## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Irish and Scottish Literature, Before and After Theory</td>
<td>Matthew Wickman</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Grierson and the Making of the Modernist Critical Canon</td>
<td>Cairns Craig</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the incorrigible Irishman”: Roger Casement and the ‘greening’ of Irish Studies</td>
<td>Eóin Flannery</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Theory: Aesthetic Roadmaps into a Future?</td>
<td>Jen Keating</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have Never been Theoretical: Scottish Literature in Theory</td>
<td>Maria-Daniella Dick</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing Scotland: Methodological Nationalism, Weak Theory</td>
<td>Alex Thomson</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Cosmopolitanism: Imagining the Stranger in Contemporary Scottish Literature</td>
<td>Carla Sassi</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Union: Literature, Theory and Four Nations Historiography</td>
<td>Cairns Craig</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Contributors</td>
<td></td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction:
Scottish and Irish Literature,
Before and After Theory

Matthew Wickman

The topic of this issue was born in 2014 at the International Congress of Scottish Literatures conference held in Glasgow, where several of the essays in this issue made their debut. The organisers of that event asked me to convene one or two panels pertaining to some aspect of Scottish literature relative to theory. A single panel, it seemed, wouldn't be adequate. For one thing, it raised the question of whether it made more sense to think in terms of ‘theory’ as a (nominally) unified discipline – which it is not – or ‘theories’ as an eclectic range of ideas, formulated in the wake (or, perhaps, the ashes) of such influential thinkers as Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger and taking forms ranging from recognisable schools of thought (e.g., deconstruction, feminism, postcolonialism, queer theory, media theory, etc.) to those that are more emergent, and in some cases ephemeral (e.g., affect theory, speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, posthumanism and more). Additionally, Scottish literature bears a complex relation to theory, emerging as a field during an era when theory also ascended to prominence in the academy. While scholars of Scottish literature may or may not have had much to say about their own field relative to theory, there was something implicitly or proximately theoretical about Scottish literature inasmuch as the latter arose in part as a critique of English Literature as a hegemonic field and not simply as the canonical works of a particular nation. Theory, we might say, was always – always already – the ‘political unconscious’ of ScotLit.

So, ‘theory’ or ‘theories’? And ‘Scottish Literature and …’ or ‘Scottish Literature as …’? These were the questions that leapt to mind when I was asked to convene a panel for the conference. Wanting to draw upon the richness of the field and also position it relative to theory’s own uneven history – its own balky hegemony and perceived ‘crisis’ – the organisers and I decided to arrange for two panels: ‘Before Theory’ and ‘After Theory.’ On the first panel, Cairns Craig, Murray Pittock and Alex Thomson discussed intellectual formations and ideas from the Scottish past that had made their way, mostly unrecognised, into modern thought. On the ‘After Theory’ panel, Scott Hames, Carla Sassi and

Maria-Daniella Dick reflected on the relationship of Scottish Literature as a field to a wide set of intellectual formations, and to the disposition of scholars in the field to engage theory in some meaningful way – or, perhaps, to fail to engage it. Four of those six presenters have written essays for this volume, whether elaborating on ideas they originally presented at the conference or crafting new essays – a set of new thoughts five years on. Given the broader focus of the *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, it made additional sense to widen the discussion to include Irish Literature, which has its own important and powerful stories to tell relative to theory/theories.

Below, I will introduce, briefly, each of the individual essays and reflect on what it means to think about Irish and Scottish Literature together alongside theory. But first, given the impetus of this issue and stemming from my own area of specialisation, let me elaborate further on why Scotland’s case relative to theory is a potentially compelling one. I return here to two groups of questions that underwrote the panels at the 2014 conference, each a combination of situation and ontology. First, where is the field of Scottish literary studies relative to major trends in modern thought – and, hence, what is the field of Scottish literary studies? And second, where is theory, today, some thirty-five years after the peak of deconstruction in the mid-1980s (when theory exerted perhaps its most forceful impact on literary studies)—and, hence, what is theory? And what can Scottish literary studies tell us, if anything, about the state of theory?

A 2007 issue of the *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, titled ‘Theory and Scottish Exceptionalism’, brought attention to questions like these. The issue’s editors, Eleanor Bell and Scott Hames, acknowledged that theory had permeated literary studies but they also wondered why ‘criticism of Scottish literature [had traditionally] largely ignored theory’. That assertion is questionable, to be sure, but their reasoning touched on an important issue. Scottish criticism had dodged theory, supposedly, for ‘ideological’ reasons. If there is to be a discrete or independent Scotland, there must also be a discrete field of Scottish literature. And, Bell and Hames observed, the ‘side-stepping [of] theory can be seen as one of Scottish literature’s enabling conditions during the period of its establishment as a semi-distinct field – a period overlapping almost exactly with theory’s renovation of the wider discipline of English’. Certain branches of theory, after all, particularly those preceding the cultural studies turn of the 1980s, tend to cast national identities as epiphenomena of broader categories, whether of language, cognition, affect, media, technology, climatic forces, aesthetic forms, performative gestures, mathematical and object-oriented ontologies, actor-network configurations or

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many others, not to mention categories like race, class and gender, which are usually attached to questions of social justice. Even theories of nationalism (think of the Benedict Anderson’s famed appeal to ‘imagined communities’) are credos about nationalisms generally, and not about nationhood in distinct contexts.

