation of a mundane state of affairs by something greater—all over again. Anything but a genuine 'event', the cultural poetics of sublimity in the generic, uninflected sense repeat the cycle of sameness, of 'nothingness', which makes occurrence so tantalising.

Not coincidentally, generic sublimity is essentially Muir's poetics: Scotland is the 'empty' literary place in which 'nothing' can possibly happen, at least not within the 'system' of Scottish culture. If anything were to emerge in the Scottish literary tradition, it would be an 'event' indeed. Muir's Scott held this same view: for him, for instance, '[t]he Union between Scotland and England was an accomplished fact, a solid part of the established order. He accepted it as such, and although Jacobite sentiment still excited his imagination, it had no effect on his practical judgment' (*Scott and Scotland* 137). Jacobitism is less a political dogma for Muir's Scott than the grand symbol of national occurrence; and, because Jacobitism points to what can never actually happen, '[o]ne

has the impression … that Scott can find a real image of Scotland only in the past, and [that he] knows that the nation which should have formed both his theme and his living environment as a writer is irremediably melting away around him' (140). Transcendence here would provide the only real option, as it purportedly does for Muir. Politically, this would mean superseding both Union *and* sovereignty: 'I do not believe in the programme of the Scottish Nationalists, for it goes against my reading of history, and it seems to me a trivial response to a serious problem. I can only conceive a free and independent Scotland coming to birth as the result of a general economic change in society…' (181-82). This is a vision of sublimation—of capitalism by egalitarianism, and of Scotland by something other than nationhood.

Duncan and Craig enable a different view of Scott, one defined less by transcendence than by association, and hence less by Muir's monolithic and vacuous 'tradition' than by a network of relations which Deleuze calls 'habit'.[45] For Deleuze, Hume provides us with a human and social model wherein '[w]e start with atomic parts, but these atomic parts have transitions, passages, "tendencies," which circulate from one to another. These tendencies give rise to *habits*… We are habits, nothing but habits'.[46] Elsewhere, Deleuze describes this network in terms of extension, infinite series (as in calculus), and, significantly, *events*: 'Extension exists when one element is stretched over the following ones… Such a connection of whole-parts forms an infinite series that contains neither a final term nor a limit… The event is a vibration with an infinity of … submultiples', of potential associations.[47] Deleuze's reference to infinite series vaguely recalls Kant's notion of the mathematical sublime, but in the Deleuzian 'event' there is no corresponding gesture of sublimation, unlike in Kant's philosophy, which defines (the mathematical) sublime as 'what even to be able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense'.[48] Instead, 'events' in Deleuze's work proceed outward toward unknown destinations.

And so too do Scottish literary studies. At least, they do if we imagine the nation *not* as one of Derrida's 'philosophemes' (which is to say, as an essentialised given) nor as one of Lyotard's sites of sublimity (that is, as the locus of a body of work which 'transcends' theory altogether). Instead, taking Deleuze's cue—which he took from Hume by way of Nietzsche—we might conceive of Scottish literary studies as the sum of myriad 'transitions, passages, "tendencies" … [and] habits' which are less the expression of raw nature than the result of pathways cleared through dense forests of experience. That 'Scottish' here names a history as well as a concept may be what Scottish studies has most to offer to contemporary theory. As theory fights for its institutional as well as intellectual relevance, its practitioners will necessarily continue to probe the past to uncover resources for reimagining western traditions in terms which do not simply recapitulate Kantian categories or, for us, Derridean models like grammatology. This is already happening, for instance, in areas like environmental studies and genetics, fields in which Scottish scientists (by accident of birth *and* cultural force of 'habit') are among those at the forefront. The

associationist philosophy which filters to us through Hume and his social milieu is thus one (but only one) such revisionist resource, effectively dissolving the difference between enlightenment and romanticism in a way which undercuts sublime tropology and, with it, the implicit reinscription of the philosophy of transcendence. Scottish history is in this respect a tradition without transcendence; it is not a 'something' predicated on 'nothing'.

Hence, Muir is right: Scottish literature does make 'for a very curious emptiness' indeed (*Scott and Scotland* 11). But he is right for reasons he seems not to have imagined. For this reason, scholars working in Scottish literary studies do not need to learn how to 'apply' theory; they need only realise that the material they profess already is theoretical. This is the accident and the opportunity, the 'event' and the 'habit', of Scottish literature's relation to the cornerstones of modernity.

NOTES

[1] 'McConnell "destroyed Scotland the Brand"', *Scotland on Sunday,* 11 July 2004. http://scotlandonsunday.scotsman.com/politics/McConnell-destroyed-Scotland-the-Brand.2544888.jp

[2] I allude here to Matthew 12:25—'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand'—and to Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

[3] McCrone, Morris, and Kiely, *Scotland – the Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 1, 4. See esp. ch. 1.

[4] Nairn's dour assessment of nineteenth-century Scottish nationalism may be found in *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: NLB, 1977), esp. Ch. 2. He revisits this issue, this time taking critical aim at Ernest Gellner's thesis that industrialisation is at the root of modern nationalist identity, in *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited* (London: Verso, 1997).

[5] Muir, *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (New York: Robert Speller, 1938), 12. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

[6] See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), esp. Part One: 'The Problem of Nothingness'.

[7] See especially Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" trans. unnamed, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1977), pp. 92-112.

[8] This point is made most forcefully by Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull in *Scotland after Enlightenment: Image and Tradition in Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1997). See esp. Chs. 1-3.

[9] I wholly concur with a remark by this essay's referee that Kelman's work in particular is about far more than simply 'grunge chic'. Critics convincingly argue that Kelman's fiction highlights issues of gender as well as class, language as well as social realism (and, I would add, ecology as well as economics). My point in this narrow context is simply that Kelman's frequent recourse to working-class Glaswegian narrators as media for these subtle issues does not overtly contradict—and even, at some level, corresponds with—the images of Scotland purveyed by Nairn, Smout, and others.

[10] For the richest and most mythic sense of this displacement, see Muir, *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1993), esp. pp. 1-121, as Muir moves leaves his Orkney childhood for adult life in Glasgow.

[11] See especially de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau' in de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 102-41.

[12] Eliot introduces the concept of the 'dissociation of sensibility' in his 1921 essay 'The Metaphysical Poets'. See Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), 241-50.

[13] Mitchell, "The Future of Criticism—A *Critical Inquiry* Symposium," *Critical Inquiry* 30: 2 (2004), 328. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

[14] I am referring here to Crawford's well-known edited volume *The Scottish Invention of English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See especially Crawford's "Introduction" (pp. 1-21). 'Emptiness' here is exaggerated inasmuch as Eng Lit begins as the Scottish instruction of English texts.

[15] See Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005).

[16] To be sure, theory abounds *in* Scottish studies, but as with most fields in which theory figures it tends to be *applied to* Scottish studies instead of *following from* them. That is, the theories exist independently of anything recognisably 'Scottish'. There are, however, more complex cases. For instance, Michael Gardiner appeals at once to theorists like Gilles Deleuze and Paul Virilio as a lens through which to read Scottish culture even as he casts Scottish history as a basis if not for those later theories then for the cultural milieu of postmodernism in which they emerge. (See *From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006].) Cairns Craig is more enterprising still, eliciting Scottish Calvinism and Enlightenment associationism as the rudiments of a larger critique of modernity in which the category of literature and literary forms like the novel are firmly mired. (See *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999] and *Associationism and the Literary Imagination: From the Phantasmal Chaos* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007].)

[17] Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 47-48, 72-73, Derrida's emphasis.

[18] I say 'Manly', but we might punningly quip 'de Manly'. Wlad Godzich comments on the compulsive quality of de Man's rigorously rhetorical readings in his introductory essay to de Man's *Blindness and Insight*, 'Caution! Reader at Work!' (pp. xv-xxx)

[19] 'Almost all the governments which exist at present, or of which there remains any record in story, have been founded originally, either on usurpation or conquest, or both, without any pretence of a fair consent or voluntary subjection of the people'. 'Of the Original Contract', *Selected Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 274-92), 279.

[20] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 14, my emphasis.

[21] Apparently, so did the French *soixante-huitardes*, who perceived in deconstruction a highly abstract and rigorously intellectual apology for neo-conservatism. In a printed interview, Derrida's interlocutors extracted from him this exasperated reply: 'I do not believe that there is any "fact" which permits us to say: in *the* Marxist text, contradiction *itself*, dialectics *itself* escapes from *the* dominance of metaphysics…' (*Positions*, trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981], 74. Such a reply, however, is precisely what irritated Derrida's critics, refusing a discussion of matters like class because of a philosophical difference regarding the *language* of class. This is what led Jürgen Habermas, among others, to refer to Derrida as a 'disciple' of Heidegger's despite Derrida's denunciations of Heidegger. See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), esp. Lecture VII.

