

Editorial: Internationalism Now?

A recent collection of essays exploring new contexts for twentieth-century Scottish literature invites a thorough re-thinking of the place of critical 'internationalism'. The editors of *Beyond Scotland* argue that the founding paradigms of Scottish Literature as 'a discrete area for academic study and critical attention' established Scottishness 'as a site of internalised contradiction'.

While this conception has, when used discriminately, been a productive conceptual tool, it has also constrained Scottish criticism in its insistence on the idea of a tradition defined by its *internal* oppositions. [...] In his desire to "aye be whaur extremes meet", MacDiarmid did not anticipate that the place of intersection might be as likely to occur on the periphery as at the centre.¹

In the most important and straightforward sense, this journal will be 'international' in attending to literary intersections of this kind: views of Scottish writers from critics outside Scotland, articles on trans-national influences and audiences, comparative studies, reviews of translations, translations of criticism, and so on.

In a more elusive sense, as the editors of *Beyond Scotland* point out, the very inwardness of Scottish Literature's 'first principles' signals its enmortgagement to non-Scottish political and cultural contexts. Gerry Carruthers, David Goldie and Alastair Renfrew argue that Scottish criticism's fixation with the 'largely personal drama' surrounding MacDiarmid and Muir's competing versions of the *inner* cultural logic of Scottishness – generative self-contradiction versus fatal fracture – has largely obscured the fact that 'the formulation for "native" Scottish literature [...] was derived from a convoluted sense of "British" cultural concerns' (p. 13). What is more, Muir and MacDiarmid's common interest in 'various types of return to a lost originary cultural moment [...] implies their typicality, not as Scots, but as Britons and indeed Europeans' (ibid). Recognising this shared heritage has far-reaching implications for Scottish criticism:

The terms in which their argument has been "developed" – indigenous versus imported, nationalism versus internationalism, essentialism versus cosmopolitanism – are little more than a series of false oppositions, produced by the initial premise from which they are consciously or unconsciously derived. The terms in which the twentieth-century debate on Scottish literature has been conducted occupy the two sides of an increasingly devalued coin. (ibid)

What role for 'internationalism' in this depreciating trajectory, twinned as it is with a nativistic literary nationalism undergoing a thorough critical revision, 'as the need to disaggregate political from cultural nationalism has become apparent' (ibid, p. 14)?

¹ Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie and Alastair Renfrew (eds.), introducing *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam & NY: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 11-15 (p. 11); emphasis added.

Firstly, and as exciting as these debates are, it is well to emphasise that this journal is not exclusively or even mainly interested in reading Scottish literature in terms of what Laurence Nicoll once called 'the cultural nationalist paradigm'²: the persistent sense, as Gavin Miller and Eleanor Bell have it in *Scotland in Theory*, that 'literature from Scotland must firstly be explained in terms of its Scottishness, rather than in terms of its literary or aesthetic qualities'.³ In his *Modern Scottish Poetry* Christopher Whyte rejects, on similar grounds, 'the illusion that the primary function of poetic texts lies in identity building, and that they are capable of resolving identity issues'.⁴ This is not to say, of course, that issues surrounding cultural identity are uninteresting or unimportant, or that a critical moratorium should be declared on the question of 'Scottishness'. Rather, there is no compelling *literary* reason why identity issues should be the primary critical consideration when encountering a new poem or play or novel by a Scottish writer.

Secondly, and as the title of *Beyond Scotland* implies, extrinsic or 'heterocentric' views of Scottish culture are likely to become more, not less relevant to debate in this field. This journal may have an important contribution to make in the critical 'reevaluation' of Scottish literary debate, be it coined in post-colonial/post-nationalist currency, or otherwise.

It is worth, finally, acknowledging the dangers of conceiving 'internationalism' as a critical space which somehow by-passes or transcends the thorny cultural issues outlined above. In a provocative essay in *Beyond Scotland*, Cairns Craig warns against what we might call 'bad internationalism':

To imply that it is only through the ideas of Russian or American intellectuals that one can grasp the real nature of the Scottish condition is to continue Scotland's submission to cultural imperialism rather than fulfil its "post-colonial" identity, reproducing the inferiorism by which Scotland is always the *object* of an understanding that can only come from outside Scotland itself, never a *subject* capable of understanding itself.⁵

This journal does not aspire to enclose the terms of 'internal' Scottish literary debate within an envelope of 'wider currents' in some hollow gesture of eclecticism, or with a view to providing some kind of it-hers-see-us antidote to cultural myopia. In fact, it does not propose to 'grasp the real nature of the Scottish condition' at all; only to explore 'Scottish literature' in international and comparative contexts neglected by most cultural-nationalist discourse.

Why is Irvine Welsh so popular in Latin America? How is Scottish literature taught and perceived in Italy? What readings of canonical Scottish writers are made possible by contemporary critical theory? What does it tell us that James Kelman is regarded by his Norwegian translator as the inheritor of Knut Hamsun, and by the critic Graeme Macdonald as a child of Zola?

Previously, there has not been an institutional place for these kinds of questions to be asked, which did not implicitly direct them toward a funnel of political culturalisms centred on national tradition. We hope the *International Journal of Scottish Literature* provides just such a critical space.

² Laurence Nicoll, "'This Is Not a Nationalist Position": James Kelman's Existential Voice', *Edinburgh Review*, 103 (2000), pp. 79-84 (p. 79).

³ Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller (eds.), introducing *Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Culture and Literature* (Amsterdam & NY: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 11-15 (p. 11).

⁴ Christopher Whyte, *Modern Scottish Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 8.

⁵ Cairns Craig, 'Scotland and Hybridity', in *Beyond Scotland*, pp. 229-253 (p. 241).

Brief Encounters, Long Farewells: Bakhtin and Scottish Literature

Alastair Renfrew

The first textual engagement between Bakhtin and Scottish literature came in David Morris's 1987 article 'Burns and Heteroglossia',¹ published six years after Bakhtin's vogue had been seriously enabled by the English translation of 'Discourse in the Novel' as part of *The Dialogic Imagination* collection.² Morris sees in Bakhtin a potential resolution of the 'linguistic split' that had encumbered Burns's reception in and beyond Scotland, and in so doing implies the productive extension of Bakhtin's ideas into similarly problematic areas of the Scottish literary tradition in general. In another, albeit closely related sense, however, Morris is also responding to a perceived need to rescue the reputation of Burns — who was then a victim of much greater neglect than he is now — by associating him with a prestige figure from the contemporary moment whose primary constituency was not the Scottish or any other 'national' literary tradition, but rather the inter- or even supra-national domain of literary theory. From its very beginnings, and notwithstanding the persuasiveness of much of Morris's analysis, the relationship between Bakhtin and Scottish literature has been as much about prestige and exposure as it has about theory — much less literature.

What Morris had attempted to do for Burns, other critics would, in the early 1990s, attempt to do for an entire literary tradition. Prominent among these was Robert Crawford, who launched a journal and a concept — 'Scotlands', plural — on a wave of affirmatory Bakhtinian diversity.³ Crawford makes his pragmatism quite explicit in the 'Introduction' to his 1993 book *Identifying Poets: Self and Territory in Twentieth-Century Poetry*, which is an attempt both to recuperate the schismatic thinking that has persistently characterised Scottish criticism *and* to place the erstwhile 'marginal' or 'peripheral' at the productive centre of a post-modern world literature. As Crawford writes:

Scottish literature has been ghettoised recently in part at any rate by the refusal of most of its critics to engage with international developments in literary theory.⁴

Quite apart from this local pragmatic motivation, however, there is a sense in which Bakhtin's appeal for Scottish criticism need not be differentiated from the set of reasons for which he initially appealed elsewhere, namely that his ideas are less threatening to the broad humanist project than many of the theoretical trends that preceded him, more easily

reconciled with established critical approaches, and, due to their fragmented publication history, emerged in the West at precisely the point when Theory-with-a-capital-T appeared poised to consume literature and literary criticism whole. Bakhtin's almost uncanny ability to force criticism to rethink its central precepts without quite undermining them altogether is as convincing as any explanation for the sheer force of his vogue in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the same time, however, Bakhtin appeared to offer something more — and more specific — to Scottish criticism than the generalised, 'soft' theoretical alternative that would prove so globally attractive, and in two closely related ways. The first requires us to ask why the situation Crawford describes was able to develop in the first place. How was it that, before Bakhtin, the high Structuralism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which had colonised large swathes of the European and north American humanities, could leave Scottish literary studies largely untouched? Why was the Scottish environment not so much resistant, as virtually deaf to the deconstructive armoury of Structuralism's ungrateful progeny, Jacques Derrida, which might have been turned to account in engagement with the pretensions and aporiae of the dominant discourses of the British state? Or to the related analyses and exposure of structures of power of Michel Foucault, who has at least spawned one of the most memorable puns in Scottish or any other criticism, L.M. Findlay's 'Scots, wha hae their Foucault read'?⁵ Scottish literary studies, as we shall later see, would only respond to Derridean inversion and Foucauldian resistance once they had been absorbed and transformed in the discourses of postcolonial theory, once they had been 'domesticated' and harnessed to a project whose aims could be interpreted primarily, if at the same time a little tendentiously, in terms of national self-determination. Prior to that, however, the inter- or trans-national aspirations of much twentieth-century literary and critical theory, and particularly its late and most concentrated products like Derrida and Foucault, have rendered it consistently inimical to the very notion of literary 'traditions'; hardly inviting territory for the Scottish tradition, which has spent much of the last century struggling, critically at least, for a sense of its own legitimacy and autonomy. Bakhtin, on the other hand, represented a moment of fissure in the fabric of 'international literary theory', through which Scottish literature might rescue itself from marginalisation, without at the same time having to abandon the search for those elements of a 'native' literary culture and criticism that would further, and perhaps even complete, the process of legitimisation from within. It is one of the many paradoxes of all forms of essentialism that external influence might not only be a means by which essentialism can be overcome, but, in different circumstances, a necessary fuel for its further propagation.

The second sense in which Bakhtin has offered something more and more specific to Scottish literary criticism, which is inseparable from this question of simple timing, brings us to the substance of his ideas themselves, or at least those elements of his thinking that dominated his early reception in the West. In their different, if often recklessly conflated ways, the concepts of heteroglossia and carnival seemed, as Morris perceived from the outset, to speak directly to long-standing debates around a literary tradition that had been defined by its linguistic divisions, by its cultural (and linguistic) marginality, and, perhaps above all, which

had made duality its central defining characteristic.⁶ It seems appropriate, therefore, to structure an initial survey of responses to Bakhtin in the Scottish context around these two central ideas — heteroglossia and carnival.

Heteroglossia

David Morris's central claim is that Burns, as a poet who thrives on the tensions between English and Scots diction and between high and low social registers of speech, is a 'native speaker of heteroglossia'.⁷ Carol McGuirk, in a fairly bitter response to Morris, in which she deplores his unwitting collusion in forcing Burns back into the ghetto of 'naturalness' and 'orality', argues that, if Bakhtin is right in his conception of the nature of language, we are all, in effect, 'native speakers' of heteroglossia.⁸ This in fact perfectly dramatises the tensions and critical slippages around Bakhtin and heteroglossia, because both Morris and McGuirk are, to an extent, correct in their ostensibly contradictory assertions. For heteroglossia is presented by Bakhtin as a social fact, and not primarily as a literary property; heteroglossia is the condition of language as such, and not a description of some particular literary use of language. As Bakhtin writes:

the centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a 'unitary language', act in the midst of actual heteroglossia. At every given moment in its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects [...] but also, and for us this is the essential point, into socio-ideological languages: the languages of social groupings, 'professional' languages, 'generic' languages, the languages of different generations, etc.⁹

Heteroglossia may penetrate the literary work to greater or lesser degree, assisted (or hindered) by the range of compositional devices available to different genres at different points in the evolution of any literary system. The novel, of course, is the genre Bakhtin favours as most receptive to heteroglossia (as he looks back over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), but it is implicit that, as literary systems evolve, other forms may become just as receptive. And particular 'vanguard' poets — Bakhtin returns again and again to Pushkin in the Russian context — may herald the 'novelization' of the poetic genres, i.e. their increased ability to absorb and interanimate the languages of heteroglossia. It is clear from our vantage point in time the extent to which this has occurred in modern poetry, in Scotland and elsewhere, so we need not dwell too long, as McGuirk does, on Bakhtin's over-emphasised and mis-read distinction between 'novel' and 'verse'.¹⁰

At those historical moments when these 'languages of heteroglossia' do not simply clash, but encounter one another in a mutually self-defining process of dialogue, language itself is defined as a dynamic and evolving incorporative process. Bakhtin calls this 'dialogized heteroglossia', which is the 'authentic environment of the utterance, in which it lives and takes its shape'.¹¹ One of the disarmingly simple reasons Bakhtin is so interested in literature is that

the epochal boundaries between cultures and ideologies — as Rome absorbs and transforms the language and ideology of Greece, for example — are fairly difficult to monitor. Books, on the other hand, which are utterances made out of the complex organisation of a range of other contingent utterances, offer themselves as specimens in a virtual 'laboratory' for the study of human change, and at the personal as well as the broad social level. It is, however, regrettable that, despite the persistent invocation of heteroglossia in relation to Scottish literature throughout the 1990s, the results from the Scottish laboratory — in critical terms at least, and with notable exceptions — have been somewhat disappointing.

Early 'applications' of Bakhtin to individual writers include Ruth Grogan's judgement that the prevalence of constructions of direct address in the poetry of W.S. Graham is evidence of a 'dialogic imagination';¹² or Sheryl Stevenson, who makes a similar case on the basis of Muriel Spark's collage of registers in *The Abbess of Crewe*.¹³ Yet Bakhtin, as the above definitions imply, is clear that while dialogised heteroglossia may enter the literary work by means of 'surface' compositional forms, the mere presence of the compositional form of dialogue does not necessarily signify dialogism; various compositional forms of dialogue can be controlled in such a manner as to produce nothing more than an authorial monologue.¹⁴ Similarly, the mere presence in the literary work of a diversity of speech forms is not of itself constitutive of dialogism, which depends on the mutual orientation and indeed interpenetration of those forms.¹⁵ This latter point motivates Robert Crawford's slightly more sophisticated attempt to apply Bakhtin in *Identifying Poets*, which still falls short of either illuminating Bakhtin's ideas or the text to which it is applied. Crawford takes the line from MacDiarmid's 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn', 'Mars is braw in crammasy', and argues that the presence in this single line of a single speaker of words that are identifiably Scots — 'braw' and 'crammasy' — and Standard English — 'Mars', 'is' and 'and' — indicates a zone of dialogue between Scots and English world-views, and that the use of this mixed diction is a form of 'dialogized heteroglossia'.¹⁶ Yet there is no attempt to examine the social provenance of the linguistic material — where does it come from? — and little scope, within the context of this single line, for examining the ways in which it conforms (or not) to compositional markers of, for example, change of speaking-subject in the text — in other words, what is it doing there?

J.C. Bittenbender comes closer to the matter in identifying one of the most celebrated fault lines in all of Scottish literature as fertile ground for heteroglossic analysis:¹⁷

Kings may be blest, but *Tam* was glorious,
O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white—then melts forever;

Or like the borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Evanishing amid the storm.—¹⁸

This passage of course provoked Edwin Muir's gaffe about Burns 'thinking in English and feeling in Scots',¹⁹ which has become, in relation to the tradition more broadly, one of the least welcome echoes of Gregory Smith's duality. Bittenbender is right in arguing that the lines and causes of linguistic division are more complex — and more Bakhtinian — than Muir's simplistic dichotomy would suggest. In a development of Thomas Crawford's analysis,²⁰ Bittenbender argues that Burns's abrupt transition to standard English is occasioned not only by the tone of remonstrance that interrupts Tam's mood of exultation, it signals also the *refutation* of that remonstrance through its association with a (parodied) 'official' language. Burns's narrator does not lurch from emotional celebration of bodily pleasure to a rational, sober realisation of the need for restraint, from a celebration of sensual freedom associated with the Scots dialect to a cautious, rational reflection on that freedom associated with (official) English, somewhat in the manner of the competing devils on Oor Wullie's shoulders;²¹ instead, he not only mocks the consciousness that might advise such restraint, but does so by mimicking the linguistic registers in which it might do so and, quite pointedly, their literary manifestation in Augustan verse.²² Two entirely different world-views are indeed brought into contact, as are two social structures, two literary cultures; they are not, however, brought into conflict as such, but rather into a mutually affective 'zone of dialogical contact'. And this is where Bittenbender undermines his own avowedly 'Bakhtinian' approach, by attributing these points of view to 'two narrators', and attempting to reconstruct a compositional dialogue between them.²³ The dialogue, in a Bakhtinian sense, in fact takes place between languages, and between the world-views, social structures and literary cultures they embody; Burns is indeed a 'native speaker of heteroglossia', *pace* Morris, because it is in his language and in his entire socio-cultural profile — in him as a speaking, writing, instantiating human being — that this embodiment is effected.

The above lines from 'Tam o'Shanter' are offered as a point at which the dialogical interaction between languages becomes obvious, or is made obvious through the authorial choices Burns makes. Yet Bakhtin would insist, in vindication this time of McGuirk, that these dialogic 'peaks' are surrounded on all sides by similar if less marked effects, in literature as beyond it, because

dialogic orientation is, of course, characteristic of any discourse — it is the natural disposition of any living word.²⁴

In this context, McGuirk's criticisms of Morris, which are founded on the idea that Morris somehow denies Burns's artistic agency by implying that his gift is to be 'wired to the folk',

that he is a neutral sounding-board for the social life of language, appear misguided. If all discourse is inherently dialogic, a Bakhtinian 'standard' for verbal art implies a new, higher form of verisimilitude: what makes Pushkin²⁵ — and Dostoevsky, for that matter — 'great' in Bakhtin's estimation is this prescient 'receptiveness' to what other writers fail to hear, the personified and embodied *ideologiia* of social life in all its layers and complexities. Indeed, Dostoevsky characterises himself not as a 'psychologist', but rather as 'a realist *in the highest sense*',²⁶ and Bakhtin defines his specificity thus:

Dostoevsky possessed the genius to hear the dialogue of his epoch or, more precisely, to hear his epoch as a great dialogue, to detect in it not just separate voices, but above all *dialogic relations* between voices, their dialogic *interaction*.²⁷

Pushkin and Dostoevsky are not bad company in which to be, as McGuirk complains of Morris's characterisation of Burns, 'an isolated special case'.²⁸

The hunt for heteroglossia in Scottish literature has also, however, in its sublimated competitive desire to capitalise on the linguistic diversity that was for so long regarded as a weakness, led to something of a paradox. The mere presence of diversity of speech or the orchestration of multiple registers has been unproblematically *equated* with heteroglossia in the Scottish context, where in fact they are often indicative of quite the opposite. Further, in a reverse reminder of Bakhtin's general caution with regard to the naked value of diversity of style and register,²⁹ James Kelman, the central figure in the contemporary 'vernacular revival' in Scottish prose fiction, has sought not diversity, but rather to extend the ambit of a single or 'pure' dialect voice into those areas of the narrative from which it has traditionally been excluded; Kelman might thus, in distinction to Burns, be characterised as a native speaker of (literary) *monoglossia*.³⁰ Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late*, for example, is saturated with the single register of its central character. There is little distinction in terms of speech register between the zones of the novel dominated by dialogue, narration or interior monologue; indeed the merging of these zones might be said to be Kelman's explicit aim. By way of contrast, Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* is almost entirely unconcerned with the question of non-standard English, but, through its 'redoubling' of the narrative and its reliance on parody and stylisation, offers more promising ground for an examination of the way in which novels are penetrated by social heteroglossia. Indeed, Gray's somewhat desultory rendition of various regional dialects in *Something Leather* demands to be read not as parodic of those forms of speech in themselves, but rather of the practice and techniques of their representation in fiction. Scottish criticism, in its partial embrace of Bakhtin, has been too willing to read heteroglossia in over-simplistic terms, on one hand as a purely literary property, and on the other, paradoxically, as something socially one-dimensional, and the process of its passage into literature as unproblematically transparent. This returns us to the point from which we began, namely the pathos of a culture or a literary tradition striving above all to establish its

own autonomy. Kelman's literary practice implies that this is best accomplished by 'fend[ing] off the voices and registers of dominant discourse as unworthy dialogic partners', as Donald Wesling has characterised this 'monoglot' strand in modern Scottish fiction generally, arguing in essence that the Bakhtinian idea of heteroglossia is not something the linguistically diverse or 'split' Scottish tradition somehow 'naturally' embodies, but is rather something *against* which it has come to define itself.³¹

Carnival

We might usefully extend the scope of this question by suggesting that various instantiations of Theory-with-a-capital-T have tended to be regarded by Scottish criticism as among the most forbidding and even oppressive of such 'dominant discourses'. This characterisation — and partial explanation — of Scottish criticism's frequent resistance to theory is consistent with the fact that the other Bakhtinian category that has been widely used in the Scottish context, carnival, is uniquely adapted to eluding this perception of external, 'dominant' discourses. Where heteroglossia has spoken to Scottish literature's perennial linguistic divisions, carnival has been invoked as a strategy to explain — and to some extent repair — Scotland's perception of itself as culturally marginal.

We have to begin by noting, however, that such distinctions have not always been terribly clearly observed, and that there has been a fairly dismal tendency for Bakhtin's categories — polyphony, double-voiced discourse, dialogism, as well as carnival and heteroglossia — to be applied as some kind of homogeneous, undifferentiated paste. Any and all of these concepts, each of which has different purchase in the context of Bakhtin's work as a whole, has stood in the Scottish context for something like 'differentness', or maybe even, in certain hands, 'resistance' or 'subversiveness'. The substantive differences between the concepts of heteroglossia and carnival, in particular, have been effaced in the name of swift application, facilitated by a broad assumption of their status as progressive or liberating cognates. J.C. Bittenbender's article, cited above in connection with heteroglossia, is a case in point, traversing the ground around heteroglossia as a brief prelude to the real business of the article, which is, as its title confirms, 'Bakhtinian Carnival in the Poetry of Robert Burns'. Burns's heteroglot practice is implied to be utterly consistent with his status as a poet of the carnivalesque, and heteroglossia is equated with carnival as an identical 'political' strategy.

Bittenbender's article also displays a tendency that has marked critical response to carnival in general:³² while he is assiduous in constructing his picture of the culture of the 'holy fair' in eighteenth-century Scotland from a range of historians as diverse as Callum Brown, Leigh Eric Schmidt and Henry Gray Graham, he never once pauses on the question of the historical provenance of Bakhtin's description of mediaeval carnival. Bakhtin's regard for scholarly propriety has recently been questioned in a number of quarters,³³ and it is clear that, in his migrant and difficult life, which might in some respects be compared to that of a rootless Rabelaisian cleric, his regard for the proper citation and use of sources varied significantly, and from necessity. That life was never more difficult, and sources never more a

matter for equivocation, than during the late 1930s and early 1940s when the bulk of his key text on carnival, *Rabelais and his World*, was written.³⁴ That the book has been re-assessed, if not quite devalued, as a description of mediaeval carnival practice need not necessarily undermine its theoretical potential, in the Scottish context or any other. Yet Bakhtin's persistent accentuation of the positive, liberating, subversive nature of carnival reversal, and his willingness to ignore the dark obverse of the coin, have serious implications: Bakhtin's 'wishfulness' is consistent with and revealing of a similar impulse among Scottish carnivalizers. He is not interested in the licensed violence against minority elements in the community often associated with carnival in central and eastern Europe; nor does he over-emphasise what is carnival's defining characteristic, namely that it is fleeting, and might in fact be argued to *entrench* the structures of authority which are temporarily reversed, but which remain in place when the carnival is over.³⁵ In short, Bakhtin's willingness to allow the evidence to fit the case in hand chimes all too conveniently with the tendency of a culture and/or criticism, striving above all for a sense of its own legitimacy and autonomy, to adapt uncritically — when it does not simply disregard — whatever comes to hand.

The paradox of Bakhtin's *Rabelais* book is that this, ostensibly the most historical of all Bakhtin's writings, relates more to the Stalinist present than to the mediaeval past. When Bakhtin writes of 'the collective ancestral body of the people', for example, or that carnival was

the victory of laughter over fear [...] over the oppression and guilt related to all that was consecrated and forbidden. It was the defeat of divine and human power, of authoritarian commandments and prohibitions, of death and punishment after death,³⁶

he invokes Stalin's systematic slaughter of the class to which Bakhtin had belonged (and perhaps also the apocalyptic conflict that was to come). The *Rabelais* book is a kind of secular prayer that the 'collective ancestral body of the people' will survive.

When we seek to 'apply' this already historically skewed account back onto periods when a recognisable 'carnival culture' still existed — eighteenth-century Scotland, perhaps — we enter a hall of mirrors and risk authoring a series of absurdities. Bittenbender's article, for example, concludes with the claim that

By recognising these carnivalesque qualities [grotesque imagery, popular festive forms, and other literary manifestations of folk culture as indications of the 'eternal incomplete unfinished nature of being'] in the poetry of Burns, we are able to see his writings as a challenge to the cultural limitations of his times.³⁷

Are we? Or does Burns's proximity to these still extant manifestations of 'carnival culture' locate him all the more firmly in the culture of his times? And from which perspective do we construct the 'limitations' of that culture? From Bakhtin's experience of an over-determined form of an almost feudal oppression still manifest in the modern era? Or are we condemned to the fruitless conflation of four historical perspectives, our own inevitably predominating?