A Scottish literature and a Scottish criticism thus purchased their identity, Bell and Hames argued, at the price of their wider intellectual and even political relevance: ‘The uncomfortable truth is that focusing its energies on the marking-out of a separate territory for initiates – those trained to recognise and affirm the Scottishness of certain writers, ideas, motifs, and histories; those prepared to “feel at home” in Scottish exceptionalism – has made Scottish literature more of a curiosity than a challenge to English criticism in general. From the outside, [Scottish literary studies] often seems a school fixated by its own self-perpetuated marginality, and with historical, political and philosophical Scottishnesses at several removes from literary judgement or aesthetic encounter’. 3 Hence, they argued, to undertake work in a carefully delineated field of Scottish literature is to engage in an intellectual act of self-imposed exile, with Scotland becoming, once again, as in a Walter Scott novel, a locus amoenus of modern romance, untouched in some ways by the theoretical forces that had confounded the national borders of other literary traditions. By extension, then, the theoretical engagement of Scottish literature was tantamount to a political act less of ‘union’ (of national literatures under the broad banner of ‘English’, say) than of a forced, frank reckoning with a wider set of intellectual and disciplinary realities. In this scenario, to grant theory ‘permanent leave to remain’ in Scottish literary studies would be to compel the field to define itself not only relative to Scotland, but also to the vaster world of literary studies generally.

Bell and Hames would pursue this line of thought into other venues, Bell in her edited volume Scotland in Theory and her monograph Questioning Scotland and Hames in edited volumes like Unstated and in a series of articles and symposia. 4 As one would expect, aspects of these arguments have met with some pushback – notably, in my view, from Cairns Craig, a contributor to this volume. Craig’s book Out of History, published in 1996 but circulating as an argument in the field for several years prior to that, made an exemplary ‘exceptionalist’ case for Scottish literature as a tradition of fantastical, outré, avant-garde and alternative histories that had long

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3 Ibid.
presented an important counter-image to the English literary tradition of realism. (The broader Western tradition of realism – better said, of ‘representations of reality’ in literature – famously culminates for Erich Auerbach with Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, an English novel set in the Scottish Hebrides.\(^5\) Over the past couple of decades, however, in a series of books and articles, Craig has been making a very different argument about Scotland’s literary and intellectual history, less exceptionalist than formative, even foundationalist in its contribution to modern thought and expression (and by way of genres and even disciplines).\(^6\) In his paper on the ‘Before Theory’ panel at the 2014 conference, Craig invoked the vital place of Scottish intellectual history within the very theoretical traditions that now would save Scottish criticism from itself. Specifically, and as a critique of the kind of argument made by Bell and Hames, he argued for the place of Hume and subsequent generations of Scottish Idealists in the work of Gilles Deleuze.\(^7\)

Irish literature has always hovered in the background of Scottish literary studies as a kind of icon of what Scottish literature might be (or, perhaps, might have been) did it not cast its exceptionalist glow. One thinks, for example, of Tom Nairn’s landmark 1977 book *The Break-Up of Britain*, which made a special—exceptionalist—place for Scotland inasmuch as the nation, Nairn contended, was at once too early and too late for a politically nationalist self-consciousness. An early participant in the British empire, Scotland’s political development had been suppressed by the comparative wealth the nation enjoyed throughout the nineteenth century. Ireland, meanwhile, victimized by oppression in more obvious ways, had sharpened its identity in opposition to ‘Britain’ and ‘empire’ alike.\(^8\) If Scotland was, for nearly two centuries, a ‘stateless nation’, Ireland was the quintessential alternative to Britain within the British Isles. Hence, there has seemed to be a reasonably comfortable fit (if by no means univocal harmony) between Irish studies and postcolonial theory, even as early as the 1990s.\(^9\) What is more, prominent theorists like Jacques Derrida had long been drawn to Irish literature through the influence of such Irish writers as James Joyce and Samuel Beckett.\(^10\) Hence, while some of the most important

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\(^6\) Of many examples, see, in particular, Intending Scotland: Explorations of Scottish Culture since the Enlightenment (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2009) and *The Wealth of the Nation: Scotland, Culture and Independence* (Edinburgh, 2018).

\(^7\) For his critique of Bell’s *Questioning Scotland* in particular, see Craig, *Intending Scotland*, 55–60.


\(^10\) In particular, see Derrida, *Ulysses Gramophone: Drame Mots Pour Joyce* (Paris: Galilée, 1987).
Introduction: Before and After Theory

Cultural evaluations of Irish literature are not exactly theoretical (I am thinking, for example, of Declan Kiberd’s bookend tomes *Inventing Ireland* [1997] and *After Ireland* [2018]), the relationship between Ireland and theory has not seemed problematic *as such*—no more than theory, itself, is deemed problematic.