[22] On the attractions of Bakhtin to Scottish literary criticism, see Alastair Renfrew, 'Brief Encounters, Long Farewells', *International Journal of Scottish Literature* 1 (2006); for a discussion of Bhabha relative to Scottish literary studies, see Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, esp. the Conclusion.

[23] Bell and Miller, *Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Culture and Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004). One of the collection's essays, Thomas Docherty's 'The Existence of Scotland' (pp. 231-48), gives an alternative reading of Scott's *Waverley* as the archetypal text of Scotland considered as a 'theoretical possibility'.

[24] See Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), esp. ch. 2.

[25] Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2000), 2.

[26] 'What Is Metaphysics?' 98.

[27] For a history of lighthouses in Scotland and the Stevensons' role in that history, see Bella Bathurst, *The Lighthouse Stevensons* (London: Harper Perennial, 1999).

[28] On seminal differences between *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*, see Ian Duncan, "Introduction" to Scott, *Rob Roy*, ed. Duncan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and also my book *The Ruins of Experience: Scotland's "Romantick" Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), ch. 2. Deleuze and Guattari address the phenomenon of deterritorialisation in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

[29] Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', trans. Lisa Liebmann, *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989: 196-211), 197. Subsequent references are cited in the text.

[30] Events belong to a philosophical category which dates back as far as Aristotle, and today philosophers associate them with semantics as often as causality. For a compendium of essays on this topic, see *Events*, ed. Roberto Casati and Achille Varzi (Aldershot, NH: Dartmouth, 1996). However, the category of the event has played an especially strong role in French theory over the past quarter century. For exemplary discussions of events relative to writing, mathematics, psychoanalysis, and of course philosophy, see Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) and Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, *opp. cit.*

[31] G. Gregory Smith famously outlines his theory of the Caledonian Anti-Syzygy in *Scottish Literature, Character and Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1919). On the uses, abuses, and wide influence of this concept in subsequent Scottish criticism, see Gerard Carruthers, *A Critical Guide to Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2009), ch. 1.

[32] Elphinstone, *Light* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006), 260. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

[33] As Lucy watches the surveyors go about their business, it strikes her that 'it marked the beginning of an ending that neither Breesha nor Lucy' nor any other member of the family 'could quite fathom' (153).

[34] Pittock, *A New History of Scotland* (Phoenix Mill, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2003), 225.

[35] Durkheim likens science to religion, whereas Frazer likens to science to magic but opposes each to religion. See Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), esp. pp. 418-48, and Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed., Part One: *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 1: 220-43.

[36] Lyotard generally speaks more favourably of Burke than Kant, toward whom he expresses deeper ambivalence. See especially Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[37] 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?' trans. Régis Durand, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979, pp. 71-82), 79.

[38] Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?' 81.

[39] T. M. Devine evokes Scotland in precisely this conceptual way in his landmark book *The Scottish Nation: A History, 1700-2000* (London: Penguin, 2001).

[40] Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1990), 185.

[41] Duncan, with Leith Davis and Janet Sorensen, 'Scotland in Romanticism', *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Davis, Duncan, and Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 1-19), 3. Duncan pursues this point with remarkable rigour in his recent book *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[42] Craig, 'Beyond Reason – Hume, Seth, Macmurray and Scotland's Postmodernity', in *Scotland in Theory*, pp. 249-83 (263).

[43] Craig, 'Beyond Reason', 265. Duncan proposes a similar argument in *Scott's Shadow*, reading Scott's impact on nineteenth-century realist fiction and British national identity through Hume's associationist model of the imagination. In contemporary theory, the non-Kantian, non-transcendental aspects of Hume's thought appealed strongly to Deleuze. See *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), esp. Ch. 6.

[44] George Elder Davie situates Hume firmly within Edinburgh club society in *The Scotch Metaphysics: A Century of Enlightenment in Scotland* (London: Routledge, 2001), ch. 1.

[45] See Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 251 and Craig, *Associationism and the Literary Imagination*, 116-17. For that matter, Elphinstone imagines her fiction as a productive, associative confusion of fact and fancy, which is how she envisioned Scott working. See 'What Force Made Men Act So?: A Question of Historical Fiction', *Scottish Studies Review* 4:2 (2003: 121-30), esp. pp. 126-27.

[46] Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, x.

[47] Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 77.

[48] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 106.

A Shrinking Highlands:

Neil Gunn, Nationalism and the 'World Republic of Letters'

Ryan D. Shirey

The Unmastered Past and the Spectre of Nationalism

> As a nation we have what the Germans call *eine unbewältigte Vergangenheit*—a past with which we haven't completely come to terms. (In this we are quite unlike the English, who have come to terms with their history so well that they have largely forgotten it).
>
> Hamish Henderson[1]

Reviewing modern historical (and semi-historical) accounts of the Glencoe massacre in the mid-1960s, Hamish Henderson's characterisation of Scottish history as, in the time-worn German expression, 'unmastered', was a reflection of what he perceived as an ongoing problem in the nation's propensity to wallow in, as he put it, 'an appalling morass of sentimental-romantic nonsense, and flighty wishful thinking' (261). 'Artfully camouflaged pieces of romantic history', he continues, 'just won't do any longer. The Scots will have to come to terms with their history if they are to survive as a nation, and secure the elementary civilised right of a nation to control over its own affairs' (261-62). Where Henderson's appeal is framed in terms of his desire for credible scholarly history to replace the sentimental narratives that have historically formed such an integral part of post-Union Scottish identity, his assertion that this process would be instrumental in the cause of national independence is a telling example of the way in which the relationship between story and history perpetually backgrounds considerations of Scottish nationalism.

In the epigraph, the '*unbewältigte Vergangenheit*' is the literal, rather than the literary, story of the past, but the expression can also be a useful reminder of the ways in which the spectre of

nationalism continues to haunt contemporary readings of Scottish literature and culture and becomes itself a problem with which writers and scholars must 'come to terms' in order to say anything about the nation at all. Tellingly, this same Henderson quotation reappeared thirty years after being published in *The Scotsman* as a subsection epigraph in Peter Kravitz's introduction to *The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Fiction* in 1997. Given the timing of that volume, it should be unsurprising that the introduction is largely concerned with framing the role of contemporary Scottish writers in the articulation of a less agonised and less agonistic cultural identity in the wake of the 1979 devolution referendum and on the eve of a new opportunity for a degree of national self-determination.

The contestation over what constitutes the national history, culture, and character has long been expressed in Scottish literature, and while the contest itself may have been productive at times (as in, for example, the development of the modern historical novel with Scott), it has also generated anxiety for generations of scholars who have felt obliged to advocate for a defined, scrupulously coherent cultural history. It is this impulse, Eleanor Bell reminds us, that has led to 'Scottish studies [being] more focused on canon-building and the construction of the national tradition, and too immersed in tradition-inspired approaches to take account of such theoretical developments [as post-modernism].'[2] For scholars of Scottish literature, the desire to make a compelling case for the very existence of a discrete national literature[3] can lead to what Bell elsewhere describes as a 'framework of cultural nationalism'.[4] The problem that plagues Scottish studies is, we might say, the construction (or constructedness) of the nation itself, which continuously reasserts its right as pre-eminent cultural concern by virtue of its historically (seemingly) tenuous existence in the absence of state sovereignty. Consequently, it is the objects of culture that come to stand in as a substitute for the non-existence of a state-sanctioned political identity, 'Scottish'.[5]

This kind of reliance upon cultural products as props for national identity also forces the recognition that those products can easily be manufactured and commodified, tradition can be invented,[6] in such a way that Scotland itself comes to be seen as little more than an emblem or object.[7] As those producers of culture who both run the most obvious risk of participating actively in that process and offer the clearest perspective on how to combat it, writers are interestingly and precariously positioned at the crossroads of transnational and national self-definition, selling their own cultural productions (branded 'Scottish') in a globalised literary marketplace while articulating through their work (at its best) an increasingly complex view of the nation.[8] When writers develop new strategies for traversing this difficult territory, it stands to reason that the older models developed by their forebears will seem not only outdated but also suspiciously like objects themselves, the naïve sentimental narratives of national belonging or the fossilised remains of discredited, even despicable, political ideologies. The perspective that such

views offer is often a useful corrective to the uncritical appraisal of writers' attitudes as normative within a putatively homogeneous national context, but such a reading also runs the risk of replicating the homogenising gesture it critiques. To again quote Bell, who is in turn summarising Willy Maley's reading of 'postal' theory in Irish literature, 'while many Revisionist critics accuse Nationalists of homogenising discourses of national identity in order to accommodate their own agendas, […] Revisionists, ironically, often tend to homogenise nationalism in order to undermine its political intentions' (149).