Even more worrying is Liam Mcllvaney's attempt to rescue one of Burns's bawdy songs 'Why Shouldna Poor Folk Mowe' from the implicitly terrible fate of being classified as 'satire'.³⁸ Mcllvaney argues that Bakhtin's derision of the Duke of Brunswick and Frederick William II is ambivalent, and associates this attitude with Bakhtinian 'carnival folk humour'. Furthermore, Burns's strategy of 'bringing low' the elevated imperial figures of the late eighteenth century by inviting them all to engage in the ultimate democratic activity, namely sex, allows Mcllvaney to bring out the persistence of reference to what Bakhtin calls the 'lower bodily stratum' within the armoury of 'folk humour'. Acts of ingestion and expulsion emphasise the limits of the physical body as it interacts with the world, and are characterised as tropes of renewal. The key trope of renewal, of course, is copulation, which emphasises not only the relationship of the body to the world, but also the social relations between bodies, and even the creation of new bodies. Yet Burns does not invite all the grand personages of eighteenth-century Europe to engage in copulation equally: Brunswick and Frederick are invited, in the modern idiom, to 'go and take a good fuck to themselves'; but King George and his good Queen Charlotte are the object of a quite different invitation, the more positive if still reductively ambivalent 'And lang may they tak a gude mowe'. When Burns turns to Catherine the Great, however, the only female sovereign to be subjected to his 'folk humour', Mcllvaney persists in his somewhat homogeneous reading of the impact of the imagery of the lower bodily stratum:

The treatment of the monarchs and nobles [...] is not merely abusive and one-sided. In true carnival fashion, the humour is ambivalent, it renews as it degrades. Burns does not mount a bitter satirical attack on the song's great personages; he laughingly explodes their pretensions by means of the imagery of the lower stratum.³⁹

And what does Burns wish upon the unfortunate Catherine? 'May the deil in her a— ram a huge prick o' brass!' Or, in other words, that she be sodomised by the devil using an enormous brass dildo. Is this ambivalent humour, which 'renews as it degrades'? Mcllvaney calls it 'comically impossible',

[it] has the flamboyancy of a formalised cursing rather than the gravity of a serious attack. On the one hand, the aim is certainly to degrade and debunk the great folk, to bring them down to earth. Nevertheless, though they lose

their epic distance and finish, the notables are reborn as full-blooded social folk.⁴⁰

All of which begs several questions about the provenance of this particular strategy of resistance, and the nature of its appeal to a certain strand of Scottish criticism.

McIlvanney contextualises Burns's lines against the background of the Revolutionary war, but they might also have been placed in the more specific context of eighteenth-century popular discourses around the French revolution, which emerged as a satirical rejoinder to the official literature that characteristically figured Louis XVI as a divine, omnipotent father. The popular songs, poems and quasi-fictional narratives that accompanied the 'bringing low' of Louis and, to an extent, prepared and authorised his later execution, increasingly employed what Antoine de Baecque calls 'pornographic attack', which figured Louis's impotence through accounts of the sexual licentiousness of his wife Marie-Antoinette.⁴¹ Catherine is not, however, merely a secondary target, but a sovereign in her own right, personally associated with state repression, and not identifiable as part of a couple or associated with a male partner (whom, moreover, she is reputed to have killed on her way to the throne). She is therefore the object of a quite different 'pornographic attack', provoked by a male reading of her 'unnaturalness', in which the devil himself assumes the vacant role of her 'natural' partner; the same devil, we might reflect, who will elsewhere chat in the vernacular with Burns's everyman and complain of being outwitted by Jock Hornbrook. It is difficult to see how the figure of Catherine thus loses only her 'epic distance', how she is reborn as a 'full-blooded social' person; on the contrary, Catherine is not the object of a 'formalised cursing', but, alone among the dignitaries lampooned in the poem, of the gravest form of 'pornographic attack'.

Such applications' effacement of gender are a symptom of the broad tendency of secondary uses of Bakhtin to cut themselves loose from the imperatives of even the most rudimentary historicism, a tendency that is all the more pronounced in specific relation to carnival. This is vividly dramatised by the fact that even our tentative attempt to mount a 'historicising' defence of Burns in this context serves only to emphasise the profound *ahistoricism* of the invocation of carnival in the first place, and its attendant and falsely homogenous characterisations of, to take just a single example, the imagery of the 'lower bodily stratum'. All of this is, once again, consistent with and illustrative of the false homogeneity that has been built around a particular, and flawed, thinker such as Bakhtin.

Many of the dangers posed by such ahistoricism and false homogeneity are avoided, however, in what is the most sophisticated and sustained invocation of carnival in Scottish criticism, Christopher Whyte's two-part 'Bakhtin at Christ's Kirk', which is distinguished throughout by a determination above all to differentiate, with regard equally to Bakhtin and to the specifics of the Scottish tradition he is called to address.⁴² Whyte's initial exposition of a broad Bakhtinian theory of carnival is almost immediately related to a specific and recurrent problem in critical response to 'Christis Kirk on the Green', namely the dynamics of its form of address, the precise locus of which is, in a sense, 'tested' against the co-ordinates of that

theory. This sense in which the literary material is cause and requirement of the means of its analysis, and not the reverse, is further reinforced as Whyte essays a historical survey of the extent to which carnival elements have survived in later redactions of the poem, most notably Allan Ramsay's, and in later exemplars of the genre or 'tradition' it bequeathed to modern Scottish literature, including poems by John Skinner, Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns. Whyte first utilises Bakhtin's distinction between the character of folk laughter in the medieval period and the denuded and one-dimensional forms it assumes in the seventeenth century in order to 'predict' the 'dilution or disintegration of carnival elements' in Ramsay's versions;⁴³ it is at this point, however, when the vernacular revival Ramsay did so much to foster begins to flower, that a yet more productive tension opens up between the development of the Scottish tradition and Bakhtin's implied template. In arguing that Ramsay's 'antiquarianism' in relation to 'Christis Kirk' represented an 'anomaly', 'a direction that the tradition was not to take', Whyte implicitly sets the development of the later Scottish tradition up in opposition to Bakhtin's model of the fate of folk laughter in European literature as a whole. Bakhtin, initially called to shed light on a specific problem in relation to 'Christ's Kirk', is now, in a simultaneous critical expansion and reversal, called to cast an interrogative light on the development of the 'Christ's Kirk' tradition and, by implication, on the development of the later Scottish tradition as a whole. What has begun in application of a particular strand of the thinking of an 'outside' critical influence, culled from the ranks of 'international literary theory', ends by exceeding the terms of its own initial surmise, by pursuing a line of inquiry into an aspect of the Scottish tradition that, while it has been enabled by Bakhtin's conception of folk laughter and its absorption into the forms of literature, ceases in its later stages to *depend* on that concept.

This is a demonstration of both the power and the limitations of the concept of carnival itself, as well as a slightly unexpected explanation of why Whyte is able so deftly to survey a broad range of literary-historical material through the prism of carnival, without falling into the kind of ahistoricism that would altogether undermine his project.⁴⁴ Where Bittenbender and McIlvanney have become victims of a kind of historical paradox, their broad historical 'good faith' being undermined by the ahistorical or transhistorical essence of Bakhtin's concept itself, Whyte eludes this paradox — and produces another — by implicitly recognising the specific limitations of carnival from the outset. As Whyte writes of the choices facing John Skinner in his later renovation of the Christ's Kirk tradition, 'The Christmass Bawing':

When dealing with 'Christ's Kirk' and 'Peblis to the Play', the question of the relation of those poems to actual social practice could only be adumbrated. Such investigations pertain to anthropology.⁴⁵

This might stand also as a description of the choices facing the *critic*, as a statement of the broad critical methodology that underpins Whyte's analysis, and of its implied definition of the uses and limitations of the concept of carnival. Whyte regards carnival, quite properly, as a

literary-historical category, and not as a social or anthropological one, which must first prove or justify itself against extraneous historical descriptions or reconstructions of the social practices it evokes. In this there are implied limitations, of course, as carnival is admitted to pertain exclusively to literature and literary history; there are also, however, concomitant strengths, in that the literary critic is not led, in blithe acceptance of Bakhtin's category without regard for the contingent game it plays with history, on to the shifting ground of a kind of quasi-history, which is adequate neither to the literary text, nor to its contextual relations to the social history that constrains it.

Long Farewells?

The process of Bakhtin's assimilation into the critical discourse of Scottish literature might therefore be described, with the exceptions to which we have alluded, as a series of all-too-brief encounters, which have not reflected particularly well on either party. This is not to say, however, despite the passing of Bakhtin's vogue in recent years and what some have been prepared to characterise as a crisis in critical theory broadly, that Bakhtin's potential value for Scottish literature was over-estimated from the very beginning, or that, by extension, it has since been thoroughly exhausted. The factors that initially drew Scottish criticism to Bakhtin have hardly receded, and the broad questions of linguistic and national self-identification around which they are clustered have, if anything, been thrown into sharper relief by Scotland's invocation in the context of debates around postcoloniality, and by the related if not resultant re-examination of its literary, philosophical and cultural history that marked the turn of the century. I want to conclude, therefore, by outlining three broad areas in which Bakhtin's thought continues to be of the most pressing relevance for Scottish literary and cultural studies.

Cairns Craig, in particular, has insisted that the proper scope of heteroglossic analysis extends far beyond the establishment of the relations between a diversity of 'voices', whether within the context of a single utterance or of modern Scottish fiction in its entirety.⁴⁶ Unconcerned with the problem of a counter-intuitive monoglossia we referred to in relation to James Kelman, Craig has argued that Kelman's ability to harness 'two different linguistic consciousnesses [...] in the hybrid structure of a single sentence' is not simply evidence of his artistic control over the flux of heteroglossia; it is also, far more significantly, the basis for a strategy that helps align Scottish writing 'with those "postcolonial" cultures which were producing some of the most theoretically inspiring contemporary writing'.⁴⁷ This argument claims a place for Scottish culture among the 'hybrid' cultures of the re-nascent former colonial territories, but also emphasises another and hugely significant element of Scotland's particular — and in fact unique — hybridity: its status, notwithstanding the internal divisions that have occupied us to this point, as a former *colonising* nation. Craig thus attempts to place Scotland at the very fulcrum of world culture from a post-historical perspective,⁴⁸ and in a manner that is even more thoroughly Bakhtinian than he claims: Scotland's status as an at once colonised and colonising nation perfectly parallels Bakhtin's conception of double-voiced

discourse, at once represented and representing.⁴⁹ What is striking here, in distinction to the difficulties we noted earlier in relation to carnival, is the way in which the ostensibly literary category reveals itself — and hence the literary text — as the basis for an integrated analysis of social and historical phenomena that lie — *only ostensibly* — beyond it. Bakhtin's sense of deep stylistic analysis characterises a nation's literature as a potential site for an essentially unmediated reading of its culture, dispensing with imperfect notions of how literature 'reflects' social and historical forces, and substituting a sense of how it might, in its substantive and linguistic unity, *embody* them. As such, it might provide a theoretical basis for something that is conspicuously absent from Scottish literary criticism, and which is required if recent discourses around post-coloniality are to be meaningfully grounded: a history of Scottish literature and colonialism, and one that is not one-dimensionally derivative of the valuable but incomplete work in this area that has been done in the field of history as such, but is able instead to constitute its object as simultaneously literary and historical.⁵⁰

The second broad area in which Bakhtin's thought might prove productive in the Scottish context picks up on a small, but undeveloped thread in his Scottish reception. Both David Morris and Robert Crawford note the presence in Burns's 'To a Louse' of what might be termed a Bakhtinian 'headline': 'O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us / To see ourselves as others see us'. Both of course note the general significance of this 'universal sentiment' for Bakhtinian and other modern conceptions of self and other, but they also refer, ostensibly tangentially, to its possible source in Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.⁵¹ And here great vistas open up before our eyes: the entire pathos of Bakhtin's work turns on a sense of man's emergence into the period of modernity, the badge of that emergence being linguistically-mediated self-recognition as a socially-constructed being. Only Vivienne Brown has been prepared to make an explicit examination of the central claims of the Scottish Enlightenment through the lens of Bakhtin, focusing most productively on a more extensive reading of Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.⁵² Brown acknowledges Smith's debt to Stoic thinking in a manner that is designed also to locate Bakhtin himself in a much longer tradition of dialogical thought, and in so doing effectuates a subtle reversal: Brown does not in the end attempt the application of Bakhtin *ex post facto* to the 'Scottish tradition', but raises instead the possibility of charting and even testing the veracity of Bakhtin's broad conception of the history of the humanities on Scottish ground. The resultant project might, albeit somewhat provocatively, be entitled 'the dialogic enlightenment', and would begin by comprehensively re-examining the philosophical roots of Smith and other Enlightenment thinkers in the dialogical thought of Antiquity. It would also, however, reach forward to examine the influence of the Enlightenment on three later Scottish philosophers, Andrew Seth, John Macmurray and Alasdair MacIntyre, who Cairns Craig, once again, has characterised as representatives of a kind of 'native' dialogical thought.⁵³ The outcome, as was the case with the extension of heteroglossic analysis as a basis for the conceptualisation of Scotland's 'duality' as colonising and colonised culture, would be a non-prejudicial, evenly-weighted comparative cultural analysis, in which Bakhtin, in a metaphor to which he himself

had recourse, would constitute an element of the critical scaffolding, to be removed once the project had reached a certain self-sustaining stage in its development,⁵⁴ rather than a disembodied and abstract 'key' to an essentially alien problem.

The third area in which Bakhtin might remain particularly productive for Scottish criticism has less historical and philosophical scope, but it is no less fundamental in specifically literary terms. It in fact has its roots in a negative inference that might be drawn from Bakhtin, and relates to the particular, not to say idiosyncratic, evolution of genre in the Scottish literary tradition. Bakhtin, as we have seen, ostensibly champions the novel as the pre-eminent genre of modernity, arguing that the novel has been uniquely receptive to those forms of dialogized heteroglossia that echo forth from the diverse social life of language. Even the briefest glance at the history of Scottish literature will tell us — at least until very recently, and long beyond the timescale of Bakhtin's version of the 'rise of the novel' — that this, for us, has been far from the case. For long periods in Scottish literature it has in fact been the verse forms that have served as the carriers for Bakhtin's diversity of speech types, and, as even our brief reference to Burns will confirm, have been compositionally sufficient for their dialogic interanimation. A history of the evolution of genre in the Scottish literary tradition might usefully take Bakhtin's theory as its point of embarkation, but only, to put it at its simplest, in order to challenge it. This is the point at which the attempted 'application' of an element of Bakhtin's thought in the Scottish context might become just as productive — if not more so — for the former as it is for the latter. Bakhtin's treatment of heteroglossia in 'Discourse in the Novel', along with much of his book on Dostoevsky and the much later 'The Problem of Speech Genres', are in fact components of a grandiose and unfinished attempt to re-order our entire perception of literary modes and genres, and their evolution in complex relation to the evolution of language and society.⁵⁵ Bakhtin posits, but never fully realises, an entirely new conception of literary genre, which would replace what it might appear almost scandalous to term 'surface' distinctions between novel and verse with deeply determined stylistic profiles that are organically connected to the life of the society that produces them. To return to the pragmatic note sounded at the beginning, we can only speculate as to what exemplification and development of this grand project on the basis of Scottish material might do for the international 'prestige' of Scottish literature.

NOTES

¹ Morris, David B. Burns and heteroglossia, *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 28.1 (1987), 3–27.

² Bakhtin, M.M. Slovo v romane. In *Voprosy literatury i estetiki. Issledovaniia raznykh let*, ed. S. Leibovich, Moscow, 1975, 72–233; Discourse in the novel. In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, Texas, 1981, 259–422.

³ Crawford, Robert. Bakhtin and Scotlands, *Scotlands*, 1 (1994), 55–65.

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- ⁴ Crawford, Robert. *Identifying Poets: Self and Territory in Twentieth-Century Poetry*, Edinburgh, 1993, 5.
- ⁵ Findlay, L.M. 'Perilous Linguists': Scots, wha hae their Foucault read... In Alexander, J.H. and David Hewitt, eds, *Scott in Carnival*, Aberdeen, 1993, 27–39.
- ⁶ It may seem almost superfluous in this respect to refer to G. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*, London, 1919, which not only gave birth to 'Scottish Literature' as a discrete area for academic study, but in so doing also determined that debates around duality and schism would be one of its most persistent features; see also Wittig, Kurt. *The Scottish Tradition in Literature*, Edinburgh, 1958.
- ⁷ Morris, 1987, 13. The roots of Morris's analysis may lie in Thomas Crawford's disarmingly simple statement that, in 'Tam O'Shanter', '[Burns] speaks with several different voices': Crawford, Thomas. *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs*, Edinburgh and London, 1960, 223.
- ⁸ McGuirk, Carol. Burns, Bakhtin, and the opposition of poetic and novelistic discourse: a response to David Morris, *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 32.1 (1991), 58–72 (65).
- ⁹ Bakhtin, 1981, 271–2.
- ¹⁰ Bakhtin's distinction between novel and verse is partly an over-determined response to the (equally over-determined) insistence of early Russian Formalism on the location of 'literariness' in a distinct 'poetic' language, and gradually gives way, as we shall later see, to a perception of the need for a more fundamental renovation of the entire system of literary genre than the mere displacement of verse forms by the novel.
- ¹¹ Bakhtin, 1981, 272.
- ¹² Grogan, Ruth. W.S. Graham: a dialogical imagination, *English Studies in Canada*, 15.2 (1989), 196–213.
- ¹³ Stevenson, Sheryl. 'Poetry deleted', parody added: Watergate, Spark's style and Bakhtin's stylistics, *Ariel: A Journal of International English Literature*, 24.4 (1993), 71–85.
- ¹⁴ Bakhtin, M.M. *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* [1963]. In *Problemy tvorchestva/poetiki Dostoevskogo*, Kiev, 1994), 205–492; *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, Minneapolis and London, 1984, 17; see also Bakhtin, 1981, 279.
- ¹⁵ Bakhtin, 1981, 284–5; 366.
- ¹⁶ Crawford, 1993, 7; MacDiarmid, Hugh. *Complete Poems*, ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken, Manchester, 1993, vol. 1, 17.
- ¹⁷ Bittenbender, J.C. Bakhtinian carnival in the poetry of Robert Burns', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 21.2 (1994), 23–38.
- ¹⁸ Burns, Robert. *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, Oxford, 1968, vol. 2, 559.
- ¹⁹ Muir, Edwin. *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer*, London, 1936, in particular 27–30. It should perhaps be said in Muir's defence that the consistency of Burns's register in his letters, for example, does tend to suggest that he was susceptible to some form of institutionalised linguistic 'split', which might be examined in terms of social conventions and genre rather than anything as crude as the thought/feeling dichotomy: see Mackay, James A., ed. *The Complete Letters of Robert Burns*, Ayr, 1987.
- ²⁰ Crawford argues that Burns utilises 'the voice and manner of an educated Scots eighteenth-century poet' in order to 'bathe the whole scene in the warm light of his irony': Crawford, 1960, 224.
- ²¹ This image is itself grounded in the Aristotelian psychological duality, which took on a specifically Scottish attenuation during the Enlightenment.

²² We might compare this with the narrator's earlier remonstrance, given in a form of free indirect speech, and embodying (and gently mocking) the point of view of Kate by retaining intact *her* linguistic profile: 'She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum, / A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum'; Burns, 1968, vol. 2, 558.

²³ Christopher Whyte rejects both Muir's 'now discarded' dissociationism in general and Bittenbender's proposed reconstruction of a compositional dialogue in particular, but does so at a very high price: Whyte insists that, in 'Tam o'Shanter' if not in 'Holy Willie's Prayer', 'two distinct voices are not perceptible, nor is one aware of two opposing purposes conflicting with one another in the words of the text', a quite remarkable reading, especially when specifically prompted by the chasm of linguistic consciousness that exists between the lines 'Kings may be blest, but *Tam* was glorious, / O'er a' the ill o' life victorious!' and 'But pleasures are like poppies spread'. This is compounded by the fact that the 'tests' to which he subjects the poem in this respect are drawn from Bakhtin's definition of parody, a definition given in order to emphasise not the nature of parody itself, but rather its suitability, among a series of other 'compositional devices', for the facilitation and foregrounding of 'double-voiced discourse', which is precisely what Burns achieves (and without, crucially, the compositional markers sought elsewhere by Bittenbender). See Whyte, Christopher. Defamiliarising 'Tam o'Shanter', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 20.1 (1993), 5–18 (15–16); see also Bakhtin, 1984, 185–6.

²⁴ Bakhtin, 1981, 279.

²⁵ Bakhtin returns to Pushkin for exemplary material most notably in Bakhtin, M.M. The problem of content, material and form in verbal art. In *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom, Austin, Texas, 1990, 257–325 (296–8), and in Bakhtin, 1981, 322–3, 329.

²⁶ Cited from Bakhtin, 1984, 60.

²⁷ Bakhtin, 1984, 90. Compare Bakhtin's much later comment on his own critical practice: 'I hear voices in everything and dialogic relations between them'; Bakhtin, M.M. K metodologii gumanitarnykh nauk. In *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, ed. S.G. Bocharov, Moscow, 1979, 361–73; Toward a methodology for the Human Sciences. In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee, Austin, Texas, 1986, 159–77 (169).

²⁸ McGuirk, 1991, 69.

²⁹ Bakhtin is moved in emphasis of this point to the uncharacteristically bad-tempered castigation of 'the frivolous, mindless and unsystematic mixing of languages — often bordering on simple illiteracy' of 'mediocre prose writers [...] This is not orchestration by means of heteroglossia, but in most cases merely a directly authorial language that is impure and incompletely worked out': Bakhtin, 1981, 366.

³⁰ For a more extended discussion of the novel's refutation of diversity of speech, one that incidentally borrows John M. Kirk's coinage 'schizoglossia' in characterisation of Kelman's work, see Renfrew, Alastair. Them and us? Representation of speech in contemporary Scottish fiction. In Renfrew, Alastair, ed. *Exploiting Bakhtin*, Glasgow, 1997, 15–28.

³¹ Wesling, Donald. Mikhail Bakhtin and the social poetics of dialect, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 29.3 (1993), 303–22.

³² For a brief critical survey of this tendency, see Humphrey, Chris. Bakhtin and the study of popular culture: re-thinking carnival as a historical and analytical concept. In Brandist, Craig and Galin Tihanov, eds, *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory*, Basingstoke and London, 2000, 164–72.

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- ³³ See in particular Matejka, Ladislav. Deconstructing Bakhtin. In Mihailescu, C.A and W. Hamarneh, eds, *Fiction Updated: Theories of Fictionality, Narratology, and Poetics*, Toronto, 1996, 257–66.
- ³⁴ Bakhtin, M.M. *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Renessansa*, Moscow, 1990 [1965]; *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1968.
- ³⁵ See Ryklin, Mikhail. Bodies of terror: theses towards a logic of violence, *New Literary History*, 24.1 (1993), 51–74; see also, in the specifically Scottish context, Watson, Roderick. Speaking in tongues: reflections after Bakhtin on the Scots literary tradition and contemporary writing. In Renfrew, 1997, 1–14.
- ³⁶ Bakhtin, 1968, 90.
- ³⁷ Bittenbender, 1994, 36.
- ³⁸ McIlvanney, Liam. 'Why shouldna poor folk mowe': Bakhtinian folk humour in Burn's [sic] bawdry, *Scottish Literary Journal*, 23.2 (1996), 43–53.
- ³⁹ McIlvanney, 1996, 50.
- ⁴⁰ McIlvanney, 1996, 50.
- ⁴¹ de Baecque, Antoine. *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770–1800*, trans. Charlotte Mundell, Stanford, 1997, 29–75 (50); see also Darnton, Robert. *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, London, 1996, which strongly equates obscene and pornographic literature with political resistance and subversion; and deJean, Joan. *The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France*, Chicago and London, 2002, which offers a corrective view based on the idea that pornography, in its gendered one-dimensionality, works for the normalisation and entrenchment of (male) authority.
- ⁴² Whyte, Christopher. Bakhtin at Christ's Kirk: Carnival and the Scottish Renaissance, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 28 (1993), 178–203; Whyte, Christopher. Bakhtin at Christ's Kirk, II: Carnival and the Vernacular Revival, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 29 (1996), 134–57.
- ⁴³ Whyte, 1993, 197.
- ⁴⁴ See also in this respect the volume from which we earlier cited L.M. Findlay's pun on Foucault, Alexander and Hewitt's *Scott in Carnival*, a collection of essays from the third international Scott conference in Edinburgh in 1991, at which participants were invited to consider new critical approaches to Scott: 'around half of them responded by invoking Mikhail Bakhtin to a greater or lesser extent', the editors' tell us in their preface, to their own very palpable surprise (Alexander and Hewitt, 1993, vii). The resultant volume is both productively and sometimes frustratingly uneven, but its title is also extremely deceptive; of the volume's 49 essays, only two are in fact more than superficially concerned with Bakhtin, and neither depends centrally on the concept of carnival: see Diedrick, James. Dialogical history in *Ivanhoe*, 280–93, and Worth, Christopher. Scott, story-telling and subversion: dialogism in *Woodstock*, 380–92, both in Alexander and Hewitt, 1993.
- ⁴⁵ Whyte, 1996, 134.
- ⁴⁶ Craig, Cairns. *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination*, Edinburgh, 1999, 30–31.
- ⁴⁷ Craig, Cairns. Scotland and hybridity. In Carruthers, Gerard, et al, eds, *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, Amsterdam and New York, 2004, 229–53 (235).
- ⁴⁸ We must once again be aware, however, that such a post-historical characterisation of Scottish culture is partially underpinned by immediate pragmatic motivations; it is in fact, as Craig freely acknowledges, a direct response to recent constructions of Irish literature and culture as somehow 'originally' postcolonial and at the same time the pre-eminent exemplar of Bakhtinian hybridity. It is

important not to lose sight, at the very least, of the extent to which contemporary criticism — and academic criticism in particular — is driven by the imperatives of what can loosely be termed a ‘market’, in which variously packaged critical goods compete for circulation. The principal point of reference here is Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland*, London, 1995.

⁴⁹ Bakhtin, 1981, 287.

⁵⁰ See for example Kidd, Colin. *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World*, Cambridge, 1999; Fry, Michael. *The Scottish Empire*, East Linton, 2001. [Douglas S. Mack’s *Scottish Fiction and the British Empire*, Edinburgh 2006, which appeared between this article’s submission and appearance, is a history of Scottish literature and colonialism which indeed ‘constitute[s] its object as simultaneously literary and historical’ – Ed.]

⁵¹ Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, Oxford, 1976 [1759].

⁵² Brown, Vivienne. The dialogic experience of conscience: Adam Smith and the voices of Stoicism, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 26.2 (1992–93), 233–60; Brown, Vivienne. Dialogism, the gaze, and the emergence of economic discourse, *New Literary History*, 28.4 (1997), 697–710. In the second of these Brown notes Tzvetan Todorov’s invocation of Smith in pursuit of the theorization of the role of ‘the internalised gaze of others’ in the construction of conscience: see Todorov, Tzvetan. Living alone together, *New Literary History*, 27.1 (1996), 1–14.