That last point requires particular attention, for theory is hardly a stable category. In fact, it has been a subject of much debate across the academy—and within and outwith theoretical circles. I am not speaking here of the ‘theoretical turn’ of the 1970s and ’80s and the reactionary counterturn to theory, as those debates seem well behind us. Instead, it seems a useful exercise simply to ask what theory even means as we approach the third decade of the new millennium. From a disciplinary standpoint, theory seems more eclectic today than in the ’80s, when it functioned, Bell and Hames observe, as an instrument in the ‘renovation of English’. I alluded to some of that eclecticism above in listing the varieties of theoretical experience; and the perusal of any number of theory journals today reveals less any sense of systematic coherence of approach or school of thought than a diversity of models reflected against a wide array of topics and levied against each other: Badiou’s mathematical ontology against the French phenomenologies and post-structuralisms that grew out of Heidegger’s philosophy; Latour’s Actor Network Theory against the sociological criticism of Pierre Bourdieu and the affect of ‘critique’ itself; object-oriented ontology alongside but also against speculative realism; theories of cognition supplementing new formalisms, and theories of affect set against each; and so on, and so on. And this is true not only of articles and books alongside each other, but also, at times, of successive paragraphs within a particular piece.

Aside from the concept of what theory is, questions concerning the state of theory are also highly nuanced from an institutional perspective. Drawing upon the work of John Guillory, J.E. Elliott argues that ‘what rescued the English department from the kind of curricular marginalization experienced by classics and, more recently, German studies, was the politicization of curriculum and an institutional monopoly on writing instruction. Although ostensibly committed to critical literacy and the cultivation of public intellectuals, a post-formalist attention to social justice has arguably been more about the creation of organizational solidarity and the recreation of a major suitable to massified enrollment’.

Deconstruction, in this scenario, weaned scholars and students off the classics, and off philology, by turning attention to ‘texts’ and the universality of interpretation, but only at the cost of eventually displacing attention from theory’s own intellectual history in the critiques of scientism and high philosophy. ‘[T]his revised role for

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thought, both performative and indeterminate, eviscerates what is conventionally understood as “normal” scholarship or science. Deconstruction might have inspired a readings industry, but it was curiously uninterested in problem solving. It was little more concerned with what might be called conceptual instrumentation’, claiming for itself, yes, an exceptionalist position within the academy that parallels the propensities of distinctively Scottish literary and critical studies. Scholars of Scottish literary studies may never have been more theoretical than when they appeared to refuse theory.

So, what does that mean, in practice, for the way we imagine Scottish literature and theory together or separately – which means, apparently, when we imagine them together or… together? And what happens when we think about them in conjunction with Irish literature? Given where theory is – and where Scottish and Irish literatures are as fields – there can be no simple, single answer. But this special issue of the Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies provides a representative sampling of perspectives onto these questions. Our lead essay is by Cairns Craig, who explores a fascinating but largely unknown chapter in the development of theory in the form of Herbert J. C. Grierson’s two-volume, 1912 edition of John Donne’s poetry. At the time, Grierson was Professor of English Literature at the University of Aberdeen; he would become the Knight Professor of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh three years after the publication of his edition of Donne. That edition, especially Grierson’s extensive scholarly introduction, presented Donne to readers as an eminently modern poet – an argument that would exert a profound impact on T. S. Eliot and, from there, on Cleanth Brooks and a generation of New Critics. Given the importance of the New Criticism to the textual focus (even fixation) of several schools of theory that followed (especially deconstruction, which for a long time in America was virtually synonymous with ‘theory’ itself), Grierson’s textual criticism may be seen as foundational – at the very least, as prescient – of modern thought in the latter half of the twentieth century. Eóin Flannery also takes up the prehistory of modern thought, in this case by way of a historical examination of Roger Casement, ‘the Irish humanitarian pioneer and revolutionary nationalist’. Casement’s early twentieth-century reports on the Congo, highly critical of the rule of Leopald II of Belgium, reveal strikingly modern sensibilities; in modern parlance, Casement’s reports bring postcolonial theory into conversation with ecocriticism. Casement’s history thus foreshadows a trajectory of thought that has become vital in our modern world. In Flannery’s estimation, it amounts to a ‘commitment to indigenous human rights and environmental justice’, a brand of theory ‘currently trading as postcolonial ecocriticism’.

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12 Ibid., 435.
With Jen Keating’s essay we take up topics that have emerged ‘after theory’, or in the wake of theory’s golden age. Consistently with the tenor of so much theory, which generally remains more invested in assessing the present for the purpose of projecting a future than in transmitting a cultural heritage (which is generally the work of literary studies), Keating surveys the contemporary art scene with the aim of creating a roadmap for the way forward. Theories of nationalism, so important to Irish studies traditionally, present a roadblock for such a project. What might it mean, instead, to fashion a future on the basis of ‘aesthetic exploration’? Maria-Daniella Dick pursues a similarly revisionist, post-nationalist tenor of thought, albeit by way of a different topic. For Dick, the very notion that we might be living in an era ‘after theory’ is contradictory to the degree that it is theory that enables us to formulate such a proposition in the first place. As she sees it, this then poses a challenge to the field of Scottish literature, which must become more self-consciously theoretical if it is to exist at all. But for Dick, the field’s belatedness in reconciling itself to theory offers a way to critically engage emergent fields like world literature, and to undercut the latter’s Anglophonic tendencies. And yet, as Alex Thomson argues in his essay, such engagement would require scholars of Scottish literature to conceptualise key tensions that inform the field, particularly the ‘methodological nationalism’ that perpetually, terminologically defines it. Invoking the spirit of Wai Chee Dimock, Gianni Vattimo and others, Thomson employs ‘weak theory’ – in contradistinction to ‘critical theory’ – as a way to navigate between ethical and aesthetic modes of critique while restoring a kind of moral force to criticism that engages literary texts as singular and local.