One of the subtle ways that this kind of Revisionist reductivism has entered into accounts of twentieth-century Scottish literature is in descriptions of the first 'Scottish Renaissance' of the MacDiarmid generation. Whether sympathetically reading its grappling with the crises of late modernity or challenging its residual cultural hegemony, much of the scholarship devoted to the Scottish Renaissance has taken the movement's own self-descriptions as axiomatic of its particular, even narrow, concern with Scottish culture alone. Of course these various readings can provide important insights into the literary practices and cultural legacy of the Renaissance writers, but they also can tacitly argue for a kind of Scottish exceptionalism that threatens to decontextualise the national literature, not from its place in European letters (where the links between Continental and Scottish developments are nearly always assiduously remarked upon) but from its place in the larger cultural crisis of interwar British imperial decline. In short, what has not been remarked upon is the way in which the various nationalisms of the Scottish Renaissance articulate not only the differences between, primarily, Scotland and England but also the shared compulsion towards examinations of local culture (in an inversion of the logic of Empire) at the historical moment when British imperial culture was in imminent decline (a point to which I will return at the end of this essay).

A common reading of the relationship of Scotland to England (and to 'Britain' as imperial state) has its roots in Michael Hechter's influential idea of 'internal colonialism', and, despite various challenges to his original formulation, the notion of Scotland as 'periphery' and England (oriented around the London metropole) as 'core' or 'centre' has remained paradigmatic. As Liam Connell has persuasively argued, however, the various theoretical models that scholars have adopted, particularly with postcolonialism, have proven inadequate to the task of describing Scotland's particularly complicated relationship with Union and Empire. The 'narrative of marginality' that typifies Scottish literary scholarship, in Connell's view, is practically limited by its lack of a materialist critique—or, to put it in different terms, its over-reliance upon abstract notions of 'cultural colonization':

> Cultural colonization does not exist—indeed, cannot exist—independently of systems of economic production. For Scottish literary studies what is urgently

required is a materialist explanation of how Scots were able to benefit economically and politically from the structures of the Union and how certain characteristics of Scottish cultural distinctiveness were able to survive in the face of increasingly normative forces of cultural standardization.[9]

Taking Connell's criticism seriously, this essay offers a reading of Scottish literary nationalism (in the figure of Neil M Gunn) in light of Pascale Casanova's theorisation of the eponymous 'world republic of letters' from which her book title is derived and Jed Esty's account in *A Shrinking Island* of the 'anthropological turn' in late Modernism. Casanova's model, derived in part from the influences of Pierre Bourdieu and Fernand Braudel, posits a transnational literary marketplace in which the exercise of 'symbolic violence' reifies the hierarchy of capital/periphery. This reification works through an implicit appeal to timeless literary value that purports to be 'nonnational' and 'ahistorical' even as it disguises the national and historical bases of the production and circulation of 'literary capital'.[10] By adding Esty's account of the culturally nationalist response of English Modernist writers to the decline of imperial power in the 1930s and '40s, we can triangulate a new reading of the work of the Scottish Renaissance as a movement locked in perpetual struggle with the forces of the capital market of the London metropole even as it simultaneously anticipated that metropole's emergent post-imperial concern with the local signifiers that mark 'provincial' nationality.

Literary Capital and 'The World Republic of Letters'

> For cosmopolitanism does not really breed the intense vision or rebellion of the native or individual spirit. On the contrary, its natural attitude is to deplore it as being unnecessary, often wasteful, and nearly always in bad form. Cosmopolitanism working through this man-of-the-world conception might out of an ultimate logic create its own ideal, but it would be the deathly or neutral idea of the perfection of the beehive.
>
> Neil M Gunn[11]

Neil Gunn's objection to cosmopolitanism in the 1931 essay 'Nationalism and Internationalism' is clearly predicated on a reading of the 'denationalised' realm as productive of nothing more than its own bland uniformity. Over against the cosmopolitan 'perfection of the beehive,' he asserts 'intense vision' and the 'rebellion of the native' as the energetic emanations of a distinctive and dynamic national culture. The characterisation of cosmopolitanism as mannered and enervated speaks to the unique perspective of a 'provincial' writer whose literary status and financial solvency, for all his sense of his own vision or native rebellion, would finally depend upon the

tastes and decisions of the class of London cosmopolitans that constituted what Pascale Casanova would say was the geographical and temporal capital of Anglophone letters.

In *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova extends both Bourdieu's notion of varieties of capital exchange and Braudel's extension of economic concepts towards what would become world-systems analysis to argue for a conception of literary history that emphasises the symbolic violence and cultural contestation that form and define the 'world republic of letters' as a sovereign, cosmopolitan realm. Rather than the ordered beehive of Gunn's imagining, Casanova describes a cultural field that is predicated upon the violent symbolic struggle between national literatures in order to ultimately claim a transcendent and politically independent nonnationality and ahistoricity for the hegemonic practices of the literary elites in the nations with the most literary capital:

> This world republic of letters has its own mode of operation: its own economy, which produces hierarchies and various forms of violence; and, above all, its own history, which, long obscured by the quasi-systematic national (and therefore political) appropriation of literary stature, has never really been chronicled. Its geography is based on the opposition between a capital, on the one hand, and peripheral dependencies whose relationship to this centre is defined by their aesthetic distance from it. It is equipped, finally, with its own consecrating authorities, charged with responsibility for legislating on literary matters, which function as the sole legitimate arbiters with regard to questions of recognition. (pp.11-12)

Once the 'geography' of the world republic of letters is established, symbolic space is conflated with temporal distance as well. In other words, the further a national literature is in terms of 'aesthetic distance' from the hegemonic capital of its literary language, the further it is considered behind the times—in the past.

As Casanova describes it, the effect is 'what might be called the Greenwich meridian of literature', and it is this fixed axis of cultural hegemony/capital that 'makes it possible to estimate the relative aesthetic distance from the centre of the world of letters', as well as to judge distance 'in temporal terms, since the prime meridian dictates the present of literary creation, which is to say modernity' (p.88). When a national literature like Scotland's, during a period of renewed interest in tradition or the representation of history, deviates from the circulating practices of the literary elites of London or New York, the risk is that this deviation will not register merely as difference, but as a variety of primitivism, a failure to be fully modern.

For writers of the early to mid-century 'Scottish Renaissance', for example, a clear anxiety persisted about the outflow from Scotland of cultural and symbolic capital in the form of both

cultural products and potential cultural producers. This anxiety quite clearly related to the notion that Scotland was not only geographically but also temporally removed from the modernity that the South represented. The case of the outflow of cultural products can be measured by the ongoing necessity of metropolitan London to literary success for Scottish writers, despite temporary national successes with small reviews and publishers like the relatively short-lived Porpoise Press. As Naomi Mitchison wrote in 1932, 'The books that are being written [by Scottish writers] are right enough. The only question is who is reading them? [...] Neil Gunn's success is a London success; Catherine Carswell seems more in contact with Lawrence than with Burns.'[12]

The second case, the loss of population, is of course related to the pervasive anxiety in modern Scotland over emigration—the recurring sense that many of the potential architects of the Renaissance were contributing their energies towards diasporic communities around the world or towards the continued, futile administration of British imperial power at precisely the moment of that power's decline. As Neil Gunn wrote in 1945, 'vital statistics show that this [change in emigration pattern] will have to [happen] soon or it will be too late. Emigration is a remorseless way of getting rid of the best. And a dwindling population adds ever new ruins to the old ruins in the glens.'[13] The pastness of those Highland ruins, reminders of the Clearances, also, for Gunn, forecast the future of a nation that already implicitly understands itself as belonging to an irretrievable and nostalgia-tinged past.