⁵³ Craig, 1999, 22–33; Craig, 2004, 240–41.

⁵⁴ Bakhtin, 1981, 331.

⁵⁵ Bakhtin, M.M. Problema rechevykh zhanrov. In *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. S.G. Bocharov and L.A. Gogotishvili, Moscow, 1996, vol. 5, 159–206; The problem of speech genres. In Bakhtin, 1986, 60–102.

White Men on Their Backs – From Objection to Abjection: The Representation of the White Male as Victim in William McIlvanney’s *Docherty* and Irvine Welsh’s *Marabou Stork Nightmares*

Carole Jones

‘In his utter defeat there was an absolute power.’¹

The above quotation from William McIlvanney’s 1975 novel *Docherty* introduces concisely the subject of this article, the representation of men as victims and the complex resonances of such a depiction in the Scottish context. The notion of power in male defeat is, according to Ben Knights, an integral characteristic of a dominant western literary tradition where ‘so much of the weight of the available narrative stock concerns male success, triumph, or triumph’s counterpart, glorious defeat’.² The vaunted cultural kudos in this way attached to being overcome is demonstrated towards the end of *Docherty* in the scene of the eponymous protagonist Tam Docherty’s death where, in a pit accident, he is buried by a roof-fall after saving a fellow miner by pushing him out of the way. This heroic demise saves Tam from an ignominious alcoholic decline that is beginning to creep into the narrative as he struggles to cope with despair and disillusion in the twilight of his working life. As the text describes it: ‘They saw a hand projecting from the rubbish, fixed in its final reflex, Tam Docherty’s hand. It was pulped by the weight of the fall. The hand was clenched’ (p. 301). The clenched fist of defiance is testament to Tam’s power in defeat.

It is compelling to compare this image of glorious defeat with the picture we are left with at the end of Irvine Welsh’s 1995 novel *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. Here the protagonist and narrator, Roy Strang, lies in a hospital bed in a coma after an unsuccessful suicide attempt. At the end of the novel he is killed by Kirsty, the victim of a gang rape in which Roy was the leader. For her revenge she cuts off his eyelids, then cuts off his penis and chokes him with it. The novel approaches its close with ‘the hysterical screaming of Nurse Patricia Devine. She’s watching me smoking my own penis like a limp, wet cigar, staring with horror into my eyes that cannot shut’.³ This is not glorious defeat; the text revels in the graphically presented image of a shamed and fatally wounded masculinity, irredeemably prostrate, disabled and murdered. Twenty years after *Docherty* the parameters of imagining the male as victim are drastically changed.

This paper explores the significance of this movement from glorious to inglorious male victimhood, from, as it were, the heroic masculinity of *Docherty* to the toxic masculinity of *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. My interrogation of the transition from a more traditional representation of an oppressed working class to the portrayal of an abject masculine victim is grounded in the Scottish setting, but here I situate these texts in relation to a wider cultural context and employ interpretive paradigms from other locations. Such a reading is a productively reflexive process: the broader, international perspective promotes a movement away from the framing of a debilitatingly fractured culture characterised by an infamous doubleness, a conception that has 'constrained Scottish criticism in its insistence on the idea of a tradition defined by *internal* oppositions',⁴ and of Scottishness as a 'damaged identity';⁵ in turn, contextualising this writing in terms of international cultural processes brings into relief the complexities of the Scottish situation. Such a perspective favours the medium of the prism over the magnifying glass.

In particular, this essay reads these Scottish novels by way of certain critical approaches that examine and question the empowered, normative authority of masculinity and whiteness in western culture, categories highly relevant to these texts, and indeed the Scottish context. Firstly, the consideration of men as victims has been a framework for various studies of male identity within the most recent manifestation of the discourse of western masculinity in crisis.⁶ Most pertinently, in *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (2000) Sally Robinson's central argument is that white masculinity in the North American cultural context often represents itself as victimized by 'inhabiting a wounded body', and she perceives a 'substitution of the personal for the political' in such representations.⁷ As we shall see, this analysis resonates in what I have pinpointed as a critical move from *Docherty* to *Marabou Stork Nightmares*.

Secondly, this article principally attends to how the construction of male victimhood in these novels, to a significant extent, is activated through themes and imagery of racial difference. Both texts employ discourses relating to race, from a colonial or postcolonial perspective, to associate Tam Docherty and Roy Strang with black identities, though certainly with differing effects. Such strategies are a significant detail in a context where 'the invisibility of black Scots both in contemporary culture and in the wider society' was not noted or critiqued until relatively recently.⁸ As Gail Low writes, '[In] questions posed by an exploration of "Black British" [...] what has been missing from the fray in the era of devolution is any discussion of how "Black British" intersects with the production of Scottish identities.'⁹ So the presence of these discourses in this writing is notable, signalling as it does that, although non-white subjects may be largely absent from the main body of Scottish literature, the issue of race is often a formative if marginalised

influence. Though rarely focussed on by Scottish creative writers and critics, the politics of racialised power relations can play a controversial role in the conceptualising of Scottish identity as revealed in these texts. In foregrounding and questioning the construction of victimhood through discourses of racial difference, this article explores the Scottish context to compose a critique of the cultural reproduction of the dominance of white masculinity.¹⁰

The male as victim is a common subject in contemporary Scottish fiction, and there are a fair number of wounded and even dead men in the writing of a variety of contemporary authors, such as Alasdair Gray, James Kelman, Irvine Welsh, Alan Warner, Janice Galloway, and A.L. Kennedy. In his essay 'Masculinities in Contemporary Scottish Fiction' (1998), Christopher Whyte observes that, 'The reclining male, a hero who is incapacitated in some way and may even be hospitalised, recurs frequently [...] The reclining position is of course, traditionally and stereotypically, a "feminine" one. These fictional male figures are incapable of adopting an upright, "erect" pose and remain horizontal.'¹¹ This is significant in relation to an idea that Whyte puts forward earlier in that article. He describes a 'representational pact' where:

One may posit a demand on the part of the Scottish middle class for fictional representations from which it is itself excluded; a demand, in other words, for textual invisibility. This would connect with the widespread perception of the Scottish middle classes as 'denationalised', as less Scottish in terms of speech and social practice than the lower classes. The task of embodying and transmitting Scottishness is, as it were, devolved to the unemployed, the socially underprivileged, in both actual and representational contexts.¹²

If this is the case, that a Scottish establishment is happy to let Scottishness be represented by a more masculine (that is, stronger and more dominant) and purportedly more authentically and faithfully Scottish (that is, not 'denationalised') lower class, then why are these images so often of supine, defeated men?

One answer to this question is proposed by Sally Robinson. She points out that since the 1960s, in the 'post-liberationist' North American context, dominant masculinity, increasingly undermined in its cultural authority, has become increasingly visible as wounded in cultural representations, and she interprets this as a process of recentering through victimhood the displaced and discredited middle-class, white male who has traditionally defined normativity and led the establishment. Throughout western societies in the post-1960s era, what has become known as 'identity politics' has been successful in winning rights and equality for those marginalised and oppressed by that establishment, such as women, ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians. This has created a society that is, as Robinson terms it, 'so taken with the dynamics of victimization'.¹³ In such a context the dominant white masculinity is brought into question and undermined in its authority, so that, as Robinson writes:

In order for white masculinity to negotiate its position within the field of identity politics, white men must claim a symbolic disenfranchisement, must compete with various others for cultural authority bestowed upon the authentically disempowered, the visibly wounded.¹⁴

Therefore claiming victimhood in a society that valorises victims is a way of claiming authority; on the part of white men, Robinson describes this as a process of 'recentering white masculinity by decentering it'. Can we read the wounded white men of Scottish fiction as part of a similar process?

Certainly the Scottish context complicates Robinson's thesis. These are representations of working-class men, and as such they constitute an 'other' against which a dominant middle-class male establishment traditionally defines itself. However, this difference has its advantages in that the discredited authority of the dominant masculinity attaches itself to these working-class men, as does the weakness and defeat that underlies these representations. In effect, middle-class masculinity benefits from this self-immolation, as in Robinson's thesis, while also being distanced from it.¹⁵ However, in a further nuance I propose that it is easier to confer victimhood upon working-class men through discourses of race, as we will see. In the circumstances, it is worth analysing how these writers construct their male characters as victims, and by what associations they authenticate that victimhood.

William McIlvanney wrote *Docherty* in the early 1970s, publishing it in 1975, at a time of gathering industrial crisis and decline. To take just one instance, the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, the bastion of shipbuilding on the Clyde, announced it was going into receivership in 1971, a collapse seen as a 'potentially mortal blow to the tottering edifice of the old industrial structure', as Tom Devine describes it.¹⁶ McIlvanney's impulse was to represent the working class in his fiction, and in *Docherty* he set about writing a history of his community, or, as he termed it, a genealogy:

Docherty is in part an attempt to articulate in the context of a book on behalf of those who may be inarticulate in a literary way. Hence, the central paradox of the book: it is written for people most of whom will never read it [...] I wanted to write a book that would create a kind of literary genealogy for the people I came from, the people whose memorials were parish registers.¹⁷

Docherty is a historical novel, set in the first two decades of the twentieth century in a West of Scotland mining community and focuses on the family of central character Tam Docherty. Though it was written at a time when the contemporary mining community was threatened with redundancy, the narrative takes place in a period of hope centred on trade unions and the Independent Labour Party. However, the miners here are inevitably victims, principally of the untrammelled industrial expansion of the Victorian age, an unbridled and insatiable capitalism that produced inhuman working and living conditions. The miners comprised an invisible army of workers who provided the raw power for that industrial growth and, as a consequence, Britain's phenomenal imperial expansion of the late Victorian period.¹⁸

Industrial and imperial expansion went hand in hand, and were associated by more than just a causal, practical relation as in the construction of ships and railways. As Anne McClintock argues:

[I]mperialism is not something that happened elsewhere – a disagreeable fact of history external to Western identity. Rather, imperialism and the invention of race were fundamental aspects of Western, industrial modernity. The invention of race in the urban metropolises [...] became central not only to the self-definition of the middle class but also to the policing of the “dangerous classes”: the working class, the Irish, Jews, prostitutes, feminists, gays and lesbians, criminals, the militant crowd and so on.¹⁹

Claude Rawson also points out that there was ‘a familiar equation of class and race which saw the domestic mob and inferior races as similar and as constituting a similar combination of useful labour and barbarizing menace’.²⁰ In the colonial writing of this period, the discourses of race, class and gender impinge on and intersect with each other and are articulated through each other creating realms of otherness against which the dominant classes identified themselves, inevitably justifying their superiority and privilege. In texts of the time the feminising of the non-white races accompanied the primitivising of the working class and the association of both ‘inferior’ races and ‘inferior’ classes in epithets like ‘white negroes’ and ‘Celtic Calibans’, the latter specifically applied to the Irish, for instance. The working class was often racialised: coal miners particularly were seen as a race apart as in this extract quoted by McClintock from *The Quarterly Review* in 1842 on the spectacle of female miners: ‘The earth seems now for the first time to have heaved from its entrails another race to astonish and move us to reflection and to sympathy.’²¹

This racialising of the miners is briefly but succinctly exposed in *Docherty*. Though sometimes expressed as a benign sense of their own difference (‘that sense of communal identity miners had, as if they were a separate species’ [p. 21]), this perception is more sinister when the miners are described through the eyes of the middle-class Miss Gilfillan as ‘a secret brotherhood of black savages’ (p. 14); or when Miss Gilfillan wishes to strike up a relationship with Tam’s youngest son she is attributed with the desire to ‘do some missionary work in darkest High Street. Just as natives are lured with coloured beads, so Conn was to be enticed with sweets’ (p. 81). In a related incident, a well-to-do family strolling down High Street is described as a common enough occurrence (p. 30), a reference to late Victorian social ‘explorers’ who ventured into the ‘terra incognita’ of the slums and working-class areas of the big cities, explorations they often described in terms of the imperial missionary enterprise.²² On this occasion they are greeted by Tam Docherty saying ‘Why don’t ye bring fuckin’ cookies wi’ ye? An’ then ye could throw them tae us!’ (p. 31).

Smatterings of such references are sprinkled throughout particularly the early part the novel and signal McIlvanney’s deliberate engagement with these Victorian colonial discourses

and their construction and reduction of the working class as something less than human. They are deployed to outrage the reader at the implication of the uncivilised and savage nature of working-class men and women.²³ However, McIlvanney's novel strenuously resists and refutes this representation through several forcefully employed textual strategies. Firstly and most obviously, the author takes great care to write in highly literary language, full of rich metaphors and allusions, abstracting the lives of his characters into an often poetically nuanced tableau, as in the description of the scene of the youngest son Conn's birth at the beginning of the narrative:

The gas-mantle putted like a sick man's heart. Dimmed to a bead of light, it made the room mysterious as a chapel. The polished furniture, enriched by darkness, entombed fragments of the firelight that moved like tapers in a tunnel. The brasses glowed like ikons. (p. 19)

As Cairns Craig has written, McIlvanney's language is 'extravagantly erudite and literary [...] designed to elevate characters by [...] insisting on the complexity of their *feelings*'.²⁴

It is not only their feelings but the social organisation of the community that is often described in detail, its order and complexity deliberately emphasised. Such an insistence constitutes a further rejection and refutation of the accusations of barbarity and uncivility: 'Underpinning the apparent anarchy of their social lives and establishing an order was a code of conduct complex enough to baffle the most perceptive outsider yet tacitly understood by even the youngest citizens of High Street from the time that they started to think' (p. 32). In this the novel is, at times, almost anthropological, setting out the communal rituals of the everyday as well as those grander ones of life and death such as birth, marriage and funeral rites which are all seen in the narrative. I use this term deliberately as it is a reminder of similar strategies employed by some postcolonial writers who set out to 'write back' to the metropolitan centre. For instance, the term 'anthropological' has been applied to Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* from 1958. This text similarly represents the detailed life of a community, the Igbo tribe, in all its complexity as a riposte to the reductive racist representations of Africans in colonial texts.

In reference to the anthropological conception of postcolonial writing, and with regard to what he calls the 'post-colonial exotic', Graham Huggan points out that there sometimes exists a 'misconceived notion that an African text offers unmediated access to an African culture, or even "African culture"'.²⁵ This is suggested, for example, in Douglas S. Mack's conception of Achebe's novel when he writes: '*Things Fall Apart* constructs an alternative view of that society [and] tries to give an honest, clear-eyed account of the *real* nature of the old culture, an account in which the old culture can speak in its own voice.'²⁶ Whyte points out that the same misconception can be levelled at readers of *Docherty*, as when, for instance, Beth Dickson claims that 'McIlvanney's fiction mirrors important aspects of Scottish life. In particular, the identity of the working class has undergone a number of recent transformations, and his fiction reflects, and reflects on, this historical experience.'²⁷

Moreover, Huggan argues that with certain African texts, 'anthropology is the watchword not for empirical documentation, but for the elaboration of a world of difference that conforms to often crudely stereotypical Western exoticist paradigms and myths of "primitive culture" ("primitive culture", "unbounded nature", "magical practices", "noble savagery", and so on).'²⁸ With *Docherty*, however, the opposite is true. It is not a world of difference, but a world of sameness that is asserted; in the nobility and complexity of language and feelings represented in this text it is a liberal and bourgeois sensibility that is promoted (in keeping with the classic realist novel of the late nineteenth century), particularly of the integrity, singularity, unity and self-sufficiency of the individual. This strategy aims to transcend allegations of inferiority and even savagery aimed at the working class and often embedded in the dominant literary traditions. In effect, though, this tactic leaves the binary categories of 'black and uncivilised' versus 'white and civilised' still in place as it asserts the equal humanity of the British working and middle classes in opposition to the savagery of blackness. This is the message of Tam's glorious defeat, his integrity as an individual whose 'hert goes fae [his] heid tae [his] taes, and that's a lot o' hert' (p. 324), as his epitaph has it at the close of the narrative.

Docherty is set in an age when these imperial and colonial discourses commanded authority. In contrast, in the post-1960s, post-liberation era these discourses have been discredited and predominantly rejected. The 1980s and 1990s setting of *Marabou Stork Nightmares* is a postcolonial era when national liberation for ex-colonies and civil rights for the marginalised have been won, apartheid has been defeated and racism fought on all fronts. The pathologies of domination indulged by the colonialists in the construction of their own identities have been recognised for the injustices that they propagated and the victims they produced.²⁹ In some controversial ways, Irvine Welsh aligns his central character, the working-class 'schemie' Roy Strang, with such victimhood; part of the shock value of *Marabou Stork Nightmares* lies in Welsh's engagement with these narratives of oppression.

The novel has three levels of narration: the present where Roy lies in a coma in hospital; his recounting, in a realist mode, of his life story up to this point, a portrait of the making of a young hooligan; and a fantasy narrative, parodying an imperial adventure story, in which Roy is a great white hunter, tracking down in order to kill the deadly scavenger/predator, the Marabou stork. In his self-narration Roy describes the economy of violence and emotional deprivation that defined his poor urban upbringing, a background that fosters the worst excesses of a pathological masculinity and leads to his role in a gang of 'casuals', indulging in recreational football violence and eventually the horrific gang rape of a young female acquaintance, Kirsty. Unable to cope with

his own culpability in this act, Roy eventually makes an unsuccessful suicide attempt which puts him in the coma where we initially encounter him.

In an effort to contextualise and explain Roy's pathologically violent identity, Welsh's narrative makes him a victim of his environment and social position, of the imposition of gender roles in this context which valorises an aggressively dominant 'hard man' masculinity. That Roy is a victim is suggested in one instance by way of a notorious parallel, one calculated to cause outrage in the reader. The Strang family spend a short time in apartheid South Africa where the young Roy, in contrast to back home in Edinburgh, does well in school and achieves a level of self-esteem previously unknown to him. When the family have to return to Scotland, due to his father being arrested for a drunken assault, he is bitterly disappointed:

I was gloomy in my resignation. Only a sick anxiety brought on by the dread of leaving occasionally alleviating my depression. Edinburgh to me represented serfdom. I realised that it was exactly the same situation as Johannesburg; the only difference was that the Kaffirs were white and called schemies or draftpaks. Back in Edinburgh, we would be Kaffirs; condemned to live out our lives in townships like Muirhouse or So-Wester-Hailes-To or Niddrie, self-contained camps with fuck all in them, miles fae the toon. Brought in tae dae the crap jobs that nae other cunt wanted tae dae, then hassled by the polis if we hung around at night in groups. Edinburgh had the same politics as Johannesburg: it had the same politics as any city. Only we were on the other side. I detested the thought of going back to all that shite. (p. 80)

This paralleling of the position of Scotland's urban poor with the plight of black South Africans under apartheid has certainly incensed many critical readers. This is an appropriation and a colonisation of the oppression and suffering of others for the purpose of inflating self-worth and 'subaltern credentials', as Aaron Kelly describes it.³⁰ Willy Maley and Ellen-Raisa Jackson write:

In this passage, social differentiation within Edinburgh is collapsed into racial differentiation in Johannesburg. We are urged to recognise 'the same politics'. A comparison implies parity, but Welsh's colonial comparison works by equating inequalities, racial and social [...]. Welsh claims a solidarity with Black South Africans through the naming of townships/new towns. The pun on Soweto and Wester Hailes develops the central point – that the 'only difference' is linguistic.³¹

As an attempt at insightful political analysis attributed to Welsh himself, this criticism is more than warranted. But taken as the view of Roy Strang, who is, after all, a notoriously, immorally unreliable narrator of his own life, the statement is more like a hysterical outburst at the prospect of the denial of the recently discovered power of his position in South Africa. It is a cry for attention by the disappointed rather than the dispossessed and as such exposes the hyperbolic and imperialist aspiration of the contention. Such exaggeration is similar to the violence in Roy's life, a self-aggrandizing gesture that falsely inflates his standing in response to the grossly deflated sense of self reflected back to him by the dominant culture.

So the outrage caused by the Welsh text is of a different order to that caused by McIlvanney's novel. There, the association with blackness is an occasion of a denigration of the working class; in Welsh's novel the association with blackness is sought after, black South Africans under apartheid being legitimate victims of a vicious white authority. The outrage here is caused by a white appropriation of black suffering.³² But as I have demonstrated, this move does connect, albeit in an oblique way, with a history of the policing of the working class through the discourses of race; in the post-liberationist era, however, the moral authority is reversed making the association with blackness a positive aspiration. Unlike *Docherty*, then, Welsh's novel does disrupt the black/uncivilised versus white/civilised binary, if only to reverse the hierarchy and 'colonise', in Kelly's words, the category of blackness.

The irony of the reversal in the value of blackness is not lost on Welsh, a point signalled by another reversal the text enacts when Roy retreats into his fantasy, his 'African safari of the mind'.³³ In this Rider Haggard-style parody of an imperial adventure story Roy is transformed into a caricature upper-class hunter and stalks the Marabou stork. The highly stylized and absurd nature of this fantasy is captured in Roy's expert mimicking of a public schoolboy sociolect: 'Wizard!', 'How positively yucky!', and 'Gosh Sandy, you're a Hungry Horace today' (pp. 4, 7) are typical expressions of the pseudo-aristocratic diction Roy uses throughout this fantasy narrative.³⁴ In parodying the stereotypical colonial text, this adventure story is also outrageously racist, emphasising Roy's ability to 'access colonial Africa as a state of virtual power, freedom and authority', however cartoon-like the depiction.³⁵ However, access to power in the material world is not readily available to a 'schemie', even one as expert a mimic as Roy, and this is a source of tension throughout the novel, and a fact that underlies and intensifies the absurdity of Roy's fantasy transformation into an upper-class imperialist. In material reality it is not so easy to escape social classification, and this situation further suggests that, as social transitions go, his association with black South Africans is equally absurd. Roy exists somewhere in-between these two social poles, between oppressor and oppressed, a situation that can be said to reflect the complexity of Scottish-British identity.

Berthold Schoene-Harwood asserts that *Marabou Stork Nightmares* 'illustrates how alluring nostalgic fantasies of untrammelled power and superiority [...] are to many men'.³⁶ Certainly this parody of colonial discourse links the colonial past with the present, and signals our continuing reliance on models of identity, particularly masculinity, formed in that era. On the other hand, Roy's attempt to associate himself with the victims of a similarly racially defined and oppressive relationship is also an attempt to maintain a position of authority in a contemporary culture that is, as Robinson argues, 'so taken with the dynamics of victimization'. The tension between these two impulses is graphically present in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, particularly in

the fractured typography that represents Roy's tortured battles with himself. Roy's association of the Scottish urban poor and black South Africans under apartheid neatly frames this tension; it expresses his consciousness of the attraction and contemporary significance of victimhood while originating in his desire for privilege and superiority. It is an audacious parallel, and even while suggesting it Roy is quick to admit that his impulse comes from his privileged status which is enshrined in the social structures of South African society: 'I wanted to stay in South Africa. What I had gained there was a perverse sense of empowerment; an ego even. I knew I was fuckin special, whatever any of them tried to tell me' (p. 88). Roy's newfound ego is proof of the hysterical nature of his indignant 'So-Wester-Hailes-To' outburst. Though his claim to kinship in oppression is undermined, it is still an illustration, an alert even, of the appropriation of victimhood as one trend in contemporary culture, according to Robinson, that puts the white man back at the centre of the discourses of power as a victim.

Roy's fluctuating status between oppressor and oppressed in *Marabou Stork Nightmares* ensures that there is not the transcendence of barbarity that we have in *Docherty* with its assertion of a human and, ultimately, bourgeois individual equality. At the end of the novel Roy finally admits the extent of his crimes, that he was the instigator of the gang rape, not the reluctant participant he has led us to believe throughout the narrative. In his admission of his guilt and his 'badness' (p. 9), he effectively embraces the status of the 'other', specifically the other of that now discredited white male bourgeois individual; unlike Tam Docherty, he does not claim equality but repudiates it. Furthermore, in his graphic wounding and mutilation at the close of the narrative he is also, in totality, a victim, a status putatively invested with the cultural authority of the authentically disempowered.

One final parallel drives home this embracing of otherness: the image of Roy choking on his own penis is an echo of something particular – the lynching of black men by white mobs, an infamous practice in the southern American states and shockingly widespread from the end of the civil war into the 20th century. These lynchings were often endorsed by allegations of sex crimes against white women; the mostly trivial nature of many of these charges meant that in essence lynching served the broad social purpose of maintaining white supremacy.³⁷ The victims were sometimes mutilated and body parts displayed and distributed as souvenirs. For Roy, a white man, to be murdered in this fashion signals another proffered association with an oppressed black minority, and through this his complete abjection. Instead of attaining or at least aspiring to the status of the central and dominant, he has become the abject, that which the social order deems impure and therefore seeks to expel in order to maintain secure boundaries of being. In fact, throughout the narrative he fulfils Kristeva's description of abjection as 'immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles [...] a friend who stabs you.'³⁸

McClintock points out that 'abject peoples are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed, and so on';³⁹ these are traditional others of the middle-class white man, though in the post-liberationist era they are now constituted as his victims. In this further, catastrophic association with otherness, then, Roy's victimhood is complete. Instead of resisting it, as Tam does in *Docherty*, Roy embodies the abject, and in contrast to Tam's defiant fist, clenched even after being 'pulped', it is not the similarly clenched fist symbolic of the Black Power movement that Welsh's text engages with here. Roy's body is passive and signifies the fragility of the boundaries of the embodied masculine subject, its insecure containment, its permeability. He is the disgraced symbol of leaky, soft and spoiled manhood.