Thomson’s appeal to weak theory accords well with a distinction Carla Sassi draws between ‘Theory’ and ‘theory’. Sassi’s balanced, generous assessment of Scottish literature’s vexed relationship with theory is worth quoting here at length:

Shaped as a disciplinary field in its own right between the 1970s and 1990s, at the height of Theory, Scottish studies developed very much in tension, not to say in open antagonism, with any universalising methodology. Its notorious resistance against homogenising paradigms and its focus on local/national ‘uniqueness’ and ‘exceptionality’ suggested a picture of nativist isolation that was in sharp contrast with the cosmopolitan esprit du temps. If such insistence on a locally rooted and factual approach, focused on defining Scottish literature as an ‘authentic’ expression of the Scottish nation, can be seen with the benefit of hindsight as a justifiably defensive stance in the early phases of a vexed disciplinary history, it nonetheless generated a rift between Scottish studies specialists and mainstream scholars
who considered their work as ‘universal’ and not bound to any particular society or culture.

For Sassi, this represents a beginning rather than an end point for Scottish literary studies, as she traces important developments in the field since the irruption of theory into Scottish studies in the 1990s. She moves here from an exploration of cosmopolitanism, long a pressing topic in the field, to an ethics oriented toward the ‘stranger’, exploring a range of literary texts that illustrate what theory is coming to mean (both consciously and unconsciously) to scholars of Scottish literature.

Sassi’s essay points not only to directions within Scottish literature, but also to contributions the field has to make to other fields adjacent to it, including theory. Irish literature has long been recognised for such contributions, of course, and the essays in this volume by Eóin Flannery and Jen Keating illustrate why. But Scottish literature also has much to offer – whether to friends or ‘strangers’.

The volume’s concluding piece, a review essay by Cairns Craig, makes this point with particular force. The volume he reviews, Literature and Union: Scottish Texts, British Contexts, edited by Colin Kidd and Gerard Carruthers, argues against Scottish ‘essentialism’, long considered as a reflex of a nationally-focussed criticism, and thus a perpetual point of concern for Scottish literature (as the essays by Maria-Daniella Dick and Alex Thomson underscore). Kidd and Carruthers thus argue for the ‘interdependence’ (rather than the “independence”) of Scottish literary studies. But Craig asks whether this criticism really bears with any force on Scottish literature or whether, to the contrary, the idea of Scottish insularity has become something of a working myth in the field, a straw man against which to take a more ‘enlightened’, cosmopolitan position. As this is a historical as well as a conceptual question, this is an important essay with which to conclude the volume – a volume that poses questions of what these fields, Scottish and Irish literatures, mean relative both to history and the history of ideas as we approach the third decade of the twenty-first century.
I

In 1939 Cleanth Brooks published *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, a book which was to shape critical thinking about poetry for a generation. Its impact was the result, at least in part, of the fact that it was a summation of critical discussions dating back to before the First World War, building, as Brooks admits in his ‘Preface’, on the work of ‘Eliot, Yeats, Ransom, Blackmur, Richards and other critics’. Indeed, the key term in his title had been a commonplace of critical discussion since at least as early as W. B. Yeats’s essay on ‘Poetry and Tradition’ in 1907, and had been made foundational to contemporary discussions of poetry by T. S. Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ of 1919. What was significant about *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, however, was not the terms of its argument but its method of analysing poetry: *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* was literary history built on the new style of ‘close reading’ which had been pioneered by I. A. Richards in *Practical Criticism* (1929), and which had been developed by Brooks and his co-author Robert Penn Warren in their *Understanding Poetry* (1938), a work that remained a key textbook on both sides of the Atlantic until the 1970s. This mode of literary analysis was identified in the United States with what is often taken to be the first theoretically motivated mode of literary criticism in the movement that came to be known as ‘the New Criticism’: it was a style of criticism self-consciously aligned as the critical continuation of the ‘modernist’ innovations in poetry that had emerged during and after the First World War. Brooks’s work of 1939 was directed at a public which still found the modernist poetry of the previous decades difficult and obscure, and Brooks’s aim in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* was to explain why modern poetry should be difficult and why it should be obscure – and to reveal how the ordinary reader could nonetheless respond to it productively.