In short, in order to be successful in both economic and aesthetic terms, Scottish authors needed to be vetted by the literary elite of London. This state of affairs corresponded roughly with the situation of any number of Scottish intellectuals and professionals for whom the move southwards to the metropolis became not only a physical, geographic journey from periphery to centre, but a symbolic transnational journey towards deracination and capitulation to the hegemonic cultural practices of the British state apparatus. This is not to say that Scottish writers' works would not be perceived as Scottish by their largely English or American audiences any more than it is to say that Scottish emigrants, upon crossing the Tweed or embarking from a port, would somehow cease to be Scottish. On the contrary, the effect might often be a heightening of the 'Scottishness' of text or person, but in a particular and mediated form—as the version of 'Scottishness' sanctioned by an ostensibly cosmopolitan elite. In such cases, one would have to be 'Scottish' enough—though not necessarily in a popular Harry Lauder sense—to warrant the cultural tag; otherwise, one would simply be another Briton in the capital.[14]

In the part of her argument that lays out more explicitly the politics of international literary prestige, Casanova offers a useful analysis of the relationship of literary capital to national status, which also speaks implicitly to the contention in Scottish literary history over the representation of national identity:

> The classics are the privilege of the oldest literary nations, which, in elevating their
> foundational texts to the status of timeless works of art, have defined their literary
> capital as nonnational and ahistorical—a definition that corresponds exactly to the
> definition that they have given of literature itself. The classic embodies the very
> notion of literary legitimacy, which is to say what is recognized as *Literature*: the unit
> of measurement for everything that is or will be recognized as literary. (pp. 14-15)

The relationship between the depth and breadth of a national tradition and its capacity to be viewed as 'nonnational and ahistorical' is vitally important to an understanding of the complexity of Scottish cultural identity for twentieth-century writers. The conclusion reached by 'the world republic of letters'—that the Scottish national tradition, in consequence of its subsumption into 'British' literature, is somewhat meager as a separate literature, or, to put it in different terms, irredeemably national and intransigently historical—would disqualify Scottish literature from having claim to any sort of timeless vantage from which it might judge other literatures or easily generate new literary fashions. But at the moment of cosmopolitan Modernism's literary-cultural hegemony, the crisis of the impending collapse of that yet more centrally hegemonic system, the British Empire, suggested a course for English writers that would see them look towards Scottish nationalist literature for models.

Scottish Nationalism and the 'Anthropological Turn'

If colonialism erodes traditional life, national culture kept inside its 'natural' or conventional boundaries, can guarantee, by contrast, a certain degree of authenticity and continuity.

Jed Esty[15]

The consequence of not reading Scottish literature in the context of its complex relationship with British (read 'English') literature is that the nationalism espoused by certain writers scans as either more or less unproblematically politically progressive (and therefore justifiable in light of the liberatory possibilities of anti-colonial nationalisms) or as dangerously close to a 'blood and soil' ideology that conjures the spectral energies of the twentieth century's worst nightmares—Fascism and Nazism. These divergent readings of Scottish nationalism have been particular points of debate for assessments of the reputation and aesthetic contributions to the national literature of Neil Gunn, a figure in whom the persistent anxieties among scholars of Scottish literature about the representation of Scottishness and the role of nationalism seem to crystallise.

However, such anxieties are not the exclusive province of Gunn's current interlocutors—they were, in fact, very much a part of his own thought on the kind of work that a nationally committed

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writer could and should do. In a 1942 essay for the *Scots Magazine*, he wrote of the vexatious quality of the nationalist question:

> In recent times surely more books have been published on nationalism and its horrid implications than on any other subject that affects the destiny of man. […] Running through the variegated theme is the curse of nationalism, until the ordinary man has begun to yearn towards some vague brotherhood or commonwealth that he hopes may somehow be attained somewhere, and thus a little peace be granted in our time, O Stalin, or O Churchill, or O Roosevelt.[16]

Gunn's description of a historical moment that saw widespread critical denunciation of nationalism speaks as much to our own time as to the early 1940s, but putting aside such political resonances, his writing demonstrates a keen awareness of the ways in which nationalist ideology engendered not only disapprobation but also critical exhaustion. It is perhaps a function of the vague desire for 'a little peace' that has played a part in Gunn's own varied posthumous literary fortunes as, outside of MacDiarmid, the most identifiably nationalist Scottish writer of the 20th century and a central figure in the Scottish Renaissance of the interwar period.

For Kurt Wittig, writing at mid-century, the Scottish Renaissance only reached its full modern expression in Gunn's work. In his 1958 survey of Scottish literary history, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature*, Wittig claimed that 'more than any other Scottish writer Neil Gunn is "modern"; he always strives to relate the past to the present, and in doing so he uses the past to provide symbols which could express the contemporary issues with which he is ultimately concerned'.[17] By the end of the century, however, with discussion of a new, 'postmodern Scottish renaissance'[18], critical perspectives on Gunn shifted (though not so far as to disregard entirely the writer whose complete body of work places him among the most important Scottish novelists of the 20th century).[19]

Duncan Glen's 1999 survey, *Scottish Literature: A New History*, dismisses Gunn: 'Admirers of the novels of Neil Gunn can make a good case for them, but I remain unconvinced, suspecting them of a false blend of overwritten mystical and Celtic romanticism' (112).[20] Criticisms such as Glen's are unequivocally grounded in the suspicion that Gunn's nationalism has, as in the case of those popular historians that Hamish Henderson excoriated, led him to embrace the sentimental narrative of Scottish national identity at the cost of a truer mode of representation.

In the seminal 1995 collection, *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature*, perhaps the first significant intervention of gender and queer theory into Scottish literary scholarship, this scepticism is extended even further. The collection's editor, Christopher Whyte,

describes the book as 'symptomatic, even exemplary of changes taking place in the overall theoretical debate [over nationalism and feminism] and in contemporary Scottish culture'.[21] A few pages later, he exclaims: 'This collection, then, serves notice that Scottish texts are being read in new, disruptive and not infrequently discordant ways and the wider world had better sit up and pay attention!' (xvi). The normative approach to reading the canonical texts of the Scottish Renaissance, Whyte suggests, had been to participate in and extend the nationalist and masculinist perspectives they represent by reading in a 'eulogistic' rather than a critical way. Broadly characterising the movement as a way of establishing the collection's alternative readings, Whyte describes Scottish Renaissance nationalism thus:

> [The] Scottish nationalism [of] the inter-war period had a concern for linguistic and racial purity […] Perhaps that kind of nationalism, that way of being Scottish, which strikes us as being so oppressive now, had its uses at a time when Scottish identity was defined primarily against an overarching Britishness or Englishness. There can be no doubt that different strategies are in operation today. (xiv)

In the evocation of the precepts of 'linguistic and racial purity' and the characterisation of 'that way of being Scottish' as 'oppressive', we see again the anxiety over a slippery slope from cultural nationalist ideology to Hitler Fascism haunting contemporary attempts to reckon with Scottish literary history.

Whyte's critical perspective on nationalist writers, which he focuses intensely on Gunn in his own chapter contribution to *Gendering the Nation*, 'Fishy Masculinities: Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings*', remains deeply suspicious of nationalism to the extent that he fails to recognise adequately the variety of progressive, international perspectives on nationalism that were available to the writers of Gunn's era. In the chapter, Whyte argues that Gunn's ideology 'was closer to that of European fascism than to any other contemporary ideological conformation […] [and] that the time has come to look honestly […] at the political implications of his seductive rhetoric of blood, ethnicity and gender stereotypes'.[22] While he gestures towards 'the range of cultural nationalisms, both progressive and reactionary, practiced and preached in Scotland in the course of this century', it is clear from his characterisation of Gunn that Whyte, like many other Scottish critics of our era, finds the nationalist writing of the Scottish Renaissance embarrassingly, distastefully reactionary.

This presumption of nationalist illiberalism on the part of otherwise well-intentioned intellectuals is not a new problem for progressive nationalists like Gunn, however. In fact it was a common assumption that plagued the nationalist movements of Gunn's own time and which prompted a number of responses on his part (including the above quoted essay). But the novelist was not

alone in his meditations upon the nationalist question. One particularly useful perspective on the question of nationalism in a broader context comes from a writer whose work has received a recent resurgence of scholarly interest. The epilogue to journalist/novelist Rebecca West's 1941 masterpiece, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia*, comments enthusiastically upon the proliferation of free and independent small nation-states after the First World War (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia). West expresses dismay at the level of criticism that these nations received from citizens of the larger, more powerful nations of the West. 'It surprised me', she writes, 'that many Englishmen and Americans, who professed to be benevolently concerned with the future of man, were not in the least exalted by this prospect'.[23] The absence of exaltation that West notices, she believes, correlates to a widespread misconception about the nature of nationalism:

> The left wing, especially, was sharply critical of the new states and all that they did. This was inconsistent in those who believed, often to a point far beyond the practical, that the individual must be free to determine his own destiny, and it was partly due to a theory, so absurd that not even its direct opposite has any chance of being true, that nationalism is always anti-democratic and aggressive, and that internationalism is always liberal and pacific. Yet nationalism is simply the determination of a people to cultivate its own soul, to follow the customs bequeathed to it by its ancestors, to develop its traditions according to its own instincts. It is the national equivalent of the individual's determination not to be a slave. (pp. 1100-01)

The connection that West makes between the right of individual self-determination and national self-determination is a belief that is fundamentally shared by Gunn and other progressive Scottish nationalists. For them, Scotland's ability to make its own political decisions would be the best means to economic and social reform. Gunn approached the question in terms of the national character in a 1939 essay entitled 'Nationalism in Writing III – Is Scottish Individualism to be Deplored?': 'Why should the Scot have retained in so marked a degree his individualism, his uneasy individualism, and lost his capacity for economic co-operation? Does the logical answer lie in the possibility that the Scot was inevitably doomed to lose his capacity for co-operation from the very moment that he abdicated his power to deal with his own economic relations?'.[24] The very ability to reconstitute an idea of cooperative community was, for Gunn, located explicitly in the kind of national self-determination that West championed.