Welsh's graphic portrayal complicates the image of the male victim. This is not an expression of *remasculinisation* in which the power of masculinity is reasserted through the demonstration of the manly endurance and overcoming of pain.⁴⁰ There is unmistakable pleasure in Roy's suffering; his reaction to his castration is an almost resigned contentment: 'aw what the fuck, the Silver Surfer never had a cock and the cunt seemed to get by as he soared on his board ... that's all I ask' (p. 263); and he even has an urge to convey gladness: 'I've got this severed cock in my mouth and I'm trying to smile' (p. 264). Robinson perceives that some narratives include 'an undeniable attraction to masochism on the part of white men attempting to come to terms with the feminist critique of male power and privilege', and such an impulse certainly complicates the representation of male subjectivity.⁴¹ This is not the reassertion of an aggressive, active and appropriative male dominance, but of a masculinity finding pleasure in passivity and a certain feminised, non-appropriative inactivity. Such a representation points to the possibility of an area of negotiation that dominant masculinity is willing to enter into, subtle changes it is willing to undertake within shifting social relations. However, such changes are also engineered to maintain white men's cultural centrality and authority, and the move to claim victimhood has significant consequences. In Robinson's words, it serves to *personalize* the crisis in white masculinity and therefore 'to erase its social and political causes and effects'. A focus on the wounded individual signals a slide from political into therapeutic discourse, the 'depoliticized personal', that facilitates 'the erasure [in these representations] of systemic and institutionalized white and male privilege'.⁴² The question we must ask, says Robinson, is, if the wounded white man comes to occupy the position of true victim, 'what happens when others get evacuated from that position?'⁴³

Just such a situation is described at the end of *Marabou Stork Nightmares* when Kirsty tells Roy 'you've made me just like you' (p. 259), and he concurs with this assertion of equivalence between them: 'I'm not an exceptionally strong person. Nor is Kirsty. We're just

ordinary and this is shite' (p. 264). The personal is prioritised in this analysis of the events of the novel. Even though Kirsty recognises the culpability of the social structures ('you raped me once, and with the help of the judge and the courts you raped me again' [p. 259]), she takes a personal revenge, and not one that protests effectively against the oppressive social reality. As Schoene-Harwood argues, 'universalising the insidious dynamics of patriarchal power as some kind of irremediable, generic by-product of human nature, *Marabou Stork Nightmares* concludes with a total eradication of sexual difference.'⁴⁴ But even further, in becoming just like Roy, Kirsty is effectively masculinized, leaving him at the close of the narrative as the main, perhaps the only, victim. As Maley and Jackson insist, the novel focuses on the effect the rape has on him rather than on the woman he has raped.⁴⁵ His victimisation puts him back at the centre of the narrative and eradicates the structural social inequality.

I am suggesting, then, that these two narratives signal a change in the representation of men in Scottish fiction from the 1970s to the 1990s, that resonates with a more general and international cultural symptom, where, rather than glorious male defeat, abject male victimhood is displayed and embraced; the politics of objection are replaced by the embodying of abjection. This move has the effect of recentering dominant masculinity within a culture of identity politics that valorises the victim. The associations inspired by colonial discourses contribute to the construction of white male victims in these two texts and should alert us to how much late Victorian imperialist conceptions of masculinity, determined as they are by pathologies of domination, still inform our notions of what it is to be a man today. In addition, between them *Docherty* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* certainly reflect the breakdown in traditional class structures that has occurred in western societies like Scotland in the last 30 years, and the fading significance of a traditional, organised working class. Read together, they gesture towards a representational trend to substitute the public and social with the personal and bodily, a move that takes us from organised class politics to therapy, from the hard-bodied, selfless solidarity of Tam Docherty to the limp, supine, selfish catatonia and self-narration of Roy Strang. Paradoxically, both reproduce the cultural centrality of the middle-class white man at the expense of his others.

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Notes

¹ William McIlvanney, *Docherty* (London: Sceptre, 1987), p. 298. Page numbers subsequently given in parentheses in the text.

² Ben Knights, *Writing Masculinities: Male Narratives in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 182.

³ Irvine Welsh, *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 264. Page numbers subsequently given in parentheses in the text.

⁴ Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie and Alastair Renfrew (eds), 'Introduction', *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2004), p. 11 (my emphasis).

⁵ Gavin Wallace, 'Voices in 'Empty Houses: The Novel of Damaged Identity'', in Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (eds), *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 217-231.

⁶ The notion of male identity being in constant bouts of crisis is one that is commonly expressed. For example, Abigail Solomon-Godeau has argued that, 'Masculinity, however defined is, like capitalism, always in crisis. And the real question is how both manage to restructure, refurbish, and resurrect themselves for the next historical turn' ('Male Trouble', in Berger, Wallis and Watson (eds.), *Constructing Masculinity* (New York/London: Routledge, 1995), p. 70). Other texts that consider the idea of masculinity in crisis include John MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), and Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

Regarding the representation of men as victims, David Savran, for example, describes his book *Taking it Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998) as 'a genealogy of the fantasy of the white male as victim' since the 1950s (p. 4).

⁷ Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 20, 191.

⁸ Andy Wood, "'The Affectionate Punch": Constructions of Identity, Masculinity, Race and Gender in Contemporary Scottish Fiction', in Shane Alcobia-Murphy, Johanna Archbold, John Gibney and Carole Jones (eds), *Beyond the Anchoring Grounds: More Cross-currents in Irish and Scottish Studies* (Belfast: Cló Ollscoil na Banríona, 2005), p. 340.

⁹ Gail Low, 'The Challenge of "Black British"', in *European English Messenger* XI.2 (2002), p. 20.

¹⁰ There is an ethical dimension to my questioning of the use of racial discourses in these texts. This article aims to expose and challenge the appropriation and exploitation of categories of non-white identity and experience that result in the re-centering of white masculinity; however, through its focus on representations of white men does it inevitably repeat that cycle of representation evident in the texts under examination, and in effect marginalise and subordinate black experience? Is blackness here merely a vehicle for for an

examination of whiteness? Is there a level, even, on which it contributes to an area of 'whiteness studies' that, in Vron Ware's words, 'is fraught with contradictions, not least of which are, first, that it tends to reestablish the first person firmly at the center of attention to whiteness [as opposed to the social structures and cultural reproduction of white domination] and, second, that it is in danger of reifying the whole notion of "race" as a system of human classification that can be understood outside the histories of its invention and brutal enforcement' (p. 26)? I wish to acknowledge here that, whatever the proffered transparency of my intentions, the line between exposure and exploitation of such a complex and contentious issue is a fine one, and differently located readers will judge my own negotiation of that line in various ways, to which interpretations I remain enthusiastically open.

For a critical account of the 'exponential expansion' of the 'new phenomenon of "whiteness studies"' (p. 21) see Vron Ware, 'Otherworldly Knowledge: Toward a "Language of Perspicuous Contrast"', in Vron Ware and Les Back, *Out of Whiteness: Colour, Politics, and Culture* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 15-32.

¹¹ Christopher Whyte, 'Masculinities in Contemporary Scottish Fiction', in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 34: 3 (1998), pp. 279, 280.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 275.

¹³ Robinson, p. 197.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ In reference to the demonising of the working class in recent popular culture and socio-political discourses Alex Law writes, 'The poor become negatively stereotyped as an undifferentiated, disgraceful, tasteless social group upon whom middle class fears of social disintegration and poverty can be projected and the ideological legacy of "whiteness" can be offloaded.' ('Hatred and Respect: The Class Shame of Ned "Humour"', in *Variant* 25 (Spring 2006), p. 28.

<http://www.variant.randomstate.org/25texts/nedhumour25.html>; accessed 23 May 2006

¹⁶ Tom Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 584.

¹⁷ William McIlvanney, 'A Shield Against The Gorgon', in *Surviving the Shipwreck* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1991), pp. 220, 223.

¹⁸ According to Eric Hobsbawm, the 'extraordinary economic transformation and expansion of the years between 1848 and the early 1870s' led to 'the era of a new type of empire, the colonial' when 'a systematic attempt to translate the military supremacy of the capitalist countries into formal conquest, annexation and administration partitioned most of the world outside Europe between a handful of states in the years 1880 to 1914.' (*The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997 [1975]), p. 29; *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p. 57.)

¹⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 5.

²⁰ Claude Rawson, *God, Gulliver and Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 209.

²¹ McClintock, p. 116. Chris Haylett, commenting on a similar practice in the 1990s, writes: 'The contemporary racialisation of the white working class is most apparent in underclassing processes which have cast the poorest sections of that group as a group beyond the bounds of "the British nation".' ('Illegitimate subjects?: abject whites, neoliberal modernisation, and middle-class multiculturalism', in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 19:3 (2001), p. 355.)

²² For an overview of the attitudes and writings, both anthropological and the 'slum fiction' genre, of the Victorian middle-class journalists, philanthropists and 'missionaries' who made forays into the 'terra incognita' (p. 22) of the world of the working class, see Michael Collins, *The Likes of Us: A Biography of the White Working Class* (London: Granta, 2004), especially chapters 5-7. [Thanks to Scott Hames for bringing this to my attention.]

²³ Gail Ching-Liang Low observes that the Victorian philanthropists' 'descriptions of the overcrowded conditions, destitution and exploitation which the urban poor had to endure is meant to provoke a sense of moral outrage [but often] also registers outrage and fear' (*White Skin/Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 16).

²⁴ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 82.

²⁵ Graham Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 37.

²⁶ Douglas S. Mack, *Scottish Fiction and the British Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 79 (my emphasis).

²⁷ Quoted by Whyte, p. 285. From Beth Dickson, 'Class and Being in the Novels of William McIlvanney', in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, p. 54.

²⁸ Huggan, p. 37.

²⁹ As Hobsbawm summarises: 'The novelty of the 19th century was that non-Europeans and their societies were increasingly, and generally, treated as inferior, undesirable, feeble and backward, even infantile' (*The Age of Empire*, p. 79).

³⁰ Aaron Kelly, *Irvine Welsh* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 116.

³¹ Ellen-Raïssa Jackson and Willy Maley, 'Birds of a Feather: A Postcolonial Reading of Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*', in *Revista de Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, No. 41 (2000), p. 191.

³² Arguably, a similar criticism can be made of the comparison Douglas S. Mack makes between the English attitude towards Scots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the racist attitude towards Africans: 'Those at the power-centre of British society in its Imperial heyday tended to use *Scotch* as a word (like *nigger* or *wog*) calculated to convey something rather different from respectful and affectionate acceptance of the persons so described. Manifestly, the "Scotch" were infinitely more comfortable and infinitely better rewarded under the Empire than the "niggers", but to be called either "nigger" or "Scotch" was to be reminded with some force that you were not "one of us"' (*Scottish Fiction and the British Empire*, p. 52).

³³ Berthold Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 152.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ The famous case of Emmett Till occurred in 1955 in Mississippi. Till, 14 years old at the time, was kidnapped and brutally murdered allegedly for saying 'bye baby' to a white woman. His death was instrumental in instigating the formation of the civil rights movement. (See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/index.html>)

³⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.

4.

³⁹ McClintock, p. 72.

⁴⁰ For instance, this is the argument of Savran's *Taking it Like a Man*.

⁴¹ Robinson, p. 11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴⁴ Schoene-Harwood, p. 156.

⁴⁵ Maley and Jackson, p. 193.

Doing Something Uncustomary: Edwin Morgan and Attila József¹

Tom Hubbard

Early in 2006, if you walked up Rákoczi Street, one of the main boulevards in the centre of Budapest, you would have seen a series of three posters. Each carried a different iconic image of the city together with a question in English.

The posters were in green, red and blue. The green one asked: 'Did you travel here to get to know the people or to be where people don't know you?' The red one asked: 'Did you travel here to get to know the culture or to get a break from your own?' The blue one asked: 'Did you travel here to get to know the customs or to do something uncustomary?' Most of us, I guess, would be willing enough to answer the red and blue questions, and be piously positive about the first part of the green one while hoping that no-one was going to probe us about its second part. I don't know how Edwin Morgan would answer either part of the green poster, but red and blue could help us obtain a perspective on his relationship with Hungarian poetry and, in particular, the work of Attila József. There is a reasonable consensus that Morgan is Scotland's leading translator of poetry. His prolific output (Morgan 1996) includes versions of poetry from French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Hungarian cultures. Regarding the last, in addition to József he has addressed himself to major figures such as Sándor Petőfi, Endre Ady, Miklós Radnóti, Sándor Weöres and many others. He enjoyed a particularly warm personal and professional relationship with Weöres. More recently, he contributed new versions of contemporary Hungarian poetry to the anthology *At the End of the Broken Bridge* (2005), for which the present author also received commissions. That Morgan is still active at the age of eighty-six is remarkable in view of the cancer with which he was diagnosed some five years ago, though unfortunately he was too frail to attend the launch of the anthology at the University of Strathclyde.

Let's take the red Budapest poster. Did Edwin Morgan engage with Hungarian poetry to get to know that culture or to get away from his own? I suggest that he intended to absorb

¹ This article is based on a guest lecture in the Department of Comparative Literature, University of Szeged, on May 3, 2006.

Hungary but not to break with Scotland; indeed, he has consistently stressed what he sees as common to both cultures. There are two aspects to this. First, in interviews with Hungarian scholars (e.g. in Nagy 1998), he has drawn attention to the fact that both Scotland and Hungary have lived in the shadow of powerful neighbours. He has not needed to add that the cultures of both countries remain a mystery to the rest of Europe: the Scots and the Hungarians, for good and ill, are perceived as exotic. Second, Morgan was attracted to Attila József largely because he found in him a fellow city-poet. The two have in common a strong interest in the deployment of the imagery of the metropolis. Morgan has admitted that József's Budapest poetry may have influenced his own Glasgow poetry. But he has also paid tribute to a poet nearer home, the Scottish-born Victorian poet James Thomson, the author of the long poem *The City of Dreadful Night*, first published in 1874. Thomson evokes a dream vision of an archetypically alienated and alienating city, an urban nightmare of a kind that was to become more familiar during the post-Freudian twentieth century. Morgan writes of this poem:

[The city of dreadful night] becomes simply [...] any city that is very large and very old, it has huge buildings, great bridges, squares, cathedrals, mansions, slums, endless streetlamps. Since it is night [in the poem], the streets are relatively empty, but because it is a large city there are plenty of shadowy nocturnal wanderers who are the inhabitants of the place and the actors of the poem – the outcasts of daytime society, the tramps, the drunks, the drug-addicts, the half-crazed, the homeless, the sleepless, the lonely. The poem emphasises the isolation of all these characters: they murmur to themselves, they creep about wrapped up in their own thoughts, they appear as products of a dehumanising process in society which is becoming so competitive it has no room for failure; there are also of course psychological weaknesses which are not being blamed on society, but they too take their place within the parameters that society sets up, and the individual seems able to do less and less to change his condition.

(Thomson 1993: 24)

Much in that comment could be applicable equally to the urban poetry of Morgan and József, especially the latter. József's is a poetry of the exploited proletariat and the mentally disturbed: he himself was both.

Affinities between the two poets can be cited with a certain precision. There is a line in Morgan's poem, 'A View of Things' (Morgan 1985: 45-6) which reads like an echo of József's 'Külvárosi éj' ('Night in the Suburbs'): 'what I hate about decrepit buildings is their reluctance to disintegrate'. Consider these lines from the József poem:

Csönd, -- lomhán szinte lábraka
s mászik a súroló kefe;
fölötte egy kis faldarab
azon tűnődik, hulljon-e.

(József [n.d]: 268)

Morgan translates this as:

Silence. – The scrubbing-brush sluggishly
rises and drags itself about:
above it, a small piece of wall is in
two minds to fall or not.

(József 2001: 21)

Such images are not uncommon in Hungarian poetry, and this is not surprising if one walks through those parts of Budapest which are unfrequented by tourists. One of the best-known pieces by the contemporary poet Győző Ferencz (b. 1954) offers an example from the last years of the Kádár régime (1956-88):

VIGYÁZAT, OMLÁSVESZÉLY!

Ha épület volnék, most darabokban
Lemállanék rólam a vakolat,
És kiütköznék rajtam, úgy, ahogy van,
A megroggyant váz a felszín alatt: [...]

(Ferencz 1989: 51)

DANGER, FALLING DEBRIS

If I were a building, chunks of plaster
would now flake off and fall into the street.
From beneath the surface my mauled frame
would stick right out, as it stands in me: [...]

(Ferencz 1988: 78)

Here the derelict building suggests existential overtones and political undertones.

Morgan's own Glasgow, however, is a city which had a long reputation for some of the worst slums in Europe. The Scottish poet was well placed to respond to the drab city-scapes of Attila József. In the József poem to which reference has just been made, there appears that domestic animal which is most associated with street-wisdom: the cat. The first great poet of the city, Baudelaire, was also the most evocative of feline life. Cats can negotiate city life more skilfully than dogs, though both acquire a certain alertness in such an environment. In Morgan's version of the József poem, 'A View of Things' (József 2001: 21-24), a cat stretches its paw through the railings of a factory fence, and a politically-active working man, distributing illegal leaflets, sniffs like a dog and looks over his shoulder like a cat, to see if the coast is clear. In his sequence of 'Glasgow Sonnets', the eyes of a cat glitter under an abandoned baby-carriage, and an emaciated dog engages in joyless fucking. The implication in both the József and Morgan poems is that human life in large cities has become degraded to the less-than-human, and that people have had to develop the survival skills of the wild. In the Glasgow sonnet following the one

with the dog and the cat, a slum landlord makes an illegal bargain with a couple which has five kids and can't afford to reject his offer. Bored teenagers have already stripped the neighbouring houses of anything they can lay their hands on. Some survive, others don't. (Morgan 1985: 78-9)

Attila József (1905-37) is one of the most celebrated, most iconic poets of Hungary. His mother, who was abandoned by his father, took in other people's washing for a living. His early life was spent in a series of odd jobs, and his experiences lent his poetry its authentically 'proletarian' tone and content. He entered the University of Szeged but was expelled for his poetry, which was deemed to be subversive: one of the professors declared that he should not be allowed to teach in any Hungarian school. His statue now stands, in determined pose, in front of the main university building; at the other side of the square can be seen one of the most wildly eccentric examples of art nouveau architecture, the Ungar-Mayer House, but József's own life never knew such opulence. He joined the Communist Party but was expelled for his pioneering attempts to fuse Marxist socio-economics with Freudian psychology. Isolated, and afflicted himself with deep psychological problems, he committed suicide in a Lake Balaton resort by throwing himself in front of a train.

I find Morgan's translations of Hungarian poetry far more interesting than references to matters Magyar in his own poetry. The best-known example of the latter is his 'Siesta of a Hungarian Snake', where the poet has fun with the consonants s, sz, zs, and z (Morgan 1985: 17). We can smile, then pass on. The image, in 'Rider', of the nineteenth-century nationalist hero Lajos Kossuth taking 'a coalblack horse from Debrecen' and clattering 'up Candleriggs into the City Hall' doesn't offer any insights into Kossuth's actual speaking tour of Scotland in 1856 (Morgan 1985: 72). Perhaps that is a literal-minded response on my part, but the poet's attempt to be surreal is too self-conscious. In my view, Morgan is not at his best when he is being modishly (and somewhat pretentiously) allusive: easy fodder, no doubt, for literary Glasgow in its most self-congratulatory mode. Morgan deserves better than the city's piety towards him.

More productively we can turn to the third question posed on the Rákóczi Street posters: 'Did you travel here to get to know the customs or to do something uncustomary?' Clearly (and despite the gimmickry just mentioned) Morgan's engagement with Hungarian culture is a serious one. However, given the preconceptions of 'exoticism' suffered by Hungarian literature and the language in which it is composed, Morgan's active interest in the country's poetry might seem to many to be 'uncustomary'. Yet there were Scottish precedents. Hugh MacDiarmid - whose poetry has been the object of some of Morgan's most percipient literary criticism - did not himself attempt any versions of Hungarian poetry, but he wrote in defence of the position of Endre Ady (1877-1919) in European modernism. For MacDiarmid, Ady was one of a number of major

figures, from 'peripheral' European cultures, 'those, untranslated into English/ For lack of whom the perspective of poetry/ In that language is hopelessly inadequate' (*In Memoriam James Joyce*, in MacDiarmid 1978: 820). One might add that an ignorance of European culture renders a perspective on Scottish literature 'hopelessly inadequate', but there are few in Scottish literary academia who are listening. The poets, as usual, are well ahead of the academics. Two twentieth-century Scottish poets, both associates of MacDiarmid, actually went ahead and turned poems by Ady into – Scots! William Soutar (1898-1943) turned Ady's 'Sem utódja, sem boldog őse' into his 'I Lang to Gie Myse!' (Soutar 1988: 319) and Sydney Goodsir Smith (1915-75)'s 'Alane wi the Sun' derives from the Hungarian's 'Egyedül a tengerral' (Smith 1950: 11). These are both extremely free renderings of the Ady poems. This is more visually obvious in Smith's version, where he reduces Ady's six stanzas to his own four. (For fuller accounts of Ady in Scots see: Hubbard 2006; McClure 2000).

Morgan's approach to translation is very different. He attempts to follow the original as closely as he can, and is especially concerned to retain its tone. He has stated his principle of 'being a good servant to the foreign poet' (Dósa 2001: 14). Moreover, although Morgan writes very accomplished original poems in Scots, he has remarked that he deliberately opted for English when tackling József; his versions of Ady are also in English. He did say, though, that he 'thought briefly about Scots words for Attila József.' (Dosa 2001: 15) I will come back to this fascinating possibility – fascinating to me personally, at any rate – because Scots is now considered a working-class language and of course József's poetry deals strongly with proletarian themes.

The evidence, then, is that a Scot translating József - or any other Hungarian poet - into English or Scots would not be as 'uncustomary' or as 'exotic' as might first appear. What was 'uncustomary', in Morgan's view, was that József was writing an urban poetry of a kind that had not so far been attempted in either English or Scottish poetry – with the exception, of course, of *The City of Dreadful Night*. Moreover, although in our own time there now exist different English versions of many József poems, it was not always so. When Edwin Morgan first became interested in Attila József during the early 1950s, it had not been 'customary' to put him into English. At first knowing no Hungarian, Morgan discovered József's work in a book of Italian translations by Umberto Albini, published in 1952. With the aid of a Hungarian-English dictionary, Morgan duly worked his way through József's *œuvre*. Eventually he acquired enough of the language to attempt his own English translations of József and of the other Hungarian poets mentioned earlier. There is a curious parallel with the case of the American critic Edmund Wilson, who learned enough Hungarian in order to appreciate Ady, at a time when good English versions of that poet simply did not exist.

By 1985 Morgan's reputation as a translator of Hungarian poetry was well-established in Hungary itself, and in that year he was presented with the Soros Translation Award for his work on József. In 2001 these poems were conveniently collected in a slim volume from the Glasgow-based small press, Mariscat. The book includes a version of the particular poem ('Tiszta szívvel') which led to József's expulsion from the University of Szeged, here under the title of 'Heart-Innocent'. It opens thus:

Without father, without mother, alone
without cradle, without shroud I go
without God, without land and home
without kiss, without girl to know. [...]

(József 2001: 11)

Morgan has commented on how the work of a foreign poet has revealed itself to him before he has actually 'understood' it. For example, he writes of a poem by the Italian poet Eugenio Montale: 'his world stirs and reveals itself [...] there is a shimmer, a play of light on water and on crumbling buildings [that image again! – TH], a face glancing in a mirror, an accordion being played in the twilight [...]' (quoted in McCarey, n.d.) It is if there is an *ur*-poem beyond the actual words, an essence that one can appreciate in a 'deverbalised' condition. This idea derives ultimately from Walter Benjamin, but the eminent translator and former President of the Hungarian Republic, Árpád Göncz, has written of "the charm of half understood words" which every translator knows," (Göncz 1999: 293), and one could point also to the stages in a text where, according to Wolfgang Iser, the reader must negotiate 'indeterminacy' – the 'gaps' and 'blanks' in that text.

Such is the beginning of the process of engagement between Morgan and József. As for the end-products, what we find in both poets – in Morgan's own poetry at its considerable best and in his versions of József – is a poetry of struggle as opposed to a poetry of contentment, a poetry for alert citizens rather than for passive consumers.

Edwin Morgan told my Miskolc University colleague, Dr Attila Dósa, that the József poems which probably moved him most were those on the poet's mother, the overworked and terminally ill laundress (Dósa 2001: 12). He therefore tried hard to make a good translation of 'Mama', and under the title of 'Mother' it appears on page 10 of the Mariscat volume. He judges it artistically desirable, in stanza 2, to depart from the rhyme-scheme of the original, replacing *ccdd* with *cdcd*. The mother hangs up the clothes in the attic to dry, and here both Morgan opts for a cold northern climate – 'flying in the wind' – which is not emphasised by other translators of the poem, except for myself in my reference to 'the brisk air' in my forthcoming Scots version. I

wanted to turn in a decidedly Scottish poem, and I suspect that Morgan, consciously or otherwise, is doing the same. As for the last two lines of the poem, Morgan reverses their order. 'szürke haja lebben az égen,/ kékítőt old az ég vizében' becomes 'The wet sky shines washed with her blue,/ her grey hair streams where the clouds scud through.' (József 2001: 10) Morgan seeks to preserve the tone, according to his translation policy, but he is prepared – quite acceptably in my view – to make other changes in order to arrive at a readable poem in English. Interestingly, his tenth Glasgow sonnet closes with an image of the women of the slums carrying their washing: '[...] and when they trudge/ from closemouth to laundrette their steady shoes/ carry a world that weighs us like a judge.' (Morgan 1985: 82) This reads like an echo of the József poem.

As for 'Reménytelenül' – 'Without Hope' in József 2001: 48 – John Bátky (József 1973: 16) has cited a critical consensus which sees this poem as a response to József's expulsion from the Communist Party and his increasing isolation and existential anxiety. It is not one of the 'city' poems but if anything it is much bleaker. More than other translators of the poem, Morgan is faithful to the *abab* rhyme scheme. None of the versions, however, can convey the possible echo of Ferenc Kölcsey's 'Hymnus' in stanza 1, line 3. Kölcsey's 1823 poem provided the words of the national anthem and is therefore known to every Hungarian. The action of looking around and not finding hope can never have the same resonance in English (or Scots) as it will in Hungarian. This is a culturally-specific detail that cannot be carried over into another language, and there is no point in trying to find equivalences where they simply don't exist.

During the preparation of this paper I decided to attempt my own Scots versions, as I felt I could not adequately grasp Morgan's strategies unless I found my own way of getting into the guts of the poems. In stanza 2 both Morgan and I avoid the 'nyárfa' (poplar). I cannot speak for Morgan, but I saw the poplar as a south-European tree and therefore out of place in the north-European poem which I was trying to make; again I can only speculate that Morgan may have made a similar decision at that point.