The central issue confronting contemporary readers was, for Brooks, a radical change in the way that modern poets use imagery, deriving from an equally radical change in what they believed were their ambitions for poetry in the modern age. Most contemporary readers, Brooks suggested, continue to operate with a nineteenth-century conception of poetry, one largely defined by Wordsworth and Coleridge and in which it was assumed that true poetry is the vehicle of

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'the wisdom of the heart and the grandeur of the imagination'. The consequence is that emotion is elevated over intellect: the true end of poetry is an intense emotional experience, whereas poetry in which the intellect is dominant produces only the ‘subtlety of the mind and the ingenuity of fancy’.2 ‘Fancy’, as Coleridge defines it, is ‘a species of wit, a pure work of the will’, rather than the ‘presentation of impressive or delightful forms to the inward vision’; what fancy offers is ‘the excitement of surprise by the juxtaposition and apparent reconciliation of widely different or incompatible things’.3 The value judgments emanating from such a conception of poetry will assume that ‘the play of intellect is inimical to deep emotion’,4 and therefore harmful to poetic achievement: according to Brooks, this negation of the relevance of the intellect narrows the potential of poetry to engage with the true complexity of experience, and it assumes that the poet’s job is to imitate and, if necessary, to ornament beauty as it already exists in the world, to present, as Alexander Pope phrased it, ‘What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed’; it treats the resources of poetry — and, primarily, the resources of metaphor — as though they existed only ‘to illustrate’ some proposition that could ‘could be made without recourse to the illustration’.5 Against this version of poetry, Brooks argues for poetry as the creation of new meanings, meanings that are brought into existence ‘by the metaphor, and only by the metaphor’.6 It is because such metaphors produce previously unknown meanings that modern poetry is difficult, but it is precisely because of this difficulty that it is of greater value than poetry that simply reflects what we already know.

For Brooks, the failure to acknowledge the fundamental role of metaphor in poetic thinking has produced a maimed conception of ‘the tradition’ of English poetry, because it has led to the exclusion of the poets who most fully exemplify the power both of metaphor and of intellect — the ‘Metaphysicals’ and, in particular, John Donne. The Metaphysicals share with the moderns ‘a common conception of the use of metaphor’ which is based on their common awareness that ‘things are not poetic per se, and conversely that nothing can be said to be intrinsically unpoetic’,7 and that the apparently ‘unpoetic’ can be crucial to an overall poetic effect when we ‘consider the figure in relation to the total context’, and when we realise that ‘there are complex attitudes in which there is an interplay — even a swift interplay — of intellect and emotion’.8 Instead of deciding in advance what

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2 Ibid., 17.
3 Ibid., 18.
4 Ibid., 18.
5 Ibid., 26.
6 Ibid., 26.
7 Ibid., 22.
8 Ibid., 24–5.
can and cannot be poetic, ‘the figure must in all cases be referred to its function in the context in which it occurs’, and must be allowed to ‘serve irony as well as ennoblement’;⁹ what will then be discovered is that the ‘unpoetic’ image can provide ‘increased psychological subtlety’ or ‘dramatic concentration’ and, most importantly, the doubling tension of ‘the ironical function’.¹⁰ The ‘wit’ displayed by a poetry that is alert to its construction of new meanings, rather than the exposition of pre-existing meanings, works ‘not merely [by] an acute perception of analogies: it is a lively awareness of the fact that the obvious attitude toward a given situation is not the only possible attitude’.¹¹ Precisely because they wrote poetry with the intellect as well as the heart, and used to maximum effect the power of metaphor to produce complex and ironic effects, the influence of Donne and the Metaphysicals has been repressed generation after generation by poets who feared the consequences of allowing poetry to be informed by the complexities of intellect and irony:

The characteristic fault of Shelley’s poetry is that it excludes on principle all but the primary impulses – that it cannot bear an ironical contemplation. What Shelley’s regenerated work of *Prometheus Unbound* really has to fear is not the possible resurrection of Jupiter but the resurrection of John Donne. Grant that, and chaos comes again.¹²

Indeed, Donne is not simply to be reintegrated into the tradition of English poetry as a stepping stone that provides continuity between Shakespeare and Dryden – he is to be understood as providing the modern critic with the model of the most complete kind of poetry:

It may be well to point out that we shall hardly be able to avoid giving a definition of *poetry* rather than merely a definition of metaphysical poetry… If we are interested in getting at the core of metaphysical poetry, we should not be surprised if we find that we are dealing with something basic in all poetry, poetry being essential. Our definition of metaphysical poetry, then, will have to treat of the difference between metaphysical poetry and other poetry as a difference of degree, not of kind.¹³

Metaphysical poetry defines a style of poetry to which all poets ought to aspire.

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⁹ Ibid., 25.
¹⁰ Ibid., 37.
¹¹ Ibid., 46.
¹² Ibid., 58.
¹³ Ibid., 48.
In his influential development of ‘practical criticism’ in the 1920s, I. A. Richards had argued that the quality of poetry depended on its capacity for ‘synthesis’, for the unification of apparent opposites, and for Brooks, the ‘alliance of levity and seriousness’ in the poetry of the Metaphysicals is an exemplary version of Richards’ ‘unification of opposed impulses’; ‘it is a poetry in which the opposition of the impulses which are united is extreme’. This is a poetry at the other end of the scale from one celebrating pre-existing values:

Such a definition of poetry places the emphasis directly on the poet as a maker. It is his making, his imagination that gives the poem its poetic quality, not some intrinsic quality (beauty or truth) of the material with which he builds his poem. The metaphysical poet has confidence in the power of the imagination. He is constantly remaking his world by relating into an organic whole the amorphous and heterogeneous and contradictory.