Even more importantly, however, was, as West puts it, 'the determination of a people to cultivate its own soul'. The self-reflexivity of such an approach to nationalism, to make an obvious point, stands in stark contrast with one of the essential underpinning ideological commitments of imperial conquest—the missionary determination of a people to cultivate the souls of others. As

Britain moved from imperial zenith to a more restricted role in world affairs and turned its collective attention to the creation and implementation of the modern welfare state, an attendant consequence for many English writers was the sense that, as Jed Esty puts it in a discussion of T.S. Eliot, England must be remade 'as a national culture that no longer consumed the rich traditions of subordinate nations while letting its own attenuate and ossify'.[25] This sense of an English national culture no longer inseparably linked with the destiny of the British Empire—no longer universally translatable and transportable, but merely one among many world cultures—led Eliot, according to Esty, to embrace as a model Hugh MacDiarmid, whose nationalist politics 'offered an explicit and prescient case for the relativisation of English culture'.

MacDiarmid's criticism of the 'sorry imperialism' of the English and the untenability of the British imperial system was an important influence on Eliot's attempts to find new vitality in a circumscribed, limited Englishness in the *Four Quartets* and *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (134). In Esty's words, 'MacDiarmid's ["English Ascendancy in British Letters" *Criterion* (1931)] thus marks a moment in the 1930s when an English intellectual like Eliot could start to come to terms with the literary-historical effects of national retrenchment'. Esty's description of this influence, though it somewhat elides the influence of Allen Tate and the agrarian movement of the American South, is compelling, but might it not also stand to reason that Eliot's acquaintance with the Gunns and their small nationalist circle in Inverness, an acquaintance cultivated on multiple trips to the Highlands as an agent for Faber (Gunn's publisher after the Porpoise Press folded), played as great a role?

For Scottish nationalists like Gunn, many of whom felt that the 'soul' (and much of the soil) of the nation had been sold along with the right of political and economic self-determination through the Union with England, the idea of a kind of spiritual renewal that would be located in both individuals and the national community was extremely powerful as a way to palliate the sense of loss inculcated by Scotland's participation in Empire. In Scotland, the interest in the local, the 'anthropological turn' towards a relativistic understanding of world cultures (including one's own), can be seen as the most logical outcome of the nation's vexed relationship to Empire. As participants in the colonial, imperial project, many Scots would have suffered a similar disorientation as their English neighbours when the looming disintegration of that project threatened a central precept of British identity. At the same time, however, nationalists, especially those of a more progressive bent, understood their position as fundamentally opposed to the global scale of a putatively exploitative capitalist system for which imperialism created the conditions. As Tom Normand has noted, the cast of most Scottish nationalism was fundamentally progressive and oriented towards community at a local, not just a national level:

> Certainly mainstream nationalism in Scotland, as a political and cultural dynamic, sought to bring about a sense of community above all other desires. […] Moreover, the ideal of community was intimately based upon shared interests, beliefs, and normative values which were present at a local level. It was, perhaps, this notion of locality which was so important in a period of economic crisis and post-colonial decline. The 'local' functioned as a political and cultural nexus wherein the dehumanising aspects of global capitalism might be resisted. In consequence the concern with identity was present as an opposition to the market-led coagulation of the anonymous consumer.[26]

Normand's conception of the 'local' is remarkably similar to Gunn's in its fundamental ability to resist the mustering forces of imperialism, global capitalism, and totalitarianism in any guise. To understand Gunn's nationalism, the nationalism that is expressed in both his essay work and his fiction, one must understand the relationship between that limited space of the 'local' and the untranslatability of experience, culture, and all those things he considered integral to the definition of human life.

An essay for *Outlook* from 1936, 'Literature: Class or National?', speaks to this point more directly. 'The simple truth of the matter seems to be', Gunn writes, 'that literature is national in origin and has found its subject-matter or drama precisely in those class differences and other distinctions or inequalities which together make up the life of a nation. That such has been the case may—or may not—be unfortunate. That it is a fact is surely unquestionable.'[27] The limits of the nation, for better or worse, quite simply offer the only proper material for literature:

> So far as social evolution has gone, then, it would seem that a man creates most potently within his own national environment. Outside it he is not so sure of himself, not so fertile, not so profound. That appears to be the accepted anthropological fact. […] For, whether we like it or not, the nation is still the basis of all large-scale creative human endeavour[.]

The evocation of the national community as an anthropological fact not only interestingly anticipates Esty's argument about late Modernism's general interest in a revaluation of the local but it also suggests Gunn's peculiar form of resistance to what he called 'idealism'—abstracted ideas that are easily manipulable and with which it is easy to manipulate other people. So long as one might stay 'grounded', he suggested, one might avoid the seductions of ideological theories that are disconnected from lived, communal experience to such an extent that they may make possible the worst imaginable violence. 'The longer I live the more I distrust idealism,' Gunn wrote

in the essay 'The Essence of Nationalism', 'not for what may be genuinely implicit in it, but for the lengths to which history has shown me human nature will go in order, as we say, to implement it. Let an idealism, with power, once get the bit in its mouth and nothing will stop it. It becomes capable of cruelty and slaughter on a gargantuan scale.'[28]

Of course to claims of a 'grounded' and purportedly non-ideological nationalism (which opposes the abstract idealism that Gunn deplores), theorists such as Theodor Adorno and Terry Eagleton would respond with the charge that such 'groundedness' is always already ideology and represents the dark undercurrent of German Romantic thought that arose in (arguably the misapprehension of) Herder and informed, for instance, the Nazism of Heidegger. While such a criticism raises important questions, particularly insofar as Gunn does belong to a broader Romantic tradition that could (and did), in some cases, inspire reprehensible ideologies, the more particular and important point for this essay relies upon a more historicised understanding of the writer's work.

The particular cultural contexts for expressions of Romantic nationalist ideas are absolutely critical and should be a prerequisite for any comparative readings of writers across national, linguistic, temporal, or other boundaries. Where ideological similarities do exist, however tenuously, between writers who share some background in an intellectual tradition (in this case, Romantic anti-rationalism), we should look to the conditions to which those writers addressed themselves for evidence of what kinds of politics those ideologies underwrote. In Gunn's case, the historical moment to which he is responding is that of British imperial contraction and the inward turn of a social-scientific endeavour that ultimately failed in both its effort to communicate convincingly a particular set of ('British') cultural values as universal and to understand fully the range of 'Other' cultures towards which it had turned an analytical eye. In short, Gunn's philosophy is circumscribed by the fact of imperial decline and the emergence of a kind of cultural relativism that made the component national cultures of the United Kingdom themselves available as objects for 'anthropological' scrutiny.

It is inarguable that Gunn the cultural nationalist has his Herderian moments, but in light of a broader late Modernist concern with 'national culture', that Esty convincingly argues also helped give birth to cultural studies in the work of E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, it seems to me a mistake to read Gunn's ideological investments too narrowly. Gunn felt himself, as he felt all people to be, inevitably and inescapably a product of his particular background, and that background is always already both limited and relative to all other backgrounds. 'In recent years,' he wrote in the *Scots Magazine* in 1941, 'the field anthropologist has done a lot to help us realize how much we are the children of our background, of our own particular culture pattern, however fondly we may have believed that ours was the only "right" and therefore universally applicable

one.'[29] The insistence on the particularity of experience ultimately offers not only the possibility of individual freedom, but also the freedom of each 'culture pattern' to express itself in a specific fashion. This almost multiculturalist perspective is not merely a product of the nationalism that Gunn so frequently defended in print; it is also a symptom of the Scottish writer's perception of the role of small national literatures in a global literary economy that, in spite of the 'anthropological turn' of high Modernist figures such as Eliot and Woolf (see *Between the Acts*), continued to define literary value as concomitant with an internationalist, cosmopolitan perspective.

The Local Universal and Imperial Decline

> Take down the Union Jack, it clashes with the sunset
> And ask our Scottish neighbours if independence looks any good
> 'Cos they just might understand how to take an abstract notion
> Of personal identity and turn it into nationhood.