Finally, if Morgan offers us a József filtered through a Glasgow and west of Scotland sensibility, I as an easterner have positioned my version in my native county of Fife. For decades our main heavy industry was coal, and many of the pits were situated near the sea. Even today the sand on the beach is mingled with coal-dust. Both my grandfathers were miners, so I had a close personal interest in attempting to evoke the proletarian flavour of József's poetry. In south Fife, not only ex-coalminers but working men generally address each other as 'sir'. The word doesn't have the sense of deference that we find in its standard English contexts; in Fife Scots it's a form of address between equals. To call your workmate 'sir' implies male bonding, but there's also more than a hint of mockery – proletarian banter, if you like, for example as in 'Ay, ay, sir,

wha wis that lassie I saw ye wi last nicht?' So I opted for this usage in the first line of my (again forthcoming) version. In the József poem, however, the banter is much darker than in the example which I have just given. The Scots and the Hungarians are both famous for their pessimism, and I would suggest that in both our cultures the sense of humour is as blackly ironic as it's possible to be. Attila József has a reputation as a gloomy poet, but that is hardly inconsistent with the grim smile which he wears throughout his work. That in itself is surely attractive to Scottish poet-translators. Sometimes an artistic 'diaspora' works out as a way of travelling not so much hopefully as homefully.

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Unwritable Dwellings/Unsettled Texts: Robert Louis Stevenson's *In the South Seas* and the Vailima House

David Farrier

On the 6 April, 1889, during a six month stay in Hawai'i, Robert Louis Stevenson provided the following description of his living circumstances, in a letter to Adelaide Boodle:

[t]he buildings stand in three groups by the edge of the beach. [...] The first is a small house [...] All about the walls [are] our South Sea curiosities, war clubs, idols, pearl shells, stone axes, etc; [...] The next group of buildings is ramshackle and quite dark; [...] you go in, and find photography, tubs of water, negatives steeping, a tap, and a chair and an ink-bottle, [...] right opposite the studio door you have observed a third little house [...] herein [you find] one Squire busy writing to yourself [...] The house is not bare; it has been inhabited by *Kanakas* and (you know what children they are!) the bare wood walls are pasted over with pages from the *Graphic*, *Harper's Weekly*, etc. [...]; on the panels [...] a sheet of paper is pinned up, and covered with writing. I cull a few plums.

"A duck-hammock for each person.

A patent organ like the commandant's at Tai-o-hae.

Cheap and bad cigars for presents.

Revolvers.

Permanganate of potass.

Liniment for the head and sulphur.

Fine tooth-comb".

What do you think this is? Simply life in the South Seas foreshortened.¹

The buildings themselves, by their contents and their construction, stand in metaphorical relation to the extent to which the Pacific had been textualized in 1889. Stevenson's shorthand Pacific is a tableau of textualizing activity. The first house, decorated like a museum with various South Sea curios and paraphernalia, represents a constant flow of recontextualizations, of object, language, and people, and refers to the way in which modes of display and the performance of culture can themselves be considered a kind of textualization. The second house, which contains photographic and writing equipment, the apparatus of representation, signifies the prerogative of the writer to represent, to produce a record of what he has observed.

It is the third and last house, however, that yields the most intriguing instance of text-building. With its walls covered by a great many cuttings and advertisements from magazines, and lists of articles of trade, it most fully represents the written Pacific, in which the trade in words written about the Pacific and the encroachment of material culture overlap. The house is, in effect, a built text. It has experienced multiple over-writings. The reference to 'life in the South Seas foreshortened' carries a multiple resonance; it bears a proleptic reference to Stevenson's death in Samoa in 1894; the corrupted condition of the house itself also resonates with what Patrick Brantlinger has called an 'extinction discourse' which, from the late eighteenth century onwards, preoccupied much of the writing about other, supposedly primitive cultures, and which described, 'the inevitable disappearance of some or all primitive races'.² The perception that, in accordance with the precepts of social Darwinism, a process of natural selection was acting among many of the island cultures of the Pacific, was common currency by the time of Stevenson's visit. In addition, each house is a reference to the difficulties of remaining settled in the Pacific, against which the final resonance, the desire to annotate the Pacific for the sake of posterity, can be read.

The purpose of this article is to consider Stevenson's writing about his Pacific experiences, and to explore the tensions inherent between what appear to be commensurate urges to write and to settle. In doing so, it will look at the encounters described by Stevenson as mediated by dual modes of production, that is, building and writing, that are similarly engaged in the production and assertion of presence. In this sense, the article considers the way in which

buildings can be made to signify, and the way texts are constructed. Both function to demonstrate the fact that the writer/builder has occupied a place, has genuinely 'been there'.³ They are monuments of presence, indicating the ability of the authors to represent themselves.

The practice of building a house to mark or commemorate presence has a traceable precedence in the post-exploration Pacific. In 1837, on Vaitahu in the Marquesas Islands, the missionary John Stallworthy witnessed the departure of his fellow missionaries, the Rodgersons, and was left 'alone on the beach. To celebrate his lonely survival, Stallworthy built a new house, spending weeks on the construction of its walls and paths and fence'.⁴ It is significant that Stallworthy's house is built to signify a singular presence—he is the sole occupant of the beach. This kind of singular, settling presence implicitly refers to a corresponding absence, in this case both of other settlers and, more ominously, of any indigenous presence. The assertion of presence is thus associated with the absolute control of context.

To negotiate the convergence of building and writing, this article will invoke the notion of the 'text-builder', from Alton Becker's call for a "[...] new philologist—a specialist in contextual relations—in all areas of knowledge in which text-building...is a central activity".⁵ The term 'text-builder' expresses the convergence of writing and building, and encapsulates the convergence of understanding culture as space and culture as knowledge: both concepts are occupied by the text-builder. Thus, through what it tells us about presence, building and settling (or dwelling) are intertwined, problematically, with writing. As the practice of dwelling is reduced to writing, it implies the centrality of certain activities to the performance of text-building: the necessary ability to exert control over context; and also the possibility of resistance: that others apart from the text-builder will engage in simultaneous textualizing practises that contradict or actively oppose the practices of the text-builder.

Rather than as a spur to his imagination, and to the production of further tales of adventure and romance such as *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island*, Stevenson imagined his Pacific travels as a period of research out of which he would compose a comprehensive survey of the cultures he had encountered. In a letter to Sidney Colvin, written as he approached Samoa on 2 December, 1889, Stevenson described his grand design for his book, next to which he predicted

there would be 'few better books now extant on this globe', and which he proposed to call *The South Seas*: 'it is a rather large title, but not many people have seen more of them than I; perhaps no-one: certainly no-one capable of using the material'.⁶ As the title suggests, it was intended to be a definitive work, divided into eight sections, dealing first with general issues, '[o]f schooners, islands, and maroons',⁷ and following with a section on each of the Pacific regions Stevenson had visited: The Marquesas; the Tuamotu Archipelago; Tahiti; Hawai'i; The Gilberts; and Samoa, 'which I have not yet reached'.⁸ As Vanessa Smith has asserted, 'Stevenson's travels were envisaged as a book'.⁹ This forms one of the principal starting points of my own argument: namely, that his intention from the beginning was to textualize his experiences. What is crucial to my argument here, is the manner in which Stevenson foregrounds his role in collating and synthesising the material he has gathered; that is, in constructing the text. The 'I', his own presence, is central, and essential, and I want therefore to argue that what Stevenson's South Sea book was intended to represent was a kind of monument to his role as author—to his ability to gain access to other cultures and experience an encounter that was unlimited in depth, but sacrificed nothing in the exchange.

This project was characterised rather disdainfully by Fanny Stevenson as 'a sort of scientific and historical impersonal thing, comparing the different languages (of which he knows nothing, really) and the different peoples [...] suppose Herman Melville had given us his theories as to the Polynesian language and the probable good or evil results of the missionary influence instead of *Omoa* and *Typee*'.¹⁰ Contrary to both Stevenson's aspirations and his wife's apprehensions, however, scientific travel writing in the nineteenth century was not a wholly neutral and objective exercise; as Nigel Leask has observed, achieving a balance 'between itinerary narrative and scientific disquisitions [...] was seen as a major problem for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific travel writing'.¹¹ Stevenson arrived in the Pacific in the wake of a wave of literature about other cultures in which the scientific and the performative converged in the process of transcribing experience. European travellers who preceded Stevenson to the Pacific were in the main missionaries and sailors who had jumped ship. Several of the latter produced narrative accounts of their time spent among the indigenous islanders, describing their

immersion in the local culture as a mixture of personal narrative and observation of the strange customs and practices they witnessed. It was this kind of 'beachcomber' narrative, such as those produced by William Dampier, Jean Cabri and George Vason,¹² which provided Herman Melville with a model for *Typee* (1846), a text that so gripped Stevenson's imagination.¹³

The habit of texts, such as those by Cabri and Dampier, of 'crossing' different narrative modes, mixing accounts of personal adventure with descriptions of hitherto undescribed peoples, demonstrates that the practice of writing encounter in the Pacific was not carried out in isolation from the subject. Rather, 'the transformation of the trajectory of the journey into that of a narrative [...] involved other kinds of cultural and linguistic crossings and contacts'.¹⁴ These crossings—of cultural and physical boundaries, locate the role of the writer of encounter, such as Stevenson was planning to undertake, in a mode of reciprocal exchange.

The requirement to engage in reciprocal exchange had been recognised long before Stevenson set out his plans for his book of the South Seas. In her 1838 treatise on ethnographic practice, *How to Observe*, Harriet Martineau advocated that,

the observer must have sympathy; and his sympathy must be untrammelled and unreserved. [...] Nothing was ever more true than that "as face answers to face in water, so is the heart of man". To the traveller there are two meanings in this wise saying, both worthy of his best attention. It means that the action of the heart will meet a corresponding action, and that the nature of the heart will meet a corresponding nature.¹⁵

For Martineau, the traveller's sympathy is vital if the other is to be called into a reciprocal exchange; the performance, therefore, of his own presence determines the outcome of the encounter. As Mary Louise Pratt has argued, in relation to another piece of travel writing by a Scottish author, Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, of 1799, '[r]eciprocity, [...] is the dynamic that above all organises Park's human-centred, interactive narrative. It is present sometimes as a reality achieved, but always as a goal of desire, a value'.¹⁶ This was a value shared by Stevenson; in a letter to Sidney Colvin, sent from Honolulu on 2 April, 1889, Stevenson recommended two Tahitians who were to visit Europe, and advised Colvin on how to meet them:

'A hint: if you want to put these people at their ease, talk of our Middle Ages, Highland Clans, etc.—*then they no longer feel foreign*—this has been my highly successful principle'.¹⁷ However, as Stevenson was to discover, '[w]ritings from the beach [...] were subject to the risks of encounter'.¹⁸

Greg Dening has described one such example; Peter Heywood, one of the *Bounty* mutineers, responded to overtures from his Tahitian hosts that he be tattooed with a great readiness. In a letter to his mother describing his reasons for becoming tattooed he states, 'it was my constant endeavour to acquiesce in any little custom which I thought would be agreeable to them, though painful in the process, provided I gained by it their friendship and esteem'.¹⁹ Heywood discovered himself living amongst an excessively amenable host, whose generosity inspired him to make a gesture in kind. As a demonstration of reciprocity, Heywood thus 'let them make him like themselves,' discovering 'joy in being possessed', as Dening has put it.²⁰ As the example of Heywood demonstrates, the 'crossings' that followed the initial crossing of the beach involved a degree of partiality—that is, a sacrifice of presence. This corresponds with Greg Dening's definition of the beach as a site of loss, the space that is initially crossed in instances of cultural interaction. He famously described the exchange that occurs as parties negotiate the beach: 'things come across the beach partially, without their fuller meaning'.²¹ Those that cross the beach represent their own culture in ways that are partial or incomplete, and their experience of exchange allows only a partial immersion in the host culture. In contrast to Dening's notion of 'partial', I will refer to Stevenson's ideal imagined encounter as a 'complete' encounter, in which the assertion of presence through the text is not infringed upon or compromised—the phrase is intended to suggest an encounter which does not concede to the partial condition of the beach. One of the principle tensions in *In the South Seas*, the book which Stevenson did eventually produce from his Pacific travels, is that between his desire for a fully reciprocal encounter—to properly cross the beach and engage with his subject—and the anxiety produced by the partial condition that inevitably followed. Where this partial condition threatened the centrality and authority of Stevenson's authorial performance, textual crisis ensued.

In line with the concern for building and writing, this article will examine Stevenson's production of two monuments to his own presence in the Pacific; *In the South Seas*, which recorded his experiences of touring Polynesia, in the yacht *Casco* from June 1888 to January 1889, and in the schooner *Equator* for June 1889 to December of the same year; and also the house he built near Apia, in Samoa, having resolved to settle there in September 1890. This article will consider three instances in which Stevenson's encounters are mediated by or centred around a building or buildings: in the Marquesas, where he investigated indigenous dwelling places; in the Gilbert Islands, where the King of Apemama built a temporary house for Stevenson; and in Samoa, where he elected to settle and build himself a house. In doing so, it will look to consider three aspects of tension relating to presence in *In the South Seas*: that is, the anxiety of the unwritable subject; the destabilizing influence of a proficient indigenous textualizing presence; and the extent to which the pursuit of a 'complete' encounter, which does not admit the partial nature of the beach, is frustrated by building and writing.

In the South Seas opens with Stevenson's decision, in 1890, to make his home on Samoa: 'the axes of my black boys are already clearing the foundations of my future house; and I must learn to address readers from the uttermost parts of the sea'.²² The projects of narration and settlement are linked in the creation of a text; here, then, we find at the outset of Stevenson's text a dual undertaking: to assert presence through building, and to write the Pacific. Vanessa Smith has described the problem of writing about Pacific encounters experienced by Stevenson, by drawing a contrast between Walter Benjamin's storyteller and Claude Levi-Strauss's bricoleur, which also is instructive in considering the adjacent concern of building. In his essay 'The Storyteller', Benjamin describes storytelling as 'an artisan form of communication'.²³ He associates the storyteller with the medieval craftsman; as Vanessa Smith has said, Benjamin 'links the production of narrative with a context of licensed workmanship'.²⁴ It therefore describes a conjunction of building and writing anticipated by Stevenson; the construction of a narrative, or of a dwelling structure, is ordered, controlled, and fitted to a particular design, by a single figure. In addition, Benjamin also describes storytelling as a bridge for contact: it is 'the ability to exchange experiences. [...] The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own and that

reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale'.²⁵ Located at the centre of reciprocal experience, the storyteller does not concede any remainder, or element of the partial, in his craft.

Stevenson similarly aspired to avoiding the partial in his constructions. In a letter to Charles Baxter, dated 6 September 1888 while the *Casco* was sailing to the Tuamotu archipelago, Stevenson goes so far as to suggest that the experience of the beach goes hand in hand with a compulsion to write:

Excuse me if I write little: when I am at sea, it gives me a headache; when I am in port, I have my diary crying, "Give, give". I shall have a fine book of travels, I feel sure: and will tell you more of the South Seas after very few months than any other writer has done—except perhaps Herman Melville.²⁶

This passage is of interest as it provides an insight into the manner in which Stevenson conceived of the space of the beach at the outset of his travels. Rather than the space of loss described by Dening, it is when he reaches the beach that Stevenson feels the pressure to transcribe his experiences—that is, it was on the beach he most fully engaged in his role as author. His confidence is high that in his authorial role he will achieve a kind of narrative such as that described by Benjamin, one that will resist the partial nature of encounter.

However, in contrast to Benjamin's model of artisanal text production, Smith has posited the beachcomber narratives that preceded Stevenson, 'producing objects and narratives that are makeshift rather than crafted, from materials to hand at the periphery of empire',²⁷ as the archetype of the written encounter in the Pacific. In *How to Observe*, Martineau has also conceded the inevitably partial nature of the encounter:

[The traveller] does not command the expanse; he is furnished, at best, with no more than a sample of the people; and whether they be indeed a sample, must remain a conjecture which he has no means of verifying. He converses, more or less, with, perhaps, one man in ten thousand of those he sees; and of those few with whom he

converses, no two are alike in powers and in training, or perfectly agree in their views
[...].²⁸

The partial nature of narratives of encounter constantly undermines Stevenson's efforts to assert an authentic presence through his role as author. It is at this point that the crisis of *In the South Seas* is located: in the possibility of authentic presence set against the distance imposed by transcription. Significantly, Benjamin imagined his storyteller operating in an oral mode, in contrast to which, '[t]he novelist isolates himself'.²⁹ Reciprocal exchange is an oral transaction, to which the practice of writing and transcription is an impediment. David Richards has noted the relationship, applied by Derrida, between speech and literacy, and social presence: 'For Derrida, the "ethic of speech is the delusion of presence mastered", "the image of a community present to itself, without difference. Writing is [...] a condition of social inauthenticity"'.³⁰ Despite his privileging of authorial authority, reciprocity was important to Stevenson in his encounters with the indigenous population, as a means of overcoming the problems of difference. For Stevenson, the desire for reciprocity is oriented around a desire to achieve some form of authentic (spoken) communication. Yet his function as a writer stifles any possibility of this, reinforcing the difference between Stevenson and his subject; rather than reciprocal, dialogic encounter, writing introduces a set of codifying, representational power-relations that centre on the performance of presence. Whereas his aspirations are similar to those of Benjamin's storyteller, his participation in the technology of writing critically undermines his endeavours. Furthermore, where he meets resistance to his efforts to write encounter, Stevenson's text struggles against the threat of the effacement of authorial presence; the anxiety that, if what he encounters is *unwritable*, then he will be made to occupy a position of absence, continually disturbs Stevenson.

I.

The problem of unwritability confronts Stevenson in his first pacific landfall, at Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas. As he approaches the shore he anticipates his forthcoming encounter in terms of a complete immersion: 'the anchor plunged. It was a small sound, a great event; my soul went

down with these mooring whence no windlass may extract it nor any diver fish it up'.³¹ There is also, however, a hint of anxiety; 'it was with something perhaps of the same anxious pleasure as thrilled the bosom of discoverers that we drew near these problematic shores'.³² The unfamiliarity of the 'problematic shores' arouses his anxiety about how to write what he sees:

The suffusion of vague hues deceived the eye; the shadows of clouds were confounded with the articulations of the mountain; and the isle and its unsubstantial canopy rose and shimmered before us like a single mass. [...] Somewhere, in that pale phantasmagoria of cliff and cloud, our haven lay concealed.³³

His first encounter with the Marquesan inhabitants compounds this; they 'swarmed' the Casco, offering 'no word of welcome', such that Stevenson fears they are 'beyond the reach of articulate communication'.³⁴ He describes the experience of writing his journal in his cabin as his Marquesan guests 'squatted cross-legged on the floor, and regarded me in silence with embarrassing eyes'.³⁵ Edmond has described this moment as 'a classic example of the observer observed',³⁶ and drawn a comparison with the incident in *Typee* where Tommo first encounters the Typee: 'One of them in particular, who appeared to be the highest in rank, placed himself directly facing me; looking at me with a rigidity of aspect under which I absolutely quailed. He never once opened his lips, but maintained his severe expression of countenance, without turning his face aside for a single moment. Never before had I been subjected to so strange and steady a glance; it revealed nothing of the mind of the savage, but it appeared to be reading my own'.³⁷ In terms of the performance of presence, the text-based logic of encounter should locate the Marquesan silence as absence; silence becomes proof of inarticulacy, rather than a reluctance to speak, and the Marquesans are thus figured as inauthentic, lacking the facility that will provide Stevenson with proof that he has encountered the authentic, and which he can textualize. Yet this is subverted, as the author is subjected to a reversal of gaze. Frank McLynn has explained Stevenson's mistake lay in his ignorance of local custom:

At this stage RLS knew nothing about Polynesian etiquette, which required a host to sit as a gesture of reconciliation; to remain standing was an insult. Stevenson unwittingly

gave offence by continuing to write instead of sitting on the floor with his guests, and did not, as expected, clap his hands as a signal for the Marquesans to initiate a welcoming ceremony in song and dance.³⁸

For all his extensive research and desire to engage with the indigenous population, writing remains the obstacle. This experience reinforces his anxiety that the subject will prove unwritable: 'my new fellow-creatures sat before me dumb like images. Methought, in my travels, all human relation was to be excluded; and when I returned home (for in those days I still projected my return) I should have but dipped into a picture-book without a text'.³⁹

In order to write, therefore, it becomes apparent that Stevenson must limit the alienation his has so far encountered, particularly in terms of language. He declares, '[t]he impediment of tongues was one I particularly over-estimated',⁴⁰ and offers proof in a comparative table of various Polynesian equivalents of *house* and *love*:

	<i>House</i>	<i>Love</i>
Tahitian	FARE	AROHA
New Zealand	WHARE	
Samoa	FALE	TALOFA
Manihiki	FALE	ALOHA
Hawai'ian	HALE	ALOHA
Marquesan	HA'E	KAOHE ⁴¹

Stevenson is discovering a means to cope with the problematics of textualizing his subject; by suggesting a degree of similarity between different languages, he hopes to eliminate unwritable diversity. To further manage the unfamiliar, he refers to a context of comparison:

It was perhaps more important that I had enjoyed in my youth some knowledge of our Scots folk of the Highlands and the Islands. [...] points of similarity between a South Sea people and some of my own folk at home ran in my head in the islands; and [...] [i]t was so that I hit upon a means of communication which I recommend to travellers. When I

desired any detail of savage custom, or of superstitious belief, I cast back in the story of my fathers, and fished for what I wanted with some trait of equal barbarism: Michael Scott, Lord Derwenter's head, the second-sight, the Water Kelpie,—each of these I have found to be a killing bait. The black bull's head of Stirling procured me the legend of Rahero; and what I knew of the Cluny Macphersons, or the Appin Stewarts, enabled me to learn, and helped me to understand, about the Tevas of Tahiti. *The native was no longer ashamed, his sense of kinship grew warmer, and his lips were opened.* ⁴²

Reference to Scots culture is intended to engender a sense of intimacy between Stevenson and his indigenous subject, by bringing the unfamiliar within the sphere of the familiar. Intimacy is necessary for the mode of sharing that constitutes a reciprocal encounter. He notes a similarity between Scots and Polynesian pronunciation—'common to both tongues [is] the trick of dropping medial consonants'⁴³—and it is significant that, as with the language table, Stevenson focuses his approach to comparison through the problem of how to write the Marquesan *houses*. Gaston Bachelard has described the house as a 'domain of intimacy', without which 'man would be a dispersed being'.⁴⁴ Stevenson's references to Scots culture, and especially Scots houses, are therefore a strategy to counter-act the threatened dispersalizing consequences, upon his text, of the unwritable.

Familiarity, or intimacy, with a Highland turf house allows Stevenson to 'read' its appearance:

In Scotland wood is rare, and with materials so rude as turf and stone the very hope of neatness is excluded. And in Scotland it is cold. Shelter and a hearth are needs so pressing that a man looks not beyond; [...] he has not an appetite for more. Or if for something more, then something higher; a fine school of poetry and song arose in these rough shelters.⁴⁵

In contrast, he says of the Marquesan *paepae-hae*: 'The same word, as we have seen, represents in many tongues of Polynesia, with scarce a shade of difference, the abode of man.

But although the word be the same, the structure itself continually varies'.⁴⁶ Because he lacks intimacy with Marquesan structures, they remain as unwritable as their inhabitants. Rather than provide a basis for reciprocal narrative, Stevenson's references to his own culture merely counterbalance the sense of displacement he feels when confronted with what he cannot write, and which resists incorporation into his text. The implication is that the unreadable *paepae-hae* will therefore resist his efforts to write it.

The comparison with Highland cultures also, however, provokes Stevenson's anxiety about his capacity to write his encounter. Stevenson was well aware of what T.M. Devine has called 'The Disintegration of Clanship'⁴⁷ during the eighteenth century: 'Not much beyond a century has passed since they were in the same convulsive and transitory state as the Marquesas of to-day'.⁴⁸ By invoking a deteriorated culture as the basis of his efforts to engender a reciprocal relationship with the Marquesas islanders, he demonstrates an anxious undercurrent of feeling that his subject is in a similar process of terminal dissolution, rapidly disappearing before his eyes, and before he can write it up properly. Here we can clearly see the influence of social Darwinism, and Adam Smith's stadial theory of culture, on Stevenson's text.⁴⁹ He describes his impression of a prevailing sense of fatalism in Marquesan culture: 'The thought of death [...] is uppermost in the mind of the Marquesan [...] death reaps them with both hands',⁵⁰ and the people are to his eyes visibly waning from European disease. Stevenson sees everywhere the threat of deracination, such as an encounter with a young Marquesan mother:

[...] she began with smiling sadness, and looking on me out of melancholy eyes, to lament the decease of her own people. "*Ici pas de Kanaques*", said she; and taking the baby from her breast, she held it out to me with both her hands. "*Tenez*—a little baby like this; then dead. All the Kanaques die. Then no more". The smile, and this instancing by the girl-mother of her own tiny flesh and blood affected me strangely; they spoke of so tranquil a despair.⁵¹

The scene does indeed affect Stevenson strangely. Edmond has described this as evidence of Stevenson's pronounced 'use of the pathetic fallacy', superimposing his own waning health upon

his environment: 'a dying narrator confronts a Polynesian world represented in similarly terminal decline'.⁵² What is most interesting here is the dying narrator, and it is my contention that in Stevenson's rendering of the scene, it is a short step from the dying narrator and dying subject, to the death of narrative.

Stevenson's imagination translates the Marquesan predicament to a European context: 'in a perspective of centuries I saw their case as ours, death coming like a tide, and the day already numbered when there should be no more Beretani, and no more of any race whatever, and (what oddly touched me) no more literary works and no more readers'.⁵³ He goes on to describe the devastating consequences of an outbreak of smallpox among the Hapaa: 'in less than a year two survivors, a man and a woman, fled from that newly-created solitude. A similar Adam and Eve may some day wither among new races, the tragic residue of Britain'.⁵⁴ He imagines a reversal of the creation narrative, thus figuring the end of narration.