From having been an eccentric irrelevance to the canon of English poetry, Donne and the Metaphysicals come to define the true tradition not just of seventeenth-century poetry but of modern poetry, which is nothing less than the true tradition of poetry itself. Brooks would have agreed with F.R. Leavis who, after reading through Donne’s predecessors, decided that when we reach Donne we adopt an entirely different attitude because we cease to read ‘as students . . . and read on as we read the living’. Donne is the poet who steps out of history to become both a classic and a modern.

II
Given how central John Donne’s poetry is to Brooks’s argument, it is a strange elision of the history of Donne’s reception that Brooks makes no mention of the work which made possible this elevation of Donne to the position of model poet – Herbert J. C. Grierson’s two volume edition of Donne’s works, ‘edited from the old editions and numerous manuscripts with introductions & commentary’, and published by Oxford University Press in 1912. Nor is any mention given to Grierson’s groundbreaking account of Donne’s work some four years earlier in his contribution to the Cambridge History of English and American Literature, in which he argued that

For evil or for good, Donne is the most shaping and determining influence

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14 Ibid., 51.
15 Ibid., 51.
that meets us in passing from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century. In certain aspects of mind and training the most medieval, in temper the most modern, of his contemporaries, he is, with the radically more pedantic and neo-classical Jonson, at once the chief inspirer of younger contemporaries and successors, and the most potent herald and pioneer of the school of poetic argument and eloquence.\textsuperscript{17}

The idea of Donne as the ‘shaping and determining influence that meets us in passing from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century’ represented a radical revision of his place within the canon; the notion that he is ‘in temper the most modern’ of his contemporaries placed him at the very origin of modernity in poetry. In a work which was, in many ways, the first concerted effort to provide a critical overview of the territory occupied by the new discipline of English Literature, Grierson, then Professor of English Literature at the University of Aberdeen – established Donne as the key link between the medieval world and the modern, the poet who maintained a deeper, European tradition by his disruption of the ways in which that tradition had been reduced to a series of commonplaces in the English interpretation of the Petrarchan version of love poetry and of sonneteering: ‘Donne can adopt the Petrarchan pose; but the tone and temper, the imagery and rhythm, the texture and colour, of the bulk of his love songs and love elegies are altogether different from those of the fashionable love poetry of the sixteenth century’.\textsuperscript{18} The range of his poetry shaped the work of his successors as no other poet did:

The spirit of his best love poetry passed into the most interesting of his elegies and his religious verses, the influence of which was not less, in the earlier seventeenth century perhaps even greater, than that of his songs. Of our regular, classically inspired satirists, he is, whether actually the first in time or not, the first who deserves attention, the first whose work is in the line of later development, the only one of the sixteenth century satirists whose influence is still traceable in Dryden and Pope.\textsuperscript{19}

Grierson promoted Donne as a poet who was at one and the same time in rebellion against current poetic styles in England and yet, at a deeper level, in continuity with European traditions whose values would be passed on to his successors.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] Ibid., 197.
\item[19] Ibid., 197.
\end{footnotes}
To establish the true importance of Donne, however, required a trustworthy text, for it was clear to Grierson that the mode of the transmission of Donne’s poetry through different manuscript versions and from manuscript to print had left the modern reader with texts whose obscurities were, in many cases, the accidents of editorial revision or of printers’ misunderstandings. Between the first printed edition of 1633, already a posthumous edition in which the ‘poems were arranged in a rather chaotic sequence’,\(^20\) and the more orderly edition of 1635 and its subsequent printings, new poems were steadily added to the oeuvre. Grierson’s conclusion was that ‘The canon of Donne’s poems is far from being settled. Modern editions contain poems which are demonstrably not his, while there are genuine poems still unpublished. The text of many of his finest poems is disfigured by errors and misprints.’\(^21\) The understanding of the poems was also disfigured by lack of awareness of Donne’s knowledge of scholastic philosophy, so that many passages which played with the terms of that philosophy had become indecipherable to later generations of readers.

Grierson’s annotations to his versions of Donne’s poems not only gave clear accounts of how he had come to his decisions about textual alternatives—he tells us that he has ‘recorded every change’ and that therefore ‘a reader should be able to gather from the text and notes combined exactly what was the text of the first edition of each poem’\(^22\)—but set those decisions in a detailed explication of the logic of the poem, often focusing on Donne’s use of punctuation and capitalization to enhance his meaning. For instance, in ‘Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inn’, the earlier editions read

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{You which are Angels, yet still bring with you} \\
&\text{Thousands of Angels on your marriage daies,} \\
&\text{Help with your presence, and devise to praise} \\
&\text{These rites, which also unto you grow due;} \\
&\text{Conceitedly dresse her, and be assign’d,} \\
&\text{By you, fit place for every flower and jewel}
\end{align*}
\]

Grierson notes that in his edition (I, 141) he has dropped the comma after ‘presence’ in the third line above, ‘because it suggests to us, though it did not necessarily do so to seventeenth-century readers, that “devise” here is a verb—both Dr. Grosart and Mr. Chambers have taken it as such—whereas it is the noun “device”—fancy, invention. Their fancy and invention is to be shown in the