<div align="right">Billy Bragg[30]</div>

'Take Down the Union Jack' is not a product of the Scottish Renaissance, or even of a Scottish writer; rather, it is a protest song by the English socialist songwriter Billy Bragg that reached number 22 on the UK singles chart in late May 2002. Bragg's lyrics do, however, describe the desire for an English nationality that, once rid of the both the exploitative 'economic union' and archaic ornaments of nineteenth-century Empire, might take its cue from the kind of progressive nationalism that has, it is implied, led to at least a modicum of success in parliamentary devolution for Scotland. It proposes precisely the kind of solution to the cultural crisis precipitated by imperial decline that many interwar British writers of all nationalities faced—an interrogation of post-imperial nationality, phrased in this case by Bragg as attention to 'what it really means / To be an Anglo hyphen Saxon in England.co.uk'.

The Union Jack, as emblem of Empire, clashes with the sunset that ironically and belatedly signals that Empire's decline. In the absence of such nostalgic signifiers of past colonial greatness, the challenge for the English, Bragg suggests, is to let the example of Scottish nationalism, just as it had with the influences of MacDiarmid and Gunn on T.S. Eliot, provide a model for the integration of a felt personal identity with the communal sense of belonging to a nation. A positive nationalism of this kind represented legitimate cultural and political possibility for certain interwar Scottish writers—it truly was a source of both creative potential and anti-

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imperial critique, and not, despite some contemporary critical claims, merely a lamentably backwards ideology that would best be forgotten.

For a writer like Neil Gunn, the irony of such contemporary criticism is that it frames the novelist's nationalism only in terms of the Scottish national scene itself and does not recognise the extent to which nationalist feeling could be understood in a more general late-modernist, Anglo-European context as a potentially progressive ideology (as in Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*), and/or, as Jed Esty claims of the late work of Modernist figures such as Eliot and Woolf in *A Shrinking Island*, typical of a 'second-order universalism based on [national] cultural integrity' and a 'reinscri[ption of] universalism into the language of [national] particularism' (14).[31] In Gunn's case, both of these characterisations apply. An independent Scottish state would, he believed, be the most practical institution through which to mount a counter-attack to the exploitative practices of global capitalism. At the same time, however, his attachment to his native Highland landscape and especially to his childhood experiences of that landscape (which gave the land such imaginative significance), led Gunn to embrace the idea that, to adapt a 1940 statement of Eliot's about Yeats, 'in becoming more [Scottish], … he became at the same time universal'.[32] Such a statement would be a fitting epitaph to the modern Scottish Renaissance.

What a re-reading of Gunn can do for our understanding of this period of Scottish literary history, long-haunted for the 'internationalist' scholar by the shadow of chauvinistic nationalism, is provide a sophisticated narrative of, to put it in terms that Gunn himself would appreciate, post-imperial British culture (in the specific form of a nationalism that anticipated imperial decline) coming upon itself as an object of critical and creatively productive scrutiny. Where the philosophical protagonists of the late novels almost literalise the 'anthropological turn' that occurs among the English high modernists that were his contemporaries—in *The Other Landscape*'s Walter Urquhart this is actually the case—Gunn had established the pattern for this search for the universal in the local long before. To see this, we need think only of one of his most celebrated novels, *Highland River* (1937), in which the protagonist Kenn, psychologically scarred from his service to the British Empire in the Great War, returns home to trace the source of the river that played a central role in his childhood imagination.

While the journey of *Highland River* is, of course, as much an interior, psychological or philosophical one as a physical trek, nevertheless the physical impulse is key in the sensory descriptions of the environments Kenn encounters, reinforcing the necessary literal quality of the trip. What is striking, however, is the way in which the nature of the quest itself represents a localised version of the prototypical imperial narrative—another Scotsman's, Dr. David Livingstone's, search for the source of the Nile. Kenn's journey, as Matthew Wickman has recently noted, problematically (and fascinatingly), casts 'experience as a private, internal

phenomenon' just when Gunn would seem to want that experience to be communal—the desire for 'full experience, Benjamin's *Erfahrung*' is unsustainable in light of the protagonist's modern alienation from a community that is at any rate, as Gunn insistently reminds his readers throughout his *oeuvre*, dying. What remains is '*Erlebnis*,' the 'decay and romanticisation' of experience.[33]

Wickman's reading suggests that this movement inward signals Gunn's eventual retreat from active nationalist politics, and this seems accurate to a great extent. But we might also read here, as I have suggested above, the cultural endgame of imperial decline in the author's insistence on the secrecy, the incommunicability, of an experience located in the specific kind of local landscape that had come to symbolise or synecdochically represent the nation. The logic of Empire, inscribed upon Livingstone's tomb in Westminster Abbey, is 'To Explore the Undiscovered Secrets'[34] so that they might be permanently uncovered, evangelised, and rendered part of a system of improving 'civilisation'. For Kenn, who is overcome with a powerful and nearly inexpressible feeling upon arriving (unlike Livingstone) at his river's source, 'a deep, secret tenderness' fill his eyes.[35] What is revealed is Kenn's own being in some fundamental way—he is able to 'see what lay in his heart and in his mind'. Truth is thus reduced to the bounded existence of the individual subject rather than in the external expanse of conquered territory. Is this not, in some sense, the most extreme example of Normand's description of Scottish nationalism as 'contractile rather than expansionist'?[36]

Through his essays on nationalism and tradition as well as in his fictional practice, Gunn is emphatic about the immeasurable value of subjective, individual experience in articulating an approach to the problems created by the dissolution of traditional cultures under the pressures of imperialism, industrialisation, and modern commodity culture. A reassessment of Gunn in this light, rather than in the diffused half-light he himself sometimes cast over his own work (especially the later work), would allow for a reading of such novels as *The Silver Bough* (1948), *The Well at the World's End* (1951), and *The Other Landscape* (1954), 'the books', as Margery Palmer McCulloch puts it, 'in which he pursues themes of disintegration and freedom in the modern world', as something other (and more) than 'on the whole unsuccessful' or marred by their philosophical concerns.[37]

Such novels, thematically linked by their exile-academic protagonists—an archaeologist, a historian, and an anthropologist, respectively—arriving at/returning to Highland landscapes that exude both familiarity and alterity, may not paint convincing portraits of the main characters as representatives of their respective fields of inquiry. What they do, however, by extending the work of Gunn's earlier novels and essays, is dramatise the moment in which the energies of imperial narration return in altered form to the communities that supplied the Empire with its requisite

intellectual and physical effort. In short, they are symptomatic of both the Scottish writer's critique of the undifferentiated conformity (the 'beehive') of the cosmopolitan ideal, including 'the world republic of letters', and of the moment in which the failure of imperial culture to maintain perpetual, (seemingly) universally translatable meaning required a return to the nation as a site for cultural renewal.

NOTES

[1]Hamish Henderson, 'Glencoe on our Minds', in *Alias MacAlias: Writings on Song, Folk and Literature*, ed. by Alec Finlay, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2004), pp. 257-62 (p. 257).

[2] Eleanor Bell, 'Postmodernism, Nationalism and the Question of Tradition,' in *Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Culture and Literature*, ed. by Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), p. 86.

[3] We might call to mind here the continuing effort in North America to petition the MLA for full division status for what is currently the Scottish Literature Discussion Group.

[4] Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 149.

[5] For what is perhaps the most trenchant and oft-cited example of this critique, see Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1977).

[6] See, most (in)famously, Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Invention of Tradition: the Highland Tradition of Scotland', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 15-42.

[7] For a particularly lucid description of this process during the Romantic period, see Ian Duncan with Leith Davis and Janet Sorensen, 'Introduction,' in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-19. For an account of this process in the context of the heritage industry and from a sociological perspective, see David McCrone, Angela Morris, and Richard Kiely, *Scotland the Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

[8] For a more substantive and nuanced discussion of the complexities of the representation of Scotland and 'Scottishness' in the work of Scottish writers, see Alan Riach, *Representing*

Scotland in Literature, Popular Culture and Iconography: The Masks of the Modern Nation (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[9] Liam Connell, 'Modes of Marginality: Scottish Literature and the Uses of Postcolonial Theory', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23.1&2 (2003) http://www.cssaame.com/issues/volume_2312_2003.html [accessed 28 October 2007], pp. 11-12.

[10] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* [orig. *La république mondiale des lettres*, 1999], trans. by M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 14-15.

[11] Gunn, 'Nationalism and Internationalism' [1931] in *Landscape and Light: Essays*, ed. by Alistair McCleery (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp. 177-80 (pp. 177-78)

[12] Naomi Mitchison, 'Letter' from *Scotland in Quest of Her Youth: A Scrutiny*, in *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland, 1918-1939: Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), pp. 253-54 (p. 253).

[13] Gunn, 'Belief in Ourselves' [1945] (see Gunn above), p. 161.