Confronted with the depopulation of indigenous society, Stevenson is also confronted with anxiety that he will be unable to dwell. He has hinted that he considers dwelling a tenuous state, one that might endure for a time but will always end in departure. Although when describing his decision to build his Samoan house, he declares that, '[f]ew men who come to the islands leave them; they grow grey where they alighted',⁵⁵ he simultaneously, when recounting his first Marquesan landfall, retains a sense of this partial condition, which he articulates by recourse to indigenous culture: "The coral waxes, the palm grows, but man departs", says the sad Tahitian proverb; but they are all three, so long as they endure, co-haunters of the beach'.⁵⁶ Significantly, whereas he appears to be appropriating a native voice in order to describe the incompleteness of exchange, he is actually borrowing a phrase with a complex, intertextual history. The proverb in question had already been included in, amongst other sources, William Ellis's *Polynesian Researches* (1816) and Herman Melville's *Omoo* (1847), both of which Stevenson was aware of. Thus, in quoting it himself he is textualizing his own account, in such a way that demonstrates the difficulty of settling with conviction. His settler's confidence is undermined by the new visitor's sense that man's dwelling is inevitably temporary and limited in depth. Stevenson refers to this proverb just before his account of the moment of arrival; its inclusion and his brief exposition

introduce an undertone of anxiety to his first recollections of the Marquesans; his insight into the partial condition is intimately informed by a sensibility of his own potentially inauthentic condition.

The perception of imminent depopulation increases the urgency of Stevenson's textualizing project; but he realises that if the subject proves to be unwritable then the culture and the text will die also. What most affects him about the possible demise of the Marquesans is the end of their potential writability. The loss of his subject would create a debilitating absence at the centre of Stevenson's 'travels envisaged as a book'. If the subject is permanently unwritable there exists no further possibility of dwelling. Stevenson even makes an association between depopulation of the island and the subsequent decay of their 'empty *paepaes*. When a native habitation is deserted, the superstructure—pandanus thatch, wattle, unstable tropical timber—speedily rots, and is speedily scattered by the wind. Only the stones of the terrace endure; nor can any ruin, cairn, or standing stone, or vitrified fort present a more stern appearance of antiquity'.⁵⁷ This passage suggests the relief of the land when those who dwell upon it leave, and despite Stevenson's rationalising, social Darwinist assertion that depopulation is due to the rapid pace of social change, brought on by exposure to European culture—'change of habit is bloodier than a bombardment'⁵⁸—there is a sense here that he shares in the Marquesans' perceived fatalism. This is the fear against which Stevenson's twin urges to write and to settle constantly struggle, and which is compounded by the paradoxical condition of the writer. Writing, for the writer, is his condition of being, and is both an inducement and a barrier to integration with the host culture. His presence is a consequence of his desire to write, yet it also prevents him from fully integrating, serving as a constant reminder of his outsider status. Inability to integrate fully means an inability to settle; the partial condition of writing encounter is to alienate the writer from his material, thus writing, or at least *textualizing*, alienates dwelling.

II.

Stevenson landed at Apemama, in the Gilbert Islands, on 1 September 1889, where he met an islander as complicit in textualizing strategies as himself—the Gilbertese king, Tembinok', whose text-creating facility was demonstrated by his voracious collecting. Stevenson wrote:

He is greedy of things new and foreign. House after house, chest after chest, in the palace precinct, is already crammed with clocks, musical boxes, blue spectacles, umbrellas, knitted waistcoats, bolts of stuff, tools, rifles, fowling-pieces, medicines, European foods, sewing-machines, and, what is more extraordinary, stoves.⁵⁹

Susan Stewart has described the process of collecting as, 'the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context':⁶⁰

[I]ts function is not the restoration of context of origin but rather the creation of a new context, a context standing in a metaphorical, rather than a contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life. Yet unlike many forms of art, the collection is not representational. The collection presents a hermetic world: to have a representative collection is to have both the minimum and the complete number of elements necessary for an autonomous world—a world which is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority.⁶¹

The collector engages in similar processes as the text-builder, appropriating and recontextualizing his materials, pursuing an ideal of representation that is unattainable. Neither the collector nor the text-builder can have absolute authority over their subject, making it a necessary condition of possession in both instances that the subject be removed from its original context and placed in a new, bounded context, which is available for control.

Stevenson's response to this fabulous assemblage of mundane artefacts is to catalogue it. However, this is not an encounter with the unwritable, as in the Marquesas, but with the already-written. Under Tembinok', Apemama is a highly textualized environment. Speaking in relation to the toy, Stewart has described the relationship between the collection and the text:

'The toy is the physical embodiment of the fiction: it is a device for fantasy, a point of beginning for narrative. The toy opens an interior world [...] To toy with something is to manipulate it, to try it out within sets of contexts, none of which is determinative'.⁶² Tembinok's collection, secured in a series of specially constructed houses, 'toys' with meaning and context in an open-ended, *narrative* process, and can thus be figured as a text. Tembinok's collection is a response to the recontextualization of the Pacific. Stevenson notes that Apemama is the only island remaining on whose beaches a white man may not embark as he pleases, whereas '[t]he white man is everywhere else, *building his houses*'.⁶³ Apemama, by contrast, 'is a closed island, lying there in the sea with closed doors'.⁶⁴ Tembinok's hermetic collection is an expression of his ability to impose his authority on the context in which material culture encroached upon his islands. Stevenson notes that Tembinok' made him swear that he would, 'give his [the king's] subjects no liquor or money (both of which they are forbidden to possess) and no tobacco, which they were to receive only from the royal hand'.⁶⁵ As O.H.K. Spate has said, the influx of nineteenth-century materialism made over the Pacific as 'a European artefact'.⁶⁶ By appropriating the artefacts of materialism and manipulating their context—arranging them within his collection and acting as the sole authority determining what may and may not be received and exchanged in his kingdom—Tembinok' demonstrates his mastery of context. As Spate has said, "'The Pacific" is a European artefact: not so the peoples who inhabit its shores and islands—rather, they are artificers'.⁶⁷

Tembinok' further demonstrates his mastery of context in the terms by which he allows the Stevenson party to dwell on the island: 'We were to choose a site, and the king should there build us a town. His people should work for us, but the king only was to give them orders. [...] [H]e was to come to meals with us when so inclined'.⁶⁸ These terms include a prohibition on interfering with island trade, which the king's sole preserve; and a reference to his rigid control of discourse. Stevenson describes him as 'an admirer of silence in the island; he broods over it like a great ear; has spies who report daily; and had rather his subjects sang than talked'.⁶⁹ As the *Equator* is unloaded, Stevenson describes the curious scene of the construction of their compound: 'It was singular to spy, far off through the coco stems, the silent oncoming of the *maniap*', at first (it seemed) swimming spontaneously in the air—but on a nearer view betraying under the eaves

many score of moving naked legs'.⁷⁰ Tembinok', rather than build a settlement from raw materials, has confiscated the houses (*maniap*'s) of his subjects and ordered them to be transported to what was to become Equator Town, recontextualizing the already-made. Stevenson later encounters one of the dispossessed population; while walking on the beach he realises that, '[n]ear by there had been a house before our coming, which was now *transported and figured for the moment in Equator Town*'.⁷¹

Tembinok' is able to dictate context; thus he is able to recontextualize Stevenson to suit his purposes. He builds a fence around the perimeter of the compound, and places the whole under tapu, manufacturing a segregated space in which foreigners can be observed free from the intrusion of everyday island life: 'we sat in the midst in a transparent privacy, seeing, seen, but unapproachable, like bees in a glass hive'.⁷² Stevenson is 'the subject of a constant study'⁷³ by the king. His purpose is to collect information pertinent to his rule:

The quality of his white visitors puzzled and concerned him; he would bring up name after name, and ask if its bearer were a "big chiep", or even a "chiep" at all [...] He was struck to learn that our classes were distinguishable by their speech, and that certain words (for instance) were tapu on the quarter-deck of a man-o-war; and he begged in consequence that we should watch and correct him on the point. [...] We were showing him the magic-lantern; a slide of Windsor castle was put in, and I told him there was the "outch" of Victoreea. "How many pathom he high?" he asked, and I was dumb before him. It was the builder, the indefatigable architect of palaces, that spoke; collector though he was, he did not collect useless information; and all his questions had a purpose.⁷⁴

It is significant that Tembinok's motives leave Stevenson speechless; within the text-based logic of presence, he is therefore fixed in a category of absence. McLynn notes that, as the Stevensons departed Apemama, the king 'told him how much he had learned about the world from white men, whom he called his "books"',⁷⁵ thus in the confrontation with a textualizing indigenous presence, Stevenson himself is made a text.

III.

Stevenson's final stop was in Samoa, in December 1889, where he made his decision to settle, and commenced the difficult task of revising his journals into a publishable form. Rod Edmond has described Stevenson's Pacific output as, 'the product of complex transactions between an already extensively textualized Pacific and his own distinctive experience as a traveller-writer who was to become a settler'.⁷⁶ This complex mediation of genre and vocation reflects the difficult formal history of what became *In the South Seas*. Whilst staying at Saranac with his family in the winter of 1887-1888, Stevenson was approached by Samuel McClure to produce a series of fifty articles, or letters, describing the journey he was to take in the South Pacific. For these he would receive '£20 per letter in England, and a further \$200 each in the USA',⁷⁷ which would provide the necessary finance to undertake the voyage. However, Neil Rennie has noted that the journal kept by Stevenson, from which he would extract material for his letters, exhibits a remarkable similarity to the published text of *In the South Seas*, suggesting, 'Stevenson was not so much writing a journal as drafting an account for publication'.⁷⁸ He imagined a book on a large scale, encompassing the rich and diverse heritages of language, myth and folklore from the whole of the South Seas. It was in Samoa, where he was also engaged in building himself a house, that Stevenson set about building his text from the various materials he had accumulated during his travels.

On 2 December, 1889, Stevenson wrote to Colvin of his design for his book, consisting of great inter-island comparisons of the like that had not previously been attempted. He finally reached Samoa on 7 December, and by January had decided upon a site near to the capital Apia on which to build his permanent Pacific residence. However, by this time his grand design had already begun to fragment, as a letter to Baxter written on 28 December illustrates: Stevenson had begun to envisage a separate volume dealing with Samoan history and politics, which became *A Footnote to History*, in addition to his 'big South Sea Book: a devil of a big one, and full of the finest sport'.⁷⁹

Already he was exhibiting uncertainty regarding how his material should be used, although his confidence that he would be capable of using it well was undiminished. But his grand

design contradicted his original commission for a series of letters based on his experiences in the Pacific. He was faced with several different pressures acting at once upon the material he had gathered between 1888 and 1889: his ambition to create a definitive work, and the demands of publishers and family, that narratives of personal experience should not be subordinate to geological inquiry and etymological theorising. Stevenson's cruise on the *Janet Nicholl* in the middle of 1890 was 'chiefly occupied with revising earlier material, rather than with [...] day-to-day accounts',⁸⁰ apart from a series of four letters describing his visit to Penrhyn, none of which were included in *In the South Seas*,⁸¹ Stevenson laid down his notebook in order to devote his energies to the organisation of his material. Yet these energies were divided between the construction of his book and the letters. By 19 July, 1890, he was able to send McClure, as promised, an instalment of fifteen finished letters worked up from the Marquesas material, but with the following qualification: 'what you are to receive is not so much a certain number of letters, as a certain number of chapters in my book. The two things are identical but not co-terminous'. He left it to McClure 'to choose out of the one what is most suitable for the other,' and promised the remaining letters by 'at the latest before Easter '91.'⁸² Although McClure secured syndication of the letters with the *New York Sun*, and *Black and White* in London, his response confirmed that Stevenson was facing a crisis of form, when he complained in early 1891, 'the letters did not come as letters are suppose to come. They were not a correspondence from the South Seas, they were not dated and ...in no way...fulfil[ed] the definition of the word "letter" as used in newspaper correspondence'.⁸³ These fifteen chapters were privately printed in November, in a copyright edition, under the title *The South Seas: A Record of Three Cruises*.⁸⁴ However, this partial printing, which included only the Marquesas material, emphasised the partial nature of Stevenson's written encounter.

By this time Stevenson was facing the prospect that his material was going to slip away from him, and it is significant that his increasingly apparent difficulty in marshalling his material coincided with the gradual transformation of his sense of his presence in the Pacific: first as a visitor, but later as a settler. Roger Swearingen notes that it was between 31 August and 25 October, 1889, while staying at Apemama, that Stevenson first 'began working on *The South*

Seas as distinct from his day-to-day accounts',⁸⁵ and this coincided with his initial decision to remain in the Pacific. He arrived with his family on the estate he was to call Vailima in September 1890, and it was in the midst of the clearing and laying down of his settlement that he realised the problem handling such 'a mass of stuff' as he had gathered on his first trips was 'architectural-creative—[how] to get this stuff jointed and moving',⁸⁶ as he explained in a letter to Colvin in November. The crisis of form was compounded by the fact that his materials would not cohere, and it is evident from his correspondence that, as he sought simultaneously to build his Samoan house and build his text of the South Seas, that the satisfaction he found in the former was increasingly lacking in the latter. He complained to Colvin in March 1891, that:

Today I have not weeded, I have written instead from six till eleven, from twelve till two [...]; a damned Letter is written for the third time; I dread to read it, for I dare not give it a fourth chance—unless it be very bad indeed. [...] On the whole I prefer the massacre of weeds.⁸⁷

The intransigence of the South Sea material contrasted greatly with the marvellous construction of the 'new two-storied Vailima residence':

[...] it was an imposing sight. [...] Painted peacock-blue, with a red-iron roof, Vailima was equipped with shutters against gales and gauze-screened windows to keep out mosquitoes, cockchafes, moths, beetles and other insects. There were no doors, only hanging mats or curtains, but a verandah ran along the whole north side of the house, both upstairs and downstairs. [...] [Stevenson's] study was a small room off the library—actually an enclosed bit of the north-west corner of the upper verandah.⁸⁸

In another letter to Colvin, in late April 1891, Stevenson was able to declare, 'Our old house is now demolished; it is to be rebuilt on a new site'.⁸⁹ The Stevensons had originally occupied a small cottage on the Vailima site, built for them by H. J. Moors, a local trader, while their larger house was being built. Thus he experienced far greater satisfaction in the redrafting of his settlement than he did of his text.

By the end of the year he had acquired a household of as many as nineteen Polynesian servants, in addition to his retinue of family and hangers-on. He had filled his mansion with fine objects from his family home: '[f]rom the households of Herriot Row and Skerryvore came Mahogany and rosewood furniture, chests of silver and linen, mirrors, a piano, a Rodin sculpture, wine glasses, decanters and, above all, books'.⁹⁰ As he progressively assumed the role of settler, building his household and developing his interest in island politics, Stevenson felt himself entering into another role that came to him via the myths of his native Scotland, which he had frequently drawn upon to assist his understanding of the Polynesian myths and traditions he encountered on his tours: McLynn has noted that, as his household became established, Stevenson came to regard 'himself as an old-style patriarch, like Cameron of Lochiel or Cluny MacPherson, with quasi-familial duties towards his extended family of retainers'.⁹¹ As already demonstrated by his descriptions of Scots and Polynesian houses, Stevenson's familiarity with Scottish folklore provided him with a basis for approaching the complexities of Polynesian society, and thus for many of the encounters he intended to write; yet as he increasingly began to occupy a role styled after the figures in Scottish legend, rather than use them as a lens through which to view the difference he encountered in the Polynesians, he found the use of this lens to be increasingly beyond his reach. The more he came to regard himself as resembling the old Highland patriarchs, with a retinue of servants, the further removed he became from a truly dialogic encounter. In other words, the more settled he became, the greater the difficulty he experienced in making his material cohere. By May 1891 he was writing to Colvin with excited 'sketch plan[s] of the present state of our empire', while at the same time complaining of the painful progress of the commissioned letters: '[d]ays and days of unprofitable stubbing and digging, and the result still poor as literature'.⁹² Building represented an impediment to writing encounter, just as did writing to the encounter itself, at least of the reciprocal, engaged kind Stevenson wanted to experience.

The combined pressure to produce the letters, and the threatening unwritability of his subject matter which resisted his efforts to make it cohere, presented too great a burden for the material or its author to bear, and by the end of 1891 Stevenson's great South Sea book had all

but collapsed. As early as April he had threatened to 'simply make a book of it by the pruning knife'⁹³ once the commitment for the letters had been fulfilled, of which thirty seven of the promised fifty eventually appeared in syndication. It was not until 1894, following the proposed publication of an 'Edinburgh Edition' of Stevenson's collected works, that he re-engaged with his South Sea material to make selections for inclusion in the collection, which was interrupted by Stevenson's death in December. *In the South Seas* appeared in 1896, assembled from the letters by Colvin, whom McLynn condemns for his inclination to 'suppress, censor, distort, mangle, and bowdlerise' Stevenson's material.⁹⁴ Partly due to Colvin's intervention, and partly to the condition of the material Stevenson left behind, the assembled text fell far short of Stevenson's original grand design; yet it remains, as Vanessa Smith has written, 'a text precisely about how it might be possible to write the Pacific islands'.⁹⁵ Although he produced a range of discerning work relating to the Pacific, including history, fiction, and balladry, his attempts to write the Pacific he himself encountered, as he journeyed first on the *Casco* and then on the *Equator*, and later as he settled on Samoa, were fraught with anxiety, and often frustrated. Yet they were also prone to considerable insight into the complexities of textualization and settlement. In September 1891, as his project for a South Sea book was collapsing, Stevenson wrote to Colvin to defend the impersonal tone he had adopted:

As far as telling you where I went or when, or anything about Honolulu, I would rather die; that is plain and fair. How can anybody care when and how I left Honolulu? [...] If ever I put in any such detail, it is because it leads into something or serves as a transition. To tell for its own sake, never!⁹⁶

Stevenson struggled, throughout the composition of his material, to convert his own experiences into a comprehensive survey of Pacific culture in the islands he visited. Yet although his encounters were frequently subordinated to the impulse to represent them, that is, to writing, it may also be said that writing for Stevenson was subordinate to the encounter; it was a means, however flawed, of achieving a 'transition' that would imply, despite the pressure to textualize, the possibility of engaging in a reciprocal encounter.

NOTES

¹ *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson vol. 6 August 1887 –September 1890* eds. Bradford A. Booth, Ernest Mehw (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) pp.279-281. I would like to acknowledge the support of the University of Leeds, where the work for this article was carried out. The article has been taken from my forthcoming book, *Unsettled Narratives: The Pacific Writings of Stevenson, Ellis, Melville and London* (London and New York: Routledge 2007).

² Brantlinger begins his analysis of extinction narratives by quoting from Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*: 'When civilised nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short, except where a deadly climate gives its aid to the native race'. Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishing: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003) p.1. The notion of a 'fatal impact', pursuant to the encounter between indigenous and Western races, was rapidly appropriated by Manichean imperialism; as Rod Edmond has observed, at the end of the nineteenth century 'evolutionary explanations of the origins of the races' were 'applied to human societies for confirmation of Anglo-Saxon superiority'. Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.156.

³ Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1983) p.4.

⁴ Edmond, 1997 p.190. For more examples of the importance of building in the assertion of incursive presence, see John Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands* (London: J. Snow, 1838); and William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches* (London; Henry G. Bohn, 1853).

⁵ Quoted in Clifford Geertz, 'Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought', in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (London: Fontana Press, 1983) pp.19-35 (p.32).

⁶ Booth and Mehw vol. 6, 1995 p.335.

⁷ *ibid* p.335.

⁸ *ibid* p.336.

⁹ Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth Century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.101.

¹⁰ Booth and Mehw vol. 6, 1995 pp.303-304.

¹¹ Nigel Leask, 'Darwin's "Second Sun": Alexander von Humbolt and the Genesis of *The Voyage of the Beagle*', in *Literature, Science, Psychoanalysis, 1830-1970: Essays in Honour of Gillian Beer* eds. Helen Small and Trudi Tate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) pp.13-36 (p.15).

¹² For extracts of these kinds of Pacific narratives, see *Exploration and Exchange: A South Seas Anthology 1680-1900* eds. Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Smith, Nicholas Thomas (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

¹³ In the case of missionary writing, texts of empirical observation were frequently produced to promote a particular sectarian agenda. Missionary texts were credited with considerable scientific value among students of the Pacific—Darwin described William Ellis's *Polynesian Researches* (1816) 'as one of the main sources of his understanding of Polynesian cultures' (Edmond, 1997 p.104)—but as Christopher Herbert has asserted, 'the idea of atonement for origins stamps itself powerfully upon early experiments in ethnography. [...] Missionaries were attempting to gather authenticated empirical proof of the proposition that unredeemed human nature is a horrifying mass of lust and wickedness'. Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991) p.159. Bernard Smith has also described how the missionary endeavour to provide, in their accounts, examples of indigenous art was intended to promote 'an active dislike in Europe for the figural arts of Pacific peoples. For the missionaries the question was inextricably bound up with idol worship'. Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, 1768-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960) p.245.

¹⁴ 'Introduction' in *Exploration and Exchange: A South Seas Anthology 1680-1900* eds. Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Smith, Nicholas Thomas (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000) p.xxi.

¹⁵ Harriet Martineau, *How to Observe: Morals and Manners* (London: Richard Bentley, 1838) p.41.

¹⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) p.80.

¹⁷ Booth and Mehew vol. 6, 1995 pp.275-276 (italics mine)

¹⁸ Lamb, *et al.*, 2000 p.xvii.

¹⁹ Greg Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power, and Theatre on The Bounty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p.36.

²⁰ *ibid* p.258.

²¹ Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourses on a Silent Land, 1774-1880* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of Hawaii, 1980) p.34.

²² Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas* (London: Penguin, 1998) p.5.

²³ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in *Illuminations* trans. Harry Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970) pp.83-109 (p.91)

²⁴ Smith, 1997 p.23.

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- ²⁵ Benjamin, 1970 pp.83, 87.
- ²⁶ Booth and Mehew vol. 6, 1995 p.207.
- ²⁷ Smith, 1997 p.23.
- ²⁸ Martineau, 1838 pp.4-5
- ²⁹ *ibid* p.87.
- ³⁰ David Richards, *Masks of Difference: Cultural Representations in Literature, Anthropology and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p.230.
- ³¹ Stevenson, 1998 p.8.
- ³² *ibid* p.6.
- ³³ *ibid* pp.6-7.
- ³⁴ *ibid* pp. 8-9.
- ³⁵ *ibid* p.9.
- ³⁶ Edmond, 1997 p.162.
- ³⁷ Herman Melville, *Typee* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972) pp.115-116.
- ³⁸ Frank McLynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1995) pp.319-320.
- ³⁹ Stevenson, 1998 p.8.
- ⁴⁰ *ibid* p.10.
- ⁴¹ *ibid* p.12.
- ⁴² *ibid* pp.12-13 (my italics).
- ⁴³ *ibid* p.12.
- ⁴⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) p.12.
- ⁴⁵ Stevenson, 1998 pp.14-15.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid* p.14.
- ⁴⁷ See T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 170-95.
- ⁴⁸ *ibid* p.12.
- ⁴⁹ Adam Smith asserted that, '[t]here are four distinct stages which mankind passes through. First the age of Hunters; second, the age of Shepherds; third, the age of Agriculture; fourth, the age of Commerce'. Adam Smith, Extract from 'MSS Notes of his Lectures on Jurisprudence, 6 vols, 24 December 1762-12 April 1763 (Glasgow University Library, MS Gen. 94/I), Vol. I, entry for 24 December 1762', in *The Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment 1707-1776* ed. Jane Rendall (London: MacMillan Press, 1978) pp.141-143 (p.141). David Richards has summarised the influence of Smith's stadial theory: 'The stadial theorists' conviction that

societies developed according to the regulating principles of history uncovered by the categorisations of ethnography was an immensely powerful philosophical construction which profoundly shaped the representation of other peoples. Since the European 'past' could be seen in the lives of contemporary primitives who lived nonetheless in a 'previous' epoch of human development, travel to these peoples involved not only a geographical journey, but a voyage in time'. Richards, 1994 p.125.

⁵⁰ Stevenson, 1998 p.23.

⁵¹ *ibid* p.22.

⁵² Edmond, 1997 p.161.

⁵³ Stevenson, 1998 pp.22-23.

⁵⁴ *ibid* p.23.

⁵⁵ *ibid* p.5.

⁵⁶ *ibid* p.8.

⁵⁷ *ibid* p.25

⁵⁸ *ibid* p.34.

⁵⁹ *ibid* p.213.

⁶⁰ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984) p.151.

⁶¹ *ibid* p.152.

⁶² *ibid* p.56.

⁶³ Stevenson, 1998 p.209 (*italics mine*).

⁶⁴ *ibid* p.216.

⁶⁵ *ibid* p.218.

⁶⁶ O.H.K. Spate, 'The Pacific as an Artefact', in *The Changing Pacific: Essays in Honour of H.E. Maude* ed. Niel Gunson (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978) pp.32-45 (p.32).

⁶⁷ *ibid* p.32.

⁶⁸ Stevenson, 1998 p.218.

⁶⁹ *ibid* p.216.

⁷⁰ *ibid* p.220.

⁷¹ *ibid* p.243 (*italics mine*).

⁷² *ibid* p.220.

⁷³ *ibid* p.217.

⁷⁴ *ibid* p.233.

⁷⁵ McLynn, 1995 p.364.

⁷⁶ Edmond, 1997 p.160.

⁷⁷ McLynn, 1995 p.313.

⁷⁸ Neil Rennie, *Far-fetched Facts: The Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p.212.

⁷⁹ *ibid.* p.345.

⁸⁰ Roger G. Swearingen, *The Prose Writings of Robert Louis Stevenson* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980) p.141.

⁸¹ See Robert Louis Stevenson, *Vailima Papers* Tusitala Edition (London: William Heinemann, 1924) p.112.

⁸² Booth and Mehew vol. 6, 1995 pp.394-395.

⁸³ Swearingen, 1980 p.142.

⁸⁴ Neil Rennie, 'Introduction', in Stevenson, 1998 p.xx.

⁸⁵ *ibid.* p.141.

⁸⁶ Booth and Mehew vol. 7, 1995 p.29.

⁸⁷ *ibid* p.95.

⁸⁸ McLynn, 1995 p.397.

⁸⁹ Fanny and Robert Louis Stevenson, *Our Samoan Adventure* ed. Charles Neider (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1956) p.112.

⁹⁰ McLynn, 1995 p.397.

⁹¹ *ibid.* p.399.

⁹² Booth and Mehew vol. 7, 1995 pp.115-116.

⁹³ *ibid* p.102.

⁹⁴ McLynn, 1995 p.507.

⁹⁵ Smith, 1998 p.110.

⁹⁶ Booth and Mehew vol. 7, 1995 p.157.