\(^{20}\) Ibid., sect. 3, 205.
\(^{21}\) Ibid.
\(^{22}\) Herbert J. C. Grierson, *The Poems of John Donne* (Oxford, 1912), Vol II, cxxiv; hereafter cited in the text as I (the poems), or II (the commentary).
attiring of the bride’ (II, 98). Creating a punctuation which adequately fulfils the meaning of the poem in its seventeenth-century context is more important than simply replicating seventeenth-century conventions. In ‘Satyre II’, for instance, there is a particularly convoluted and dense passage which Grierson renders as follows:

Now like an owlelike watchman, hee muſt walke
His hand still at a bill, now he must talke
Idly, like prisfoners, which whole months will fweare
That only futetship hath brought them there,
And to every fuitor lye in every thing,
Like a Kings favourite, yea like a King;
Like a wedge in a blocke, wring to the barre,
Bearing-like Asſes; and more ſhameleſſ farre
Then carted whores, lye, to the grave Judge; (I, 152)

Grierson notes that ‘These lines are printed as in 1633, except that the comma after ‘Asses’ is raised to a semicolon, and that I have put a hyphen between ‘Bearing’ and ‘like’. The problem that this intervention is designed to meet is that previous modern editions have rendered the complex final lines in a fashion which makes them syntactically ambiguous:

Like a wedge in a block, wring to the bar,
  Bearing like asses, and more shameless far
  Than carted whores; lie to the grave judge . . .

Of such versions, Grierson notes,

By retaining the comma after ‘bar’ in the modernised text with modern punctuation these editors leave it doubtful whether they do or do not consider that ‘asses’ is the object to ‘wring’. Further, they connect ‘and more shameless than carted whores’ closely with ‘asses’, separating it by a semicolon from ‘lie to the grave judge’. I take it that ‘more shameless far’ is regarded by these editors as a qualifying adjunct to ‘asses’. This is surely wrong. The subject of the long sentence is ‘He’ (l. 65), and the infinitives throughout are complements to ‘must’: ‘He must walk . . . he must talk . . . [he must] lie . . . [he must] wring to the bar bearing-like asses; [he must], more shameless than carted whores, lie to the grave judge, &c.’ This is the only method in which I can construe the passage, and it carries with it the
assumption that ‘bearing like’ should be connected by a hyphen to form an adjective similar to ‘Relique-like, which is the MS. form of ‘Relique-ly’ at l. 84. Certainly it is ‘he’, Coscus, who is ‘more shameless, &c.,’ and not his victims. These are the ‘bearing-like asses’, the patient Catholics or suspected Catholics whom he wrings to the bar and forces to disgorge fines. (II, 111–12)

The minor but certainly intrusive solution that Grierson adopted in this case is indicative of his determination that Donne’s poetry should never simply lapse into obscurity; however apparently convoluted in structure, it is, nonetheless, syntactically coherent and logical in its development. If ‘bearing-like asses’ seems a far-fetched adjective, Grierson is able to show that ‘bearing’ is ‘the regular epithet for asses in Elizabethan literature’ by quoting from *Taming of the Shrew*: ‘Asses are made to bear and so are you’ (II, 112). Such interventions are important because for Grierson not only the sense but ‘the rhetoric and rhythm’ of Donne’s poetry ‘depend a good deal on getting the right punctuation and a clear view of what are the periods’ (II, 217).

If unpicking the apparent obscurities of Donne’s syntax is the first step in making his poems more readable, the second is coming to terms with the philosophical context which informs the poetry’s argumentative structures. In the introduction to his *Commentary*, Grierson notes the general indebtedness of the poets of the Renaissance to Platonism but finds that Donne was steeped in Scholastic Philosophy and Theology. Often under his most playful conceits lurk Scholastic definitions and distinctions. The question of the influence of Plato on the poets of the Renaissance has been discussed of recent years, but generally without a sufficient preliminary inquiry as to the Scholastic inheritance of these poets. Doctrines that derive ultimately, it may be, from Plato and Aristotle were familiar to Donne and others in the first place from Aquinas and the theology of the Schools, and, as Professor Picavet has insisted (*Esquisse d’une histoire générale et comparée des philosophies médiévales*. Paris, 1907), they entered the Scholastic Philosophy through Plotinus and were modified in the passage. (II, 5)

In accounting for Donne’s imagery Grierson acknowledges that he has ‘made constant use of the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas’ (II, 6), as well as ‘Zeller’s *Philosophie der Griechen*, on Plotinus, and Harnack’s *History of Dogma*’ (II, 6). Thus the concluding lines of ‘The Good-morrow’—
What ever dyes, was not mixt equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe flacken, none can die. (I, 8)

– are explained in terms of Scholastic theories of unity and difference:

If our two loves are one, dissolution is impossible; and the same is true if, though two, they are always alike. What is simple – as God or the soul – cannot be dissolved; nor compounds, e.g. the Heavenly bodies, between whose elements there is no contrariety. … The body, being composed of contrary elements, has not this essential immortality: ‘In Heaven we doe not say, that our bodies shall devest their mortality, so, as that naturally they could not dye; for they shall have a composition still; and every compounded thing may perish; but they shall be so assured, and with such a preservation, as they shall alwaies know they shall never dye.’ Sermons 80.19.189. (II, 11)

Donne’s imperishable unity is, of course, a witty conceit – the application to earthly lovers of what can be true only of immaterial souls – but draws on the logic of Aquinas in order to render earthly love rhetorically eternal. Similarly, in ‘The Second Anniversary’, Elizabeth Drury is attributed with being a creature

Who could not lacke, whate’er this world could give,
Because she was the forme, that made it live; (I, 253, l. 72–3)

The notion of ‘forme’ Grierson traces to Aristotle through Aquinas, who ‘accepts the Aristotelian view that the soul is united to the body as its form, that in virtue of which the body lives and function’ (II, 196–7). That Elizabeth Drury should be the ‘forme’ of the world is, of course, a rhetorical exaggeration of the kind that led Ben Jonson to insist to Drummond ‘That Donnes Anniversaries were profane and full of blasphemies; that he told Mr Done [sic] if it had been written of the Virgin Marie it had been something’ (II, 187). Grierson, however, supports Donne in his defence that ‘he described the Idea of Woman, and not as she was’, because he ‘interwove with a rapt and extravagantly conceited laudation of an ideal woman two topics familiar to his catholic and mediaeval learning, and developed each in a characteristically subtle and ingenious strain’; these two topics are ‘common enough in mediaeval devotional literature – a Contemptu Mundi, and a contemplation of the Glories of Paradise’ (II, 187–8). What makes Donne more than simply a belated medieval poet, however, is that all this scholastic learning is
juxtaposed with a profound awareness of how the medieval cosmogony has been disrupted by the discoveries of explorers and scientists:

One of the most interesting strands of thought common to the twin poems is the reflection on the disintegrating effect of the New Learning. Copernicus’ displacement of the earth, and the consequent disturbance of the accepted mediaeval cosmology with its concentric arrangement of elements and heavenly bodies, arrests and disturbs Donne’s imagination much as the later geology with its revelation of vanished species and first suggestion of a doctrine of evolution absorbed and perturbed Tennyson when he wrote *In Memoriam*. . . No other poet of the seventeenth century known to me shows the same sensitiveness to the consequences of the new discoveries of traveller, astronomer, physiologist and physician as Donne. (II, 188–9)

The rhetorical and logical structure of a Scholastic philosophy which provided an ordered hierarchy culminating in the perfection of God is deployed in the context of new forms of knowledge that at once undermine it and, yet, make it even more attractive:

Thou art too narrow, wretch, to comprehend
Even thy self: yea though thou wouldest but bend
To know thy body. Have not all soules thought
For many ages, that our body’s is wrought
Of Ayre, and Fire, and other Elements?
And now they thinke of new ingredients,
And one Soule thinkes one, and another way
Another thinkes, and ‘tis an even lay.
Know’st thou but how the stone doth enter in
The bladders cave, and never breake the skinne?
Know’st thou how blood, which to the heart doth flow,
Doth from one ventricle to th’other goe? (I, 258–9, ll. 261–72)

From this flux of uncertainty and controversy – ‘We see in Authors, too stiffe to recant/A hundred controversys of an Ant’ (I, 259, ll. 281–2) – we rebound to the certainties offered by Aquinas, of a heaven where

Thou shalt not peepe through lattices of eyes,
Nor heare through Labyrinths of eares, nor learne
By circuit, or collections to discern.
In heaven though straight know’st all, concerning it,
And what concerns it not, shalt straight forget.

(I, 259–60, ll. 296–300)

In Grierson’s view, ‘it was not of religion [Donne] doubted but of science, of human knowledge with its uncertainties, its shifting theories’ (II, xxviii). The vision of heaven in such an intellectual context can only underline the fluidities of our ordinary life:

And what essential joy can’t thou expect
Here upon earth? What permanent effect
Of transitory causes? Doft thou love
Beauty? (And beauty worthy’t is to move)
Poor confounded coulenor, that she, and thou,
Which did begin to live, are neither now;
You are both fluid, chang’d since tysterday;
Next day repaires, (but ill) last days decay.
Nor are, (although the river keepe the name)
Yesterdaies waters, and to daies the same.
So flowes her face, and thine eyes, neither now
That Saint, nor Pilgrime, which your loving vow
Concern’d, remaines; but whil’t you thinke you bee
Constant, you’are hourely in inconstancie.

(I, 262, ll. 387–400)

And it is precisely the ability to capture this fluidity by the rapid transitions of his imagery, the rapid shifts of social and intellectual contexts, that makes Donne’s work at once so striking and so difficult: ‘The spiritual sense in Donne was as real a thing as the restless and unruly wit, or the sensual, passionate temperament’ (II, xxx), and all of them – whether in the satires, the songs and sonnets, or the religious poetry – are in constant interchange, so that Donne’s poetry is ‘a record of intense, rapid thinking’ (II, xxxiii), which requires the same speed of transition from his readers if they are to comprehend – and appreciate – his work.

One of the most anthologised of Donne’s poems, as reinterpreted by Grierson, is ‘