[14] For a convincing argument on behalf of the little-acknowledged importance of such popular cultural representations of Scottishness as Harry Lauder's stage Scotsman (as an alternative to 'highbrow' literary representations such as Hugh MacDiarmid's), see David Goldie, 'Hugh MacDiarmid, Harry Lauder and Scottish Popular Culture', *The International Journal of Scottish Literature*, 1 (2006) http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue1/goldie.htm.

[15] Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.130.

[16] Gunn, 'The Essence of Nationalism' [1942] (see Gunn above), pp. 141-44 (p. 141).

[17] Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), p. 338.

[18] See Cristie Leigh March, *Rewriting Scotland: Welsh, McLean, Warner, Banks, Galloway, and Kennedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) for more on the origins of claims for a new Scottish Renaissance.

[19] Claims for Gunn's relevance and achievement do persist, as in Cairns Craig's description of Gunn as 'the novelist of the Renaissance movement most fully committed to exploring and overcoming the structures of fear which have permeated the Scottish imagination'. Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinbugh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 71.

[20] Duncan Glen, *Scottish Literature: A New History from 1299-1999* (Kirkcaldy: Akros, 1999), p.112.

[21] Christopher Whyte, 'Introduction', *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature*, ed. by Christopher Whyte (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. ix-xx (p. xi).

[22] Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities: Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings*' (see Whyte above), p.66.

[23] Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia*, (New York: Penguin, 1994), p. 1100.

[24] Gunn, 'Nationalism in Writing III – Is Scottish Individualism to be Deplored?' [1939] (see Gunn above), p. 117.

[25] Esty, p.133.

[26] Tom Normand, *The Modern Scot: Modernism and Nationalism in Scottish Art, 1928-1955* (Hants: Ashgate, 2000), p. 163.

[27] Gunn, 'Literature: Class or National?' [1936] (see Gunn above), pp. 118, 121.

[28] Gunn, 'The Essence of Nationalism', p. 141.

[29] Gunn, 'On Background' [1941], (see Gunn above), p. 202.

[30] Billy Bragg. 'Take Down the Union Jack'. *England, Half English*. 2002. CD. Elektra 62743.

[31] In both of these quotations I have replaced Esty's original "English" with "national."

[32]Quoted in Esty, p. 14.

[33] Matthew Wickman, *The Ruins of Experience: Scotland's 'Romantick' Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 184-85 (p. 184).

[34] Dean and Chapter of Westminster, 'David Livingstone', *Westminster Abbey: from 1065 to Today*, http://www.westminster-abbey.org/search/12283 [accessed 28 October 2007].

[35]Gunn, *Highland River* (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1991), p. 241.

[36]Normand, p. 164.

[37] Margery Palmer McCulloch, *The Novels of Neil M Gunn: a Critical Study* (Glasgow: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 178.

Occasional Paper: The Debt to Theory

Christopher Whyte

Letter to the Editors of *IJSL*

Dear Eleanor and Scott

The words of Cairns Craig's which you offered as a trigger for reflection risk being misinterpreted when read out of context. As it is, they imply a species of protectionism where Scottish thought is concerned which I find disquieting. What is there to stop us from roaming far and wide through the cultures and the literatures of the world, in search of insights which may prove fruitful where the immediate situation in Scotland is concerned? Unwillingness to do so could easily be read as an instance of the very inferiorism which Cairns is so eager to avoid. And why should we not be prepared to find helpful and illuminating insights where they were least expected, in contexts and situations the most apparently dissimilar from those we find ourselves dealing with? Suspicion of the foreign, and of what is all too often labelled as the cosmopolitan, is an element in several less palatable brands of nationalism, liable to be present and active on the Scottish scene as much as they are elsewhere. One reason for treating that suspicion sceptically is that the dichotomy between the foreign and the native is endemically unstable, especially when viewed in diachronic terms. The very word 'Scot' was originally applied to the Irish, and the so-called Burns stanza can be traced back, via the York cycle of English mystery plays, to the Provençal poet Guillaume of Aquitaine and medieval Latin (Catholic) hymnology.

Rather than take issue directly with what Cairns would appear to be saying, and at the risk of appearing immodest or quite simply boring, I would like to trace my own debt to theory across a period of more than thirty years. Though some quarters might argue that an excessive involvement with the foreign makes my case unrepresentative, incapable of standing the test of Scottishness, I suspect that any individual story will reveal particular nuances and strangenesses

and that, where Scottish writers, activists or intellectuals are concerned, a normative figure would be hard to find. My case also serves, I hope, to demonstrate that theory can mean a multitude of different things. For me, it was not a question of deconstructionism, or of French theory filtered through the American academic world, but rather of interaction with Italian culture and, as a result, with Slavic literature and literary studies. A longstanding fascination with music, as well as more than a decade spent teaching English as a foreign language, also played their part. If arguing from the particular means I need claim no general validity for what I have to say, expressing a debt to theory is doubly important in my case, given that during the years I spent teaching Scottish literature, I more than once heard theory being described as "not worth the paper it was written on".

When I studied at Cambridge in the early 1970s, theory did not extend beyond Dr Johnson and Coleridge on Shakespeare, though we were encouraged to read Karl Jaspers on tragedy (I did not), and it was possible to study Plato and Plotinus as part of a paper somewhat speciously named the 'English Moralists'. After I had moved to Rome, living with, and increasingly in, a language other than English sparked an interest in linguistics that was probably innate with me. From a general study of the history of linguistics by Mounin I progressed to André Martinet, whose manual I read from beginning to end. Though it is now somewhat out of date, the concept of the phoneme as a difference in sound used to express a difference in meaning entranced me. It explained why Italians had such difficulty in extracting the 'ng' sound from words like *banco* or *fango* and placing it at the end of an English word, without a following 'g' or 'k'. It also, since the number of phonemes in any variant of a spoken language was finite and could be counted, introduced me to the notion of an interrelated structure, where the arrival of a new element necessarily prompted a rearrangement of all the prexisting ones. So I arrived at structuralism through linguistics. A collection of Béla Bartók's writings on folk music edited by Diego Carpitelli, and specifically the essay on Bulgarian rhythm, which the Hungarian composer had failed to notice in recordings made as long as twenty years before, taught me that textual material will yield different elements to different observers, or to the same observer at different stages in his lifetime. And Bartók's insistence on the constant migration of melodies among the peoples inhabiting the Carpathian basin, combined with a haunting remark by Pier Paolo Pasolini, to the effect that peasant culture is of its nature international, rather than national, inoculated me at a relatively early stage against the back to roots brand of nationalism, one which would see, for example, in the border ballads an inexhaustible store of core Scottishness, a veritable repository of national identity. Many years later, a casual remark made in conversation by Hamish Henderson reassured me that my scepticism, where the ballads were concerned, was amply justified.

My job, at the Faculty of Languages in Bari University, then later at the La Sapienza university in Rome, was to help Italian students improve their English (and I still believe that, if they found it so problematic to pronounce the initial consonant in *th*is or *th*ese, it was because they instinctively felt it was discourteous to bring the tongue so close to the front of the mouth while speaking). The intellectual world I came into contact with, however, as my command of Italian improved, was puzzling, stimulating and profoundly politicised. Until 1989 Italy was in many respects an Iron Curtain country, in the sense of being a country whose political and cultural life was strongly marked by a geographical position neighbouring the nations of Europe subjected, in the wake of military occupation, to the dubious benefits of communism imposed from above. The Italian communist party was locked in perpetual opposition, but gathered in its ranks many of the nation's most responsible, civically concerned and forward-looking individuals. This was noticeably the case in a university arts department. The moral and intellectual role of the Italian communist party also ensured that there would be a constant stream of up to date, high quality translations of material from Russian and other Slavonic languages. It was symptomatic that students were encouraged to buy, and required to read Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, in full, in scrupulous versions made from the original, whereas in English language universities they might be referred to a couple of paragraphs in a manual by Terry Eagleton, or to a Bakhtin reader whose editor made no claim to even a superficial acquaintance with the texts in their original language.