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

Carla Sassi

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

Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

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

Edwin Morgan, 'Memories of Earth'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

² Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 2005.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hugh MacDiarmid, Harry Lauder and Scottish Popular Culture

David Goldie

Hugh MacDiarmid was, to put it mildly, no great fan of twentieth-century Scottish popular culture. His work is peppered with slighting and outright derogatory references to popular writers and entertainers and to the recreational tastes of his compatriots: from the 'puerile and platitudinous doggerel' promoted by the degraded Burns cult; through the popular writing of those like Annie S. Swan and 'most other accepted Scottish litterateurs' who 'know nothing of literature and life' and 'have no ideas or ideals'; to the works of the popular Scottish Players movement, George Blake, John Brandane, Neil Grant, J. J. Bell, and Hugh Robertson, which are 'entirely destitute of literary distinction or significance'.¹ Among all this spleen sits one pre-eminent target for MacDiarmid's ire: an entertainer who was probably, at the time, the world's most famous living Scotsman, and who in MacDiarmid's resentful description 'rules the roost'—Sir Harry Lauder.² MacDiarmid's criticisms of Lauder take the form both of generalised attacks on the malign influences of popular culture in Scotland and more direct *ad hominem* assaults on Lauder's character. The gist of this commentary, as instanced in *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, is that Lauder is prime among a number of peddlers of 'hokum, hokum, hokum' - a part of a cultural racket that panders unashamedly to a debased popular taste and thus makes the work of serious art impossible.³

Part of MacDiarmid's queasiness about the cultural and recreational tastes of contemporary working-class Scotland might be put down simply to old-fashioned prejudice and snobbism. For a man of relatively humble origins and modest formal education, MacDiarmid could sound surprisingly aristocratic in his put-downs of the urban poor, and rather Arnold-like in his fears of extending to the contemporary proletariat the right of 'doing as one likes'. Nowhere is

this more evident than in his persistent derogation of the hub of proletarian Scotland, Glasgow: a city, according to MacDiarmid, that has 'never had / A single poet of the slightest consequence'; a place whose people are characterised by their 'vulgarity / And pettiness and darkness of spirit' and their need drag down with their 'idiot fury' any solitary genius who might attempt to rise from the city's unplumbed cultural depths:

Wherever the faintest promise, the slightest integrity,
Dares to show in any of the arts or thoughts or politics
At once the jealous senile jabber breaks out
Striking with sure instinct at everything with courage and integrity [. . .]
In the Tarnhelm of unconscionable ignorance
Where "everybody is entitled to his own opinion"⁴

MacDiarmid's assault here is not so much on the working class per se, but at what he sees as a lumpen proletariat corrupted by its masters — a vitiated, enervated people whose better instincts have been beaten down by capitalism. Indeed, he would at various times ostentatiously embrace this proletariat, as with his public espousal in 1936 of 'Scottish Workers' Republicanism' in the wake of his expulsion from the National Party of Scotland. Even here, though one of the preconditions for the needful 'self-education of the Scottish proletariat' was that it learn its 'revolutionary tasks *with the aid of their own intelligentsia*'.⁵ This sounds, perhaps, as much like Arnold as it does Marx in its insistence that the workers do not so much look to themselves and their own values in order to liberate themselves, as submit to the guidance of an enlightened elite. Arguments like this, hedged in the vehement manner with which MacDiarmid castigated the unenlightened proletariat throughout his writing career, rather gives the impression that he identified with the Scottish generality only in so far as he might command their support. Like many leftist intellectuals of the time, he took few, if any, of his values from this mass, but demanded rather that they adapt their tastes and judgements to those he had acquired through his professedly superior reading and culture.

But there is also a more principled and perhaps more interesting reason for MacDiarmid's revulsion from the popular, which derived from his conception of his self-appointed role as the saviour of Scotland's aesthetic culture: his ambition to 'be the creator of a new people, a real bard who "sang" things till they "became"'; to be 'as an individual, the incarnation of an immemorial culture'.⁶ The reader of MacDiarmid's poetry and prose cannot mistake his utter seriousness in this regard: his work is shot through, not only with pronouncements about the nature of the necessary cultural revival, but also with acknowledgments about the sheer amount of hard work that will be required.⁷ MacDiarmid worked himself hard – with what he described rather characteristically as 'that extreme pressure and blinding overwork / Only genius knows' – and clearly expected Scotland to work hard to keep up with him.⁸ Plainly, the simple pleasures of popular culture were an affront to that strenuous moral purpose – a frittering away of the national spirit in a few cheap laughs and a sentimental song. So when he talked of 'Glasgow's hordes', 'All bogged down in words that communicate no thought, / Only mumbo-jumbo, fraudulent clap-trap, ballyhoo', and complained that,

The idiom of which constructive thought avails itself
Is unintelligible save to a small minority
And all the rest wallow in exploded fallacies
And cherish for immortal souls their gross stupidity,⁹

it is apparent that a large part of the cause is the trivialising popular culture in which the people are mired.

It is against this, and often in direct contradistinction to it, that C. M. Grieve first constructed the persona of Hugh MacDiarmid in 1922: a persona dedicated, quite ruthlessly, to reclaiming Scottish cultural standards from 'the preferences of Auchenshuggle, or what smacks of the legacy of Sir Harry Lauder or William McGonagall', and rescuing its language from the 'smattering of hackneyed tags' propagated by the 'rhymesters of the Kail-yard-cum-Harry-Lauder-school'.¹⁰ There can, I think, be little doubt that this was a laudable aim, and that MacDiarmid's

was a timely intervention in the culture. But it is the extent to which he went to the opposite extreme, the way he flew too fast and too far from a trivialising mongrel popular culture to rest on an idea of Scottish culture that placed an inhibiting insistence on national purity and high-aesthetic seriousness, that is particularly troubling.

Troubling, too, is the manner in which this flight from the popular threatened to force the persona of Hugh MacDiarmid over the borderline of an admirable high-minded seriousness into a rather monstrous inhumanity. The emphasis on work, for example, might in one light make him appear an admirable Stakhanovite intellectual labourer, but in another it makes him seem rather like a joyless Victorian reformer for rational recreation – a kind of humourless, tutting public moralist disapproving the irresponsibilities of music hall and cheap literature.¹¹ A more generous commentator would perhaps not have been so grudging about the recreational needs of an already hard-worked people, and so dismissive of the ways in which they chose to spend their hard-won leisure time and disposable income. For someone who claimed to be interested in getting back ‘among the common people and down to the roots of our national psychology’, MacDiarmid was curiously dismissive of what such ‘common people’ actually thought and felt.¹² He seemed, rather, to be much keener on prescribing what, in the light of his tendentious interpretations of the national tradition, he felt they would be better to be thinking and feeling.

A more sensible, and more pragmatic, reformer might also have realised the extent to which humour and the demotic mode more generally can be a powerful weapon: that, from a purely rhetorical standpoint, it can be more effective to cajole than harangue; and that it might just be more prudent and winning to speak to people in the forms of a popular culture to which they willingly subscribe rather than those of a higher form of culture from which it is perceived they have fallen. This, however, would involve stooping to the popular will, and MacDiarmid (like Browning’s Duke of Ferrara) chose never to stoop.¹³ Instead, he risked turning himself into a kind of caricature of pompousness, of ranting humourlessness and red-faced pontification. When it came, for example, to defending what he admitted were his ‘furious attacks’ on Harry Lauder and other Scottish comedians he chose to do so on the rather dubious grounds that a sense of humour was an impediment to the serious artist. ‘It is indeed necessary’, he wrote, ‘to eschew

humour altogether if a man is to make it possible for himself to pursue his art with the almost inhuman tenacity and resolution which is necessary.'¹⁴

MacDiarmid chose increasingly to extend this 'inhuman tenacity' to the subject matter of his philosophical and political poetry, too. For a writer so concerned with the Re-Catholicization of Scotland, he could sound remarkably Puritanical in his insistence upon an informative, ratiocinative poetry purged of its more sensuous and sentimental qualities. It is interesting, for example, to note the tone of evangelical zeal in which he hedges his appeal for *The Kind of Poetry I Want*:

one must die to life in order to be
Utterly a creator – refusing to sanction
The irresponsible lyricism in which sense impressions
Are employed to substitute ecstasy for information,
Knowing that feeling, warm heart-felt feeling,
Is always banal and futile.¹⁵

The persona of Hugh MacDiarmid thus constructed: a persona which privileges relentless work over recreation; which believes a sense of humour to be an impediment to the necessary 'inhuman tenacity' of the artist; and which prefers information to 'irresponsible lyricism' on the ground that heart-felt feeling 'is always banal and futile', is hardly a very sympathetic one, and does not exactly seem like the recipe either for poetic success or the basis of a revived national character. Added to this is MacDiarmid's deeply unattractive Anglophobia, expressed in various ways, from the 'England is Our Enemy' section of *In Memoriam James Joyce*, through a relentless sniping campaign in his journalism, to the boast, in *Lucky Poet*, that indifference and hatred toward the English had 'developed into my life work'.¹⁶ Such a position has, to some extent, a recognisable rationale behind it: the argument advanced by Arnold and developed by the writers of the Irish Renaissance that identified Englishness and English popular culture with

industrialisation and found in Celtic culture a viable, indigenous cure to its various malaises, and which led to the de-Anglicization programmes of Irish Republicanism. So when MacDiarmid talks of 'that made-in-England speciality, the Proletariat' and argues that 'the vast majority of Scots today . . . regard as typically Scottish the very sentiments and attitudes which are the products of their progressive Anglicization,' he is not being extraordinarily contentious.¹⁷ What he is doing, however, is cutting off his lines of communication to that 'vast majority'. By placing himself above the culture, speaking as a True Scot to the sorry mass of inauthentic Scots perverted by the English and their popular culture, he closes down the possibility of a meaningful dialogue. In insisting on the distance between his enlightened position and their debased state he begins to employ a megaphone to get his arguments across.

Given all this, it is no surprise that MacDiarmid felt antipathetic to Lauder: an artist whose basic tools were humour and sentiment, who exhibited an effortlessly sure feel for his audience and appeared to have an indecent capacity to please his English clients with a capering caricature of Scottishness. If it can be said – bearing in mind the extent to which MacDiarmid had modelled a persona in direct contrast to the qualities embodied by Lauder – that they were the Polar Twins of Scottish Culture in the nineteen twenties and thirties, then it is perhaps hardly surprising that MacDiarmid's diatribes have a kind of fratricidal urgency and desperation. His most sustained attack appeared pseudonymously in August 1928 in *The Stewartry Observer*. Two long quotes show the intensity of MacDiarmid's feelings towards the Lauder phenomenon and are, arguably, as interesting for what they tell us about MacDiarmid as about Lauder:

The reason why the Harry Lauder type of thing is so popular in England is because it corresponds to the average Englishman's ignorant notion of what the Scot is – or because it gives him a feeling of superiority which he is glad to indulge on any grounds, justified or otherwise. 'Lauderism' has made thousands of Scotsmen so disgusted with their national characteristics that they have gone to the opposite extreme and become, or tried to become, as English as possible; 'Lauderism' is, of course, only the extreme form

of those qualities of canniness, pawkiness and religiosity, which have been foisted upon the Scottish people by insidious English propaganda, as a means of destroying Scottish national pride, and of robbing Scots of their true attributes which are the opposite of these mentioned. It is high time the Scots were becoming alive to the ulterior effect of this propaganda by ridicule.

Sir Harry Lauder earns £1,500 a week; and Sir Harry himself [. . .] rejoins that he never fails to receive full houses in Scotland as elsewhere. That may well be. There are plenty of non-Scottish people in Scotland to supply him with the necessary audiences. Besides, what proportion of the population of Scotland – or even of the cities in which he appears – do Sir Harry's audiences constitute? A very small and not necessarily in any way a representative one! The present writer has never met a single intelligent Scot who would be seen at a Lauder performance. The fact that this over-paid clown gets £1,500 a week is a shameful commentary on the low state of public taste. It represents a salary which, divided up into good reasonable sums, would provide for 150 intellectual workers yearly amounts of £500 each.¹⁸

Setting aside the more obviously untenable claims (that Lauder so disgusts Scots that they willingly take on English attributes, or that his Scottish audiences are predominantly made up of non-Scots) there are several assertions here that need further examination. The first concerns the extent to which Lauderism is English propaganda foisted on Scots and delivered to audiences that don't represent the majority taste. MacDiarmid here can be said to be glossing over a rather unpalatable truth, which is that Scottish audiences were far from unwilling participants in the kind of tartan comedy epitomised by Lauder. As Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion have argued, tartan comics such as Lauder and his precursor W. F. Frame, were far from being the creations of Anglocentric culture, but were rather 'approved and even celebrated as symbols of a nationality which, under normal circumstances, audiences were never allowed to express'.¹⁹ Paul Maloney has similarly shown that MacDiarmid's assumptions are rather wide of the mark, arguing

that 'the idea that the Scottish comics arose purely as a response to English variety audiences' need for a handle on Scottish identity seems simplistic, given their enormous popularity in Scotland'.²⁰

The second dubious contention made by MacDiarmid derives from what might be described as a zero-sum theory of Scottish culture, seen in the contention that the vast amounts earned by this 'over-paid clown' represent money that ought instead to be spent on salaries for more worthy 'intellectual workers'. Even discounting MacDiarmid's rather piqued envy (understandable, perhaps, given the extremely straitened, and probably unfair, financial circumstances under which he was working at the time) this argument is pernicious, assuming as it does that Lauder is unfairly monopolising a finite, limited resource of capital expenditure on culture. This not only misunderstands economics (a science of which MacDiarmid claimed a profound knowledge) but also hampers culture more widely by refusing it a genuinely productive capability. Instead of welcoming popular cultural forms as an expansion of the whole sum of forms available to the practising Scottish artist, MacDiarmid attacks these forms on the assumption that he is competing against them for a finite sum of cultural and economic capital. MacDiarmid assumes that Scotland isn't big enough for both himself and Lauder, and like a small-town sheriff in a Western insists that one of them will have to leave. This is not only hopelessly parochial, but also betrays a mind unable to see beyond the economics of command. Had MacDiarmid been less concerned about the disbursement of cultural funding and instead concentrated on expanding and diversifying that economy in response to an obvious demand for a wide range of cultural forms, he might have realised that both he and Lauder might have been able to prosper side-by-side in a larger, more broadly-based cultural economy. Why this is particularly pernicious is that this kind of zero-sum argument sets the tone for much of the criticism of popular culture that was to follow in the twentieth century. The arguments against Scottish popular culture, particularly tartanry and kailyard literature, made by commentators like Tom Nairn, Colin McArthur, and in the early work of Cairns Craig have often been grounded in this assumption or one very like it. Based partly in MacDiarmid's modernism, partly in Gramscian thinking about hegemony and false consciousness, and partly in Adorno and Horkheimer's

strictures against the culture industry, their arguments have often turned on the ways popular forms impoverish the culture more generally: characterising popular culture—or as Nairn memorably called it ‘sub-cultural Scotchery’—as a component of a cultural hegemony that makes serious or authentic expression more or less impossible.²¹ For Nairn and McArthur, these are ‘pathological’ and ‘regressive discourses’ that ‘provide a seriously limited set of representations about the country and its people’.²² For Craig, these discourses have turned ‘the language of lowland Scots into a medium necessarily defined with a couthy, domestic, sentimental world’ so that ‘it becomes impossible to give expression to a vernacular working-class environment in Scotland without provoking those connotations’.²³ These arguments are theoretically sophisticated and often very persuasive in their assertions about the political irresponsibility of Scottish popular culture, but they are based on a set of assumptions about the reach of popular culture and its power to repress more serious forms of art and argument that seem to fall down in their real-world applications. Can it really be said, for instance, that Sandy Powell and *Last of the Summer Wine* make Ted Hughes and Tony Harrison impossible? Or that it is credible to deny that *Father Ted* and Seamus Heaney might not spring from the same culture, or that Jackie Mason and Krusty the Clown somehow invalidate Saul Bellow and Philip Roth? Was Scottish culture so limited that Harry Lauder really made it impossible for MacDiarmid to ply his trade and earn an honest living?

MacDiarmid’s grossest error with regard to Lauder, however, was his inability to understand the subtlety of Lauder’s performance and the complexity of the cultural interchange transacted in it. One criticism that MacDiarmid characteristically makes of Lauder and other popular figures is their parochialism – their failure to rise to the status of international artists. This was the stick with which MacDiarmid beat Neil Munro – another very popular practitioner to whose cultural and historical subtleties MacDiarmid proved unresponsive.²⁴ Lauder, however, was not only an internationally recognised artist but also worked in a medium that was itself very far from being parochial. As Scottish theatre historians have shown, the roots of early twentieth-century Scottish music hall and comedy were very diverse: the Glasgow Fair, for instance, had, since the mid-nineteenth century hosted performances by the great English/Italian clown families

such as the Lupinos and the Boleros, helping foster the Scottish penchant for pantomime; and Scottish comedians routinely modelled themselves on continental performers (Bert Denver and Tommy Lorne, for example, drew heavily on the clowning and mime of Jean Gaspard Debureau and Joe Grimaldi)²⁵. Lauder, then, who it must be remembered was deeply dyed in this tradition—and who began as an Irish comedian—was in fact a sophisticated artist working quite consciously in one of the first truly international modern media. It is true that he chose, with a degree of understanding of his audience that amounted almost to cynicism, to make for himself a naïve persona whose primary appeal was to sentiment and to a regressive stereotype of highlandism. But it is also true that he had a much wider tonal range and formal sophistication than this. Paul Maloney has argued that ‘music hall in Scotland offered a more rounded and varied representation of Scottish culture than the predominance of the Scotch comic caricature has led us to expect’, and it is possible to argue that Lauder, who epitomised it, similarly offered a range and roundedness that has been ignored by his detractors.²⁶ His highland persona, for example, was only the most famous of many that he adopted – personae that moved from guilelessness and simplicity on the one hand to real depths of irony and genuine pathos on the other.

It is plainly impossible for a modern critic to evaluate an ephemeral performance from nearly a century before, but the next best thing is to find reliable witnesses to that performance.²⁷ The response of two such credible witnesses, both Englishmen, contradict MacDiarmid’s assertions about the way Lauder degrades the national stereotype and also suggest that his performances were more nuanced and more affecting than MacDiarmid allowed. MacDiarmid talked, for example of the ‘brainless buffoonery and “chortling wut”’ of ‘Sir Harry Lauder and the other Scotch “coamies”’ that are ‘to-day general and accepted as particularly Scottish’.²⁸ The great theatre critic of the *Sunday Times*, James Agate, however, saw it quite differently:

It must not be supposed that Lauder does not calculate his effects. He does. Each verse is more elaborate than the preceding one, so that the effect is both cumulative and culminative. This actor has an exceedingly fine feeling for character. Soldier, sailor, yokel, god’s innocent are all to their several manners born. They are true to nature, yet

transfigured. Even Doughie, the loutish baker, his face covered with flour, his brow bound with a ragged bonnet, wears about him something elfin, something of Pierrot. Once or twice the daft fellow will cock a malignant eye, and in such a moment the great actor is revealed. Lauder can make a face of horror like the mask of Irving's Dante confronted with the starving Ugolino. These qualities of pathos and tragedy are not what the generality look for. To them Lauder is a figure of pure fun, with a modicum of sentimental alloy. They love that description of bonnie Wee Jean with her velvet arms around her father's neck, but they adore still more that rueful 'But she's got ma nose and ear-r-r-s!' Here again the comic idea is given an ingenious twist. The gist of it is not the superimposing of absurdity upon plain sense, but the discovery of the rational in lunatic or sentimental disguise. When all is said and done the man remains an evangelist whose tidings are of pure joy.²⁹

This testifies to Lauder's tonal range and plainly suggests that there is far more to him than a simplistic comedian draped in tartan. The range of characters he embodies plainly begin in caricature but end in the kinds of insightful characterisation to be found in recognisably higher forms of drama.

The idea that the average Englishman gets a wholly misplaced understanding of Scotland through Lauder is similarly brought into question by H. V. Morton. There are few better claimants to the title of representative Englishman in the period than Morton, the much-celebrated *Daily Express* countryside writer and author of the best-selling 'In Search of' series of books that began with *In Search of England*.³⁰ Morton's search for Scotland found him confronted with its most famous performer:

Millions of people who have never seen, and never will see, Scotland have experienced affection for the country whose homelier characteristics are so deliciously exaggerated in this man. Lauder's genius is a thing apart. Observe that sudden extra tenseness which comes to an audience when he is announced; see him come on the stage, a grotesque

little 'Highlander' with a deformed yellow walking-stick; watch him advance right to the footlights and, in the apparent effortless certainty of his genius, grip his audience so tightly to him that his slightest inflexion becomes full of meaning, the hardly perceptible movement of a muscle significant. Rarely does he say anything witty. An audience, however, is willing to welcome anything he may care to say, no matter how commonplace, with a constant ripple of laughter. His personal magnetism is irresistible. [. . .] Watch how he will concentrate his effect on one good laugh, quickly followed with another, funny but with a serious side to it; and then, suddenly, startlingly, and with a simplicity and a sincerity impossible to question, he is telling some story of the war. There is not a sound in the theatre. The little Scotsman stands in the full flare of the floodlights speaking words which come straight from his heart. Every word rings true. In two minutes he has carried hundreds of men and women of different types and mentalities to the opposite pole of emotion. There is real feeling in the theatre now; an emotion which few great actors can command. Something essentially honest, good, pure, and simple in the little Scotsman is speaking to those same qualities in his fellow-men. Then he switches back to laughter! [. . .] The greatest compliment the world pays him is the fact that he is the only comedian who is permitted to be serious whenever he feels like it.³¹

Note that Morton doesn't mistake Lauder's dress for real Scottishness; he spots the caricature immediately (placing, for example, scare quotes around the designation 'Highlander') and recognises it for the 'delicious exaggeration' that it is. Morton is clearly seeing here what presumably most Scots would also have registered in Lauder's performance – a sophisticated presentation of a national type that is being celebrated and ironised at the same moment. Morton's measured, humane view of a complex, self-reflexive popular culture is plainly quite far from MacDiarmid's casual assertions about 'brainless buffoonery' and 'chortling wut'.

What Morton also attests to here, is Lauder's capacity to move and to articulate a deeply-felt response to the devastating social consequences of the First World War. Lauder, of course,

lost his son in the war and so was well placed to speak out in this way – something Morton, as an old soldier, presumably recognised. MacDiarmid, of course, also served in the war, and had made that experience the subject of some of the early writing published in *Annals of the Five Senses*. It is interesting to compare Lauder's seriousness and sensitivity on this issue with MacDiarmid's often more blundering and solipsistic response. Material written by MacDiarmid during his service in Salonika and Marseilles suggests a rather high degree of self-absorption and disregard for the larger catastrophe of war and for the many people suffering in the war's other theatres.³² His post-war poem 'At the Cenotaph' continues in this vein:

'At the Cenotaph'

Are the living so much use
That we need to mourn the dead?
Or would it yield better results
To reverse their roles instead?
The millions slain in the War –
Untimely, the best of our seed? –
Would the world be any the better
If they were still living indeed?
The achievements of such as are
To the notion lend no support;
The whole history of life and death
Yields no scrap of evidence for't. –
Keep going to your wars, you fools, as of yore;
*I'm the civilisation you're fighting for.*³³

This poem is noteworthy for its almost magnificent hauteur and its spleen. Read as a dramatic monologue it offers a powerful insight into a mind driven to the margins of derangement by

Coriolanus-like aspirations and assumptions. If we allow it as the product of what MacDiarmid described as his 'Berserker' poetic persona we can – even if we don't relish its sentiments – at least marvel at its combativeness and the ruthlessness with which it carries through its central argument. But if we believe for one moment that these words are intended to be taken seriously and coldly as a statement of cultural politics then they become something else entirely. At best they offer an example of the kind of aesthetic autism sometimes found in MacDiarmid's work – that fundamental inability to comprehend other opinions and sensibilities which could make his pronouncements seem unnecessarily tactless and gauche. At worst, they ring with a worryingly authoritarian tone. This, of course, is not too much of a concern in the case of a poet – poetry offers a space to attempt to think the unthinkable or say the otherwise unsayable, and a part of MacDiarmid's strength as a poet is his willingness to take risks in affronting aesthetic and political convention. But it is a worry in the case of someone who moves so freely between the aesthetic and political spheres as MacDiarmid, and whose project is so nakedly that of a *Kulturkampf*. It is, after all, one thing to read and enjoy Baudelaire, Nietzsche, and Pound, but quite another to identify with and aggrandize their politics. When MacDiarmid wrote of the need for a Scottish fascism, or when he supported the Soviet Union's repression of Hungary in 1956 it is just about possible to invoke his artistic license and excuse it as the tolerated folly of a poet.³⁴ But such opinions are much less forgivable when uttered from the political platform where the poetic license is necessarily revoked. It was, arguably, often MacDiarmid's problem that he failed to recognise the significance of this boundary and was too ready to exercise an elitism and hauteur acceptable to aesthetics in the spheres of nationalist politics and culture where it was much less acceptable and appropriate. In the case of this poem, MacDiarmid's want of empathy can be excused as kind of sublime curmudgeonliness and perhaps even celebrated in its way as art, but it surely can't be tolerated as politics: it is, arguably, in these terms quite contemptible in its casual disregard for the lives and wishes of millions of his fellow citizens. This perhaps, is what comes of placing oneself above one's audience in the belief that they have become unwittingly conditioned to a state of inferiority by modern culture.

What might leave the sceptical reader even less enamoured of the poem, bearing in mind MacDiarmid's derogation of Lauder, is the way it lumbers rather heavily towards its punch line in the manner of a poorly executed music-hall monologue. It is also not particularly to MacDiarmid's credit that the punch line itself ('I'm the civilisation you're fighting for') is an unattributed lift from a humorous comment made by Lytton Strachey to a bellicose lady patriot during the war. One normally expects the poet to have the mastery of complex emotion and tone, and the vulgar entertainer to disregard humane feeling in grabbing opportunistically for the cheap gag. But in these examples it is Lauder who makes a connection with the audience through his tonal and technical subtlety and MacDiarmid who strikes the hollow note.

All this is not intended to suggest that Lauder is somehow to be preferred to MacDiarmid. MacDiarmid's great poetry needs no defence and will happily stand on its own aesthetic merits; he undoubtedly brought a seriousness to Scottish poetry, and a new belief in the resources of the language that was long overdue. What is worth noting, however, is just how disabling MacDiarmid's contempt for a contemporary popular audience proved to be – both for himself and for those who sought subsequently to make him an exemplar of the national literary consciousness. Contemporaries like Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Edwin Muir could write with equal asperity about urban Scotland – Gibbon once referred to Glasgow as 'the vomit of a cataleptic commercialism' while for Muir the city famously evoked the sense of 'an immense, blind dejection' – but both could also write generously and sympathetically about the plight of its inhabitants.³⁵ For Gibbon, all questions of culture were necessarily secondary to the fact of poverty. 'There is', he suggested, 'nothing in culture or art that is worth the life and elementary happiness of one of those thousands who rot in the Glasgow slums.'³⁶ While in *Scottish Journey*, Muir exhibited a humane understanding of the need to sympathise with rather than condemn the lapses in conduct and taste of the urban working classes. For Muir, the industrial poor were 'ordinary men and women in a hopeless position, who have been placed there by the operation of a process over which they have no control.' This being the case, 'it would surely be inhuman to grudge them what enjoyment they can get, whether in drink, love, or fighting'.³⁷ Muir had not

always been so understanding - his *Autobiography* offers a psychologically astute account of his early attempts to escape the squalor of his Glasgow surroundings by assuming a superior, Nietzschean intellectualism:

To support myself I adopted the watchword of 'intellectual honesty', and in its name committed every conceivable sin against honesty of feeling and honesty in the mere perceptions of the world with which I daily came into contact. Actually, although I did not know it, my Nietzscheanism was what psychologists call a 'compensation.' I could not face my life as it was, and so I took refuge in the fantasy of the Superman.³⁸

For Muir this was an adolescent reaction, conditioned by his reading and the arrogance of youth, which he outgrew with practical experience. It is arguable that MacDiarmid started from a similar point, but made much less progress along this road than Muir, and that his attitudes of Nietzschean 'honesty' and his striving to be a kind of *Übermensch* of Albyn – refreshingly shocking at first – became both strained in themselves and damagingly constraining to his wider work the more they were uttered. Muir and Gibbon, like George Blake, had learned that where the working class and their culture was concerned it was better to try to understand a little more and condemn a little less.³⁹ MacDiarmid was less forgiving, and his intolerance and dogmatism on issues relating to the relationship between the lumpen proletariat and the national ideal threatened to destabilise the project of literary revival. One of the writers associated with that revival, James Barke, for example, noted a growing and increasingly damaging separation between the movement's nationalism and the aspirations and experiences of ordinary Scots and urged Scottish writers to remember that 'all that is best and worthy of preservation in the various national cultures is the heritage of the workers and peasants'. Although he did not mention MacDiarmid by name, he talked of a nationalism promulgated in prominent writers of the revival that 'has vitiated much of their work', and noted the consequence that 'much strength that ought to accrue to the Left in Scotland is actually diverted into reactionary channels.'⁴⁰ Such warnings weren't always heeded however, and MacDiarmid's centrality to the movement licensed others to

disparage the cultural tastes of ordinary Scots in the name of a high nationalist aesthetic—to laud the Scot in the abstract but find they were sadly disappointed by him in the particular. Nan Shepherd, for example, was content to follow MacDiarmid in asserting the aim of the movement to be ‘man “filled with lightness and exaltation”’, while noting that, in fact, under current conditions in Scotland ‘Men are obtuse, dull, complacent, vulgar. They love the third-rate, live on the cheapest terms with themselves . . . Their reading is “novels and newspapers”, their preoccupations “fitba” and “weemen”, their thinking “treadmills of rationalizing”’.⁴¹ In summarising MacDiarmid’s central contribution to the movement, Duncan Glen was prepared to recognise elements of ‘hatred and intellectual arrogance of fanatical intensity’ in MacDiarmid’s less temperate statements—such as his professed willingness to ‘sacrifice a million people any day for one immortal lyric’—yet was still prepared to argue that he was ‘not only the “authentic voice of Scotland” but also that of universal man’. Perhaps I am not the only reader to be reminded of the special pleading of the photojournalist played by Denis Hopper in *Apocalypse Now*, ascribing Kurtz’s monstrosities to his great genius (‘Hey, man, you don’t talk to the Colonel. You listen to him. The man’s enlarged my mind. He’s a poet-warrior in the classic sense’) as Glen explains that ‘not all MacDiarmid’s protests and yells of wild hatred can hide that this hatred grows out of a love of humanity—he is a humanist, call it scientific as opposed to emotional, but it is a great love of Man.’⁴²

Had MacDiarmid been less dismissive of Lauder and popular entertainment more generally he might have learned to master a more democratic discourse, and might have discovered that dialogue is a more attractive and effective form of political and cultural communication than the castigations of the soap box. Had he spoken *to* his audience rather than *at* them, had he addressed them in a human voice rather than place them at the other end of a megaphone, he might have been able to engage in a dialectic beneficial to his art: his claims to speak for Scotland might have gained just a shred more credibility. Paradoxically, if he had been prepared to extend more credit to Lauder and others like him MacDiarmid might have approached closer to

the status of one of his heroes of high literary seriousness, James Joyce. Joyce similarly adopted an aesthetic distance from the mob and used his art to disparage the urban conditions that degraded modern thought—famously describing *Dubliners* as an attempt ‘to betray the soul of that hemoplegia or paralysis which many consider a city’.⁴³ Joyce, however, also attended closely to and relished the language and popular culture of the Dublin crowd, and in *Ulysses* wove its songs, its cheap advertisements, its jokes, and all its petty vulgarities into a work of the highest literary accomplishment. The lesson he taught, largely ignored by MacDiarmid, was that a serious modern (and national) art might be constructed out of, not in spite of, an often trivial, ephemeral popular culture. Failing to make this stretch, MacDiarmid was left, in his quieter moments to lament his failure to connect with a national audience. For all his mastery of his poetic craft, in which he took a justifiable pride, he was terribly conscious throughout his career of his failure to hold and master a Scottish audience. This is discouraging to any writer, but it doesn’t need emphasising that it is especially disappointing for a writer who has cast himself in the role of national saviour. He could write plaintively of this dilemma in *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, and in *Second Hymn to Lenin*:

Are my poems spoken in the factory and fields,
In the streets o’ the toon?
Gin they’re no’, then I’m failin’ to dae
What I ocht to ha’ dune.⁴⁴

The simple point here is that had MacDiarmid moderated his high expectations, had he trusted the industrial working class and been prepared to acknowledge the vitality and validity of their hybridised culture in the way that Lauder did rather than derogate that populace and its culture at every turn, he might in his own lifetime have achieved the national standing that he believed was his due. Lauder might be guilty of flattering his audience into a lazy attitude of complaisance, but was it really better actively to insult them—to argue, as MacDiarmid did, that ‘the truth of the matter is that it doesn’t matter one way or another what the general public think, on any literary

matter. They are not in a position to have or express opinions’?⁴⁵ Had Joyce thought this way he would still have created Stephen Dedalus, but could surely never have come up with such a convincing, sympathetic rendering of Leopold and Molly Bloom. Joyce does not condone the cultural or literary tastes of the likes of Bloom or Gerty MacDowell, but neither does he dismiss them out of hand. Rather, their cultural tastes – shallow and silly as they often are – come to be recognised as the novel progresses as the necessary, humane complement to Stephen’s often tiresome aesthetic seriousness. Joyce shows, with a humour and magnanimity rarely seen in MacDiarmid, that the popular culture of modernity, vulgar and mongrel as it is, is a vital—perhaps even a central—component of the national life that the serious modern artist cannot afford to ignore.

In setting himself apart from this aspect of the national life MacDiarmid forced himself into a number of awkward, sometimes specious, arguments to justify his self-estimation as the national bard. There was, for example, the argument about cultural belatedness—that as Scotland was too degenerate in the present to deserve being thought about as a nation then its national poet would necessarily be out of step with the country’s inhabitants.⁴⁶ Such an idea could only foster contempt, leading him to inveigh against his fellow Scots for being a people whose “race memory” only goes back to the day before yesterday’;⁴⁷ and to talk ‘again and again and again about the current stranglehold of mediocrity in Scotland’ and ‘the moronic character of most of our people’, and to see his compatriots as ‘a people greedy, lying, and unconscionable / Beyond compare’.⁴⁸ In the looking-glass world of this nationalism contemporary unpopularity becomes an asset—the less attention MacDiarmid gets the more he feels he proves his point about racial and cultural degeneracy and the blindness of the undifferentiated contemporary mob. ‘I am’ he says ‘consumed with love for the people I detest’.⁴⁹ Luckily, he never paid heed to ‘the people’, who might well have been forgiven for telling him exactly what he could do with such love.

This general attitude is, of course, in many ways similar to the modernist emphases of Eliot and Lawrence, and Pound and Leavis.⁵⁰ These writers share with MacDiarmid a direct and

personal experience of cultural deracination, and a corresponding revulsion at forms of mass-participative culture. But while they accept a diminished role for their preferred version of culture—a position summed up in Leavis's 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture' (1930) and Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948)—MacDiarmid's vision of a national culture does not allow him to let go so easily.⁵¹ Much of modernism throws up its hands at popular culture, and like the Engsoc of Orwell's *1984*, just allows the proles to get on with whatever they're doing as long as they don't interfere with the interests of the opinion-forming elite. MacDiarmid's insistence on the national role of his art puts him in a trickier position: if he continues to insist that his elite culture is necessarily the cornerstone of national consciousness then the popular culture of contemporary Scotland cannot by definition be Scottish. The benign interpretation of his role as national poet is thus to make his poetry the bridge between an authentic Scotland of the past and the re-achieved Scotland of the future. Or as he himself put it in *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, to make his poetry 'sic' a Noah's Ark' in which, by implication, the genetic stock of Scottish culture is conserved for propagation when the obliterating flood relents.⁵²

This means, of course, repudiating the heterogeneous mix of contemporary Scottish cultural production epitomised by Lauder, and supplanting it with an ideal Scottish culture: a belief that properly realised Scottish art is the manifestation of an essentially unchanging national spirit—a little like what Hegel in *The Philosophy of History* called 'a *determinate* and particular Spirit' to which actual historical national cultures conform to a greater or lesser degree and through which nations come fully to consciousness of themselves.⁵³ This is raised explicitly by MacDiarmid in, for example, 'The Burns Cult', in which he talks of the need to reassert 'the fearless radical spirit of the true Scotland'; or in *To Circumjack Cencrastus* when he talks of the spirit at work that is 'The Shape o' Scotland's purpose'; or in his desire, quoted earlier, to become 'the incarnation of an immemorial culture'.⁵⁴

Instead of simply developing an inclusive model of the national culture as the sum of all current cultural activity—which would have been both permissive and progressive, and which even T.S. Eliot was broad-minded enough to acknowledge when he described culture as 'the whole way of life of a people'—MacDiarmid tried instead to impose a proscriptive model of high-

cultural nationalism that was both unworkable and exclusive to the point of redundancy: a model that had no truck with England or Britain, and which massively overstated the danger of relatively harmless UK-wide popular cultural phenomena like kailyard and Sir Harry Lauder. In this regard, MacDiarmid proved a pernicious influence, encouraging Scottish literary and cultural criticism to narrow its sights and become over-influenced by nationalist-led ideas of a singular Scottish cultural ideal—to privilege cultural homogeneity over heterogeneity and to reject out of hand the supposed embarrassments of a mongrel, commercially-dominated popular culture. The result was that Scottish culture tended to become defined negatively and conservatively. The idea of Scottish culture was not that of a bustling marketplace of ideas. It was, instead, figured as a repository of traditional value, ‘an immemorial culture’, that functioned to keep the vulgarities of the market at bay and put apparent aberrations such as tartanry, kailyard, and Lauderism firmly in their place. Fortunately, this influence has not lasted and recent Scottish criticism, in the work, for example, of Angus Calder, Douglas Gifford, Duncan Petrie, and Alan Riach, has developed a much more inclusive sense of what properly constitutes Scottish literary culture.⁵⁵ Cairns Craig has also revised his early opinions and written perhaps the most powerful indictment of this Scottish *Traihson des Clercs* with regard to Scottish popular culture. For Craig, MacDiarmid and the ‘Scotch Myths’ critics who followed in his wake constructed out of their embarrassment at a popular culture that was ‘resolutely national, and which had all the vulgarity, sentimentality, and vitality of popular culture everywhere’ a damaging myth of an ‘evacuated culture’ that belied what was actually a ‘long and vital tradition of working class literature in one of the most literate countries of the world’. In Craig’s damning analysis, this type of critique did not so much expose the shortcomings of Scottish culture as point to ‘the profound hatred of the intellectuals for the culture they inhabited, the profound embarrassment they suffered by being unable, any more, to identify themselves with some universalist truth that would redeem them from Scottishness’.⁵⁶

Harry Lauder is far from being a figure on whom one would want to found a national culture. But his work, like that of Billy Connolly or the ‘Chewin’ the Fat’ comedians after him, needs to be recognised not only for its technical excellence, but also for the way it speaks directly and in differing ways to a wider national culture than that normally reached by serious literature.

As such, it is a complement rather than a threat to literature. If such a view is allowed, the picture of the national culture that emerges is both more generous and humane than MacDiarmid admitted, and also more open to cross-fertilization and revitalizing change. To see *both* MacDiarmid and Lauder as important national figures is to imagine a culture open to possibility and not one bound by either a narrowing intellectualism or an inhibiting deference to tradition or precedent.

In his *Scotland in Film*, Forsyth Hardy recalls his taking the Hollywood producer Arthur Freed around Scotland. Freed was preparing the production of Vincente Minelli's *Brigadoon*, and was scouting locations in search of 'a village in the Highlands which would look unchanged with its inhabitants just awakened after the passage of a hundred years'. After having been taken on a tour that took in a number of places often considered the quintessence of Scottishness—Culross, Dunkeld, Braemar, and Inverary—Freed went back to Hollywood disappointed. 'I went to Scotland but I could find nothing that looked like Scotland', he is reported to have commented. So, unable to find an apparently authentic Scottish location on this side of the Atlantic he constructed one in Hollywood.⁵⁷ This story is sometimes retold as an example of a vulgar Americanism that has little understanding of and empathy with other cultures. But couldn't it be argued that this is also and exactly MacDiarmid's approach to Scotland? When he says, for example (in his very first published piece as 'Hugh MacDiarmid'), that 'there's nothing more foreign in Glasgow today than a real Scotsman', or states outright that the vast majority 'of the Scottish people in Scotland today are not Scottish in any real sense of the term' is he not just being as blind as Freed?⁵⁸ *Brigadoon* was a low-cultural travesty of Scottishness. Could it not be said that MacDiarmid's view of Scotland was its high-cultural equivalent?

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Notes

¹ 'A New Movement in Scottish Literature', in Hugh MacDiarmid, *Albyn: Shorter Books and Monographs*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), 4. 'After George Robey', in Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose*, eds Angus Calder, Glen Murray, and Alan Riach, 2 vols. (1; Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), 65. 'On Scottish Drama', in Hugh MacDiarmid, *Selected Prose*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), 13.

² 'Ann Garborg, Mr Joyce, and Mr M'Diarmid', in MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose*, 234.

³ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, eds Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken, 2 vols. (1; Manchester: Carcanet, 1993), 252-4. For other examples of Lauder bashing see, 'Scotland and the Banking System' and 'Whither Scotland' in Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose*, eds Angus Calder, Glen Murray, and Alan Riach, 2 vols. (2; Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), 10-24 (11) & 271-3 (271).

- ⁴ 'Glasgow', Hugh MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, eds Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken, 2 vols. (2; Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 1049-51. See also Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (1869), in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* ed. by R. H. Super, vol. 5, *Culture and Anarchy with Friendship's Garland and Some Literary Essays* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 115-36.
- ⁵ See Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas. Being the Autobiography of Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve)* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 145.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.
- ⁷ Although he does rather overdo this at times, as when he claimed that he had, by the age of fourteen, read 'almost every one' of the 12,000 books in the Langholm Library. See, *Ibid.*, 8-9.
- ⁸ 'Glasgow', MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, 1335.
- ⁹ 'Third Hymn to Lenin', *Ibid.*, 900.
- ¹⁰ 'Introduction 1978', Hugh MacDiarmid, *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), 449. 'A Lesson from Provence', in MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose*, 97.
- ¹¹ As Callum G. Brown has shown, this spirit was still very much alive in Scotland well into the twentieth century. Callum G. Brown, 'Popular Culture and the Continuing Struggle for Rational Recreation', in T. M. Devine and R. J. Finlay (eds.), *Scotland in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 210-29.
- ¹² MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, 16.
- ¹³ See Browning's 'My Last Duchess' ll. 42-3.
- ¹⁴ MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, 80. This doesn't altogether stop MacDiarmid from attempting the kinds of humorous anecdote found, for example, in the early sections of *Lucky Poet* (5-7). Such anecdotes are, however, rather lumbering, and are perhaps best seen as an example of what Alan Riach has, in another context, described as MacDiarmid's 'unsophisticated comicality'. See Hugh MacDiarmid, *Annals of the Five Senses: and Other Stories, Sketches and Plays*, eds Roderick Watson and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999), ix.
- ¹⁵ *The Kind of Poetry I Want*, MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, 1021.
- ¹⁶ MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, 16.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 332. MacDiarmid, *Albyn*, 6.
- ¹⁸ 'Special Correspondent' [Hugh MacDiarmid], 'Scottish People and Scotch Comedians', *Stewartry Observer*, 23 August 1928, in *The Raucle Tongue*, vol. 2, 113-15 (114-15).
- ¹⁹ Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion, 'W. F. Frame and the Scottish Popular Theatre Tradition', in Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion (eds.), *Scottish Popular Theatre and Entertainment: Historical and Critical Approaches to Theatre and Film in Scotland* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Library, 1996), 39.
- ²⁰ Paul Maloney, *Scotland and the Music Hall, 1850-1914* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 170.
- ²¹ Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain* (Second, Expanded edn.; London: New Left Books, 1981), 158.
- ²² Colin McArthur, 'Introduction' and 'Scotland and Cinema: The Iniquity of the Fathers', in Colin McArthur (ed.), *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1982), 2 & 58.
- ²³ Cairns Craig, 'Myths Against History: Tartanry and Kailyard in 19th-Century Scottish Literature', in *Ibid.*, 11.
- ²⁴ 'Neil Munro has literally no place in British, let alone European literature: he simply does not count – his popularity – is simply a commercial phenomenon, an element (of a comparatively very restricted nature) in contemporary entertainment, of no particular literary consequence at all'. 'Neil Munro' in MacDiarmid, *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, 18-19.
- ²⁵ Albert D. Mackie, *The Scotch Comedians: From the Music Hall to Television* (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 1973), 12-13.
- ²⁶ Maloney, *Scotland and the Music Hall*, 163.
- ²⁷ Although it is possible to gain a sense of the power of Lauder's voice and persona from recordings such as those found at <http://www.sirharrylauder.com>.
- ²⁸ MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, 152.
- ²⁹ James Agate, *Immortal Toys: A Survey of Light Entertainment on the London Stage, 1920-1943* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945), 201-2.
- ³⁰ See Charles Perry, 'In Search of H. V. Morton: Travel Writing and Cultural Values in the First Age of British Democracy', *Twentieth Century British History* 10/4 (1999), 431-56.
- ³¹ H. V. Morton, *In Search of Scotland* (London: Methuen & Co., 1929), 155-6.
- ³² See particularly 'A Four Years' Harvest' in MacDiarmid, *Annals of the Five Senses*.
- ³³ MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, 538.
- ³⁴ 'Plea for a Scottish Fascism', MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose*, 82-7; 'Programme for a Scottish Fascism', MacDiarmid, *Selected Prose*, 34-8. See also Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve, A Critical Biography* (London: Paladin, 1990), 409-11.

- ³⁵ 'Glasgow', in Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene: or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (London: Jarrolds, 1936), 136-47 (36). Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (London: Methuen, 1964), 92.
- ³⁶ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, 140-41.
- ³⁷ Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey* (London: Flamingo, 1985), 118.
- ³⁸ Muir, *An Autobiography*, 127.
- ³⁹ See, for example, George Blake, *The Heart of Scotland* (revised edn.; London: B.T. Batsford, 1951), 44-6.
- ⁴⁰ James Barke, 'The Scottish National Question' (1936), in Margery Palmer McCulloch, *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland, 1918-1939: Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), 369.
- ⁴¹ From the *Aberdeen University Review*, quoted in 'The Politics and Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid' in MacDiarmid, *Selected Prose*, 218.
- ⁴² Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1964), 180-81.
- ⁴³ See Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (revised edn.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 163.
- ⁴⁴ MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, 323.
- ⁴⁵ 'The Doric and Literature', in MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose*, 35.
- ⁴⁶ For his rationalisation of this, see, for example MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, 41-3.
- ⁴⁷ Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy', *Scottish Eccentrics* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1936), 287.
- ⁴⁸ 'Author's Note 1972', MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, xiii.
- ⁴⁹ 'Glasgow' and 'Third Hymn to Lenin', MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, 1337 & 895.
- ⁵⁰ For an excellent account of this Modernist (and leftist) suspicion of popular culture at this time, see D. L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 103-37 & 294-317.
- ⁵¹ Eliot, for example, writes that 'it is the essential condition of the preservation of the quality of the culture of the minority, that it should continue to be a minority culture. T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), 184.
- ⁵² MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, 255.
- ⁵³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 53
- ⁵⁴ 'The Burns Cult' in MacDiarmid, *Selected Prose*, 105.
- ⁵⁵ See, for example, Angus Calder, 'A Descriptive Model of Scottish Culture', *Scotlands*, 2/1 (1995), 1-14; Douglas Gifford, 'Re-mapping Renaissance in Modern Scottish Literature', in Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie, and Alastair Renfrew (eds.), *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2004), 17-37; Duncan J. Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); Alan Riach, *Representing Scotland in Literature, Popular Culture and Iconography: The Masks of the Modern Nation* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). See also Michael Gardiner, *Modern Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), and the discussions of 'postnational communities of difference' in Jürgen Neubauer, *Literature as Intervention: Struggles over Cultural Identity in Contemporary Scottish Fiction* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 1999), 163 and Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
- ⁵⁶ Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), 107.
- ⁵⁷ Forsyth Hardy, *Scotland in Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 1.
- ⁵⁸ 'Nisbet, an Interlude in Post War Glasgow' (1922), MacDiarmid, *Annals of the Five Senses*, 110. 'Albyn: or Scotland and the Future' (1927), in MacDiarmid, *Albyn*, 6.

Occasional Paper: Recent German-language RLS Criticism

Manfred Malzahn

Dieter Petzold, "Robert Louis Stevenson und die Ambivalenz des Abenteurers".
Anglistik: Mitteilungen des Deutschen Anglistenverbandes 17/1 (2006) 27-38.

It is surely not an easy task to assess the international impact of Scottish literature with any degree of precision: though in many respects, it seems to be easier now than it has ever been before. The BOSLIT project, for instance, has collated a wealth of data concerning all kinds of translations; and it would no doubt be a worthwhile undertaking to gather a comparable corpus of criticism on Scottish literature that is written in languages other than English. I am sure that a concerted effort would uncover a surprising amount of material and insight. Ever since in the 1970s I tracked down a copy of a Japanese study of Neil Gunn's fiction and had the gist of it summarised for me by a Japanese fellow student, I have been periodically reminded of how much is out there that one may never learn about or from; and I have thus come to be aware of the fact that an ideal scholar of Scottish literature would need to be a more polyglot person than I myself can claim to be.

I am at least lucky enough, however, not to be linguistically challenged when it comes to German, and consequently I was able to read the abovementioned article on "Robert Louis Stevenson and the Ambivalence of the Adventurer" by Professor Dieter Petzold of the University of Erlangen, located near and affiliated with Nuremberg in southern Germany. In his compact and comprehensive characterisation of Stevenson's life and work, Petzold portrays the notion of adventure, defined as the single-minded and free-ranging pursuit of self-interest regardless of the consequences for oneself and for others, as a focus of constant attraction and revulsion in Stevenson's real and imagined travels and narratives. Those, Petzold argues, show a playful handling or manifestation of contradictory impulses: the yearning for adventure on the one hand, and the distaste for real adventurers on the other.

Petzold's portrait of Stevenson as a rebel with the handbrake on, or as a bohemian with a safety net, is built up in four stages. First comes an account of Stevenson's background and early

travels, documenting a restlessness rooted in the rejection of bourgeois restraints and paternal expectations. This is followed by an analysis of early travel writings in which, Petzold argues, the author betrays a histrionic tendency to act the vagrant and vagabond, while preserving an ironic distance from his own persona, and talking of genuine low life in terms that at least partly reflect values such as those of his staid Victorian father. Petzold characterises Stevenson's attitude towards lower-class emigrants to America, for instance, as showing "a mixture of admiration, pity, and cool contempt".

The following section on *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* portrays Jim Hawkins and David Balfour as reluctant and temporary adventurers, set in contrast to the true adventurers Long John Silver and Alan Breck as well as to the non-adventurous world of bourgeois respectability. The final analysis of *The Ebb-Tide* then suggests that in Stevenson's literary production, the initial ambivalence gives way to a clearly weighted picture: the attraction of the adventure recedes, and the reality of adventurers appears as being one of losers, failures, or amoral egotists. Stevenson's typical adventurer, Petzold concludes, reveals himself as "an incarnation of human hubris and greed, the true impulses of colonialism".

The argument which I have summarised here is accompanied by a good deal of references to primary as well as secondary sources. It is a solid piece of work which proceeds systematically from a well-defined starting point towards an appropriate conclusion, although this conclusion seems to me to present an unrealised or at least unverballed new question. To wit, if Stevenson ended up disillusioned with colonial adventure, did this constitute an abandonment of rebellious and bohemian leanings in favour of bourgeois values, or rather a new level of rebellion against the bourgeois reality from which the colonial venture emanated? This seems an interesting and perhaps necessary continuation of Petzold's investigation, in which references to other parts of Stevenson's voluminous oeuvre might also have helped to add a few more shades to the overall image.

Nonetheless, the article is a sound and noteworthy addition to Stevenson scholarship, and could be as good a reason as any to open one's German dictionary. Meanwhile, though, the editors of *Anglistik*, official organ of the German Association of University Teachers of English, have decided to change their periodical into a refereed journal whose contributions will be exclusively in English.