And so I noticed students carrying around an anthology of writings by the Russian formalists, edited by Tzvetan Todorov, originally published in French. This was where I first made the acquaintance of Jakobson and of Viktor Shklovsky. It was Shklovsky who helped me realise that a novel has a shape, and led me years later to disconcert a classroom of Glasgow students, inured to naïve psychologism (where you would evaluate the make-up and the behaviour of the characters as if they were friends, or else the people living next door) or to moralistic criticism of the English Protestant variety (the idea that reading novels can in some obscure fashion make you a better person) by asking them how they would describe the shape of the novel they had just finished reading. Was it long and thin? Or short and fat? Did it have bumps in the middle? And were the bumps all the same, or of different sizes? Shklovsky's delightful diagrams of the narrative progress of *Tristram Shandy* had done their work. Most provocative and, in the end, most fruitful of all was my encounter with Tynjanov. During an interminably protracted degree exam session (oral and so face to face, like the majority of university exams in Italy at that time) I noticed an especially glamorous colleague, who would later become a fiction writer of repute, fiddling with her copy of *The Problem of Poetic Language*. The English version of this text, published in the States, is so convoluted as to be, where I am concerned, practically incomprehensible. But I managed to battle my way through the Italian. Tynjanov not only spelt out for me the way in which poetry, differently from prose, sets resonating the second, third and

fourth semantic values of a word, and not just the one required by that context. He convinced me that onomatopoeia, the sound painting I had been taught since studying Tennyson at school to seek for in every poetic text I examined, was the exception rather than the rule, that it was, indeed, alien to the specific way in which poetry orders language. Then there was the fascinating, destabilising suggestion that, in fiction, character could be a function of situation, and even of dialogue, rather than the other way round. Many years later when, working on my first novel to be published, I split a single character into two because I wanted him both to commit suicide and not to, Tynjanov would come back into my mind.

In the course of time, though this was strictly speaking far beyond my duties, I was allowed to help supervise Italian students preparing their degree theses. This was how I discovered Todorov's *The Fantastic*, which I picked up in Paris, in French, in the course of a train journey home to Scotland, along with a collection of essays by Jakobson entitled *Questions de poétique*. It was Todorov who made me so impatient with the old, eternally recycled chestnut about Hogg's *Justified Sinner*, setting students to amass evidence for and against Robert Wringhim's accomplice actually being the devil and encouraging them to choose once and for all between the psychological and the mythical interpretations of the text (or else to retreat in frustration at the near impossibility of doing so). Todorov made it obvious that such ambivalence was characteristic of the genre, was, indeed, a condition of the novel's generic cohesion.

But the student to whom I owe the greatest debt of gratitude was one who (I am talking about the early 1980s) wrote her thesis on Bakhtin and Walter Scott. Because of her, I read Bakhtin in full, in Italian translation, and was forced laboriously to track down the English versions when I came to publish articles using his work. It proved impossible to get my hands, in the library university at Glasgow or in the National Library in Edinburgh, on the Russian originals. And so I was unable to substantiate a distinct impression that where, in his Rabelais book, Bakhtin repeatedly waxes lyrical about the genital area, about faeces and semen, Helen Iswolsky had operated a discreet bowdlerisation in her English translation. I felt certain, however, that the Italian *pluridiscorsività* (plurality of discourses) was infinitely preferable to her choice of 'heteroglossia' (which, if it does not set the reader thinking of glossy magazines, at the very least implies that a sort of speech named homoglossia needs to be set alongside it). And her choice of 'degradation' where the Italian had *abbassamento* (simply 'lowering'), with reference to Bakhtin's attempt to redress the balance, in post-Renaissance, bourgeois European discourse, between the head and the crotch or the anus, struck me as similarly problematic. Bakhtin must have heard of Burns. But I suspect he knew very little about the other poets of the Vernacular Revival, or about the Christ's Kirk tradition. Yet when I came to teach, and write about these texts, or about the agricultural idylls of Burns and Fergusson, it was Bakhtin's work on both Rabelais and Dostoevsky which led me to unlock insights that might otherwise have proved inaccessible.

Far more difficult than Bakhtin, but equally rewarding of effort, was another Russian text to be found on bookshop shelves in Rome, but which subsists in English only in a hard to track down North American translation, Jurij Lotman's *The Structure of the Poetic Text*. Lotman's listing of the variant adjectives in a line by Pushkin finally demonstrated to me how, in poetry, the choice of a word can be governed by phonetic rather than semantic considerations, thus demonstrating that the semantics of poetry is different from that of prose, that language in poetry functions in a different way. His reading of Tsvetaeva's poem about the panther and the cave (the third of her 'Verses to an Orphan') was an object lesson in the study of phonetic patterning (always easier to discern in a foreign language than in one's own). When introducing the poetry module for first year Glasgow Scottish Literature students, I repeatedly drew on Lotman's work, and remain hopeful that, however simplified and watered down, something of what he had to say got through to them.

It was in 1991, by which time I was already on the staff at Glasgow, that I rather bravely (I had been in a permanent post for less than a year) made the journey south to take part in a conference on gay and lesbian studies at London University, with a paper on Almodóvar's *The Law of Desire*. In a bookshop there I happened upon and pounced on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, which was to provide the inspiration for a module on gender and sexuality taught on three separate occasions as well as, ultimately, for a volume of essays edited in 1995, *Gendering the Nation*. Two years before, I had mischievously quoted her in the epigraph to an article on Burns's 'Tam o' Shanter'. I still cannot be sure how many of its readers guessed the amount of fun that I was having. Her book gave me the courage to commit to print my serious misgivings about Neil Gunn's fiction and helped me clarify and motivate the admiration I had long felt for MacDiarmid's treatment of (dysfunctional or barely functional – other kinds presumably do exist) male sexuality in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. It was not merely that, in her brilliant opening series of axioms (admittedly obfuscated by a not always helpful use of jargon) she seemed prepared to take astrology seriously. J.M. Barrie was approached from an innovative, unprecedented angle, and the triumvirate of gender, sex and sexuality offered a new and deeply needed axis of reading to counterpoint the well-used, already tiring axis of revivalist cultural nationalism, with its sad addiction to victim positioning (the twin disasters of 1603 & 1707). By the time I came to repeat the module, Irvine Welsh had reached iconic status with his *Trainspotting*. If Kosofsky Sedgwick supported me in articulating the revulsion I experienced at this recrudescence of diseased and damaged masculinity, at its claim to return centre stage at the expense of all other voices, students also strengthened the case I was trying to make (and notably the woman who commented, à propos of the Z campaign which figures in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, that 'The point of the Z campaign is there can be no excuse – and this book is one long excuse!')

Returning to where we came in, during those first years in Italy I picked up a copy of *Semiotics of Popular Culture* by Peter Bogatyrëv of the Prague school (though I could make nothing of Mukařovský, however hard I tried), then progressed to Vladimir Propp, his *Morphology of the Folktale* and the more problematic *Historical Roots of Wonder Tales*. If my status as an out gay man made it perhaps inevitable that I should deal with gender and sexuality in my teaching, the realisation that I was also drawn to these topics through having experienced sexual abuse within a family context made me feel I had perhaps spent sufficient time on those particular barricades. So I put together a module on narratology, where I began by encouraging groups of students to examine Gaelic folktales from the collections of John Campbell of Islay in the light of Propp's functions. This was a huge success, with several seminars developing into a sort of not excessively wild party game. We were then able to consider the importance of those same functions in *The Lady of the Lake* and in *Redgauntlet*, before going on to use Genette's *Narrative Discourse* in teasing out the narrative complexity of that wonderfully warm and sophisticated book, Naomi Mitchison's *The Bull Calves*. Here again I had to transfer the underlinings from my Italian text of *Figures III* to the American edition.

At the close of that module, I asked students to note that I had given five lectures in a row without ever using the word 'Scottish'. They were mystified. But the point remained extremely important for me. And here I would like to return to the implications of the remarks by Cairns you offered, whether or not these reflect his actual position, or his position at the present moment. To begin with, theory gives us the opportunity to contextualise readings of Scottish material that have been powered by nationalist ideology. It allows us to take a break, to get a breather. Insistence on the specificities of our Scottishness, like identity politics of any kind, risks enclosing us within a ghetto of our own making, one which can become stifling and suffocating, and where we are likely to grow increasingly impatient with the company we have been forced to keep. But theory can offer infinitely more than a palliative or a diversion. One way or the other, for better or for worse, in the course of the twentieth century the discourse about Scottish literature was intricately linked with political nationalism and with the campaign for political autonomy. As far as I am concerned, the single greatest, indeed tragic lack within that discourse, and I am also talking about the present here, is of any reflection on the particular brands of nationalist ideology deployed, even the simplest attempt to contextualise them, to set them within the broader picture of nationalism and identity politics as a whole. As long as people continue to claim that the battle for Scottishness or the discourse about Scotland are axiomatic and natural, placing them beyond question or discussion, then the strategies deployed will also be placed beyond choice. The essence of a genuinely critical discourse is that it should be selective and should enable selectivity. One approach or insight can be replaced or corroborated by another, mistakes can be rectified, differences of opinion accommodated and developed. How this can be done if we confine our interpretive tools and our choice of intellectual input to figures who are provably Scottish is an

enigma to me. That consideration, as much as any other, makes me determined to oppose the implications (intentional or otherwise) of Cairns' words, to the extent that it is in my power to do so.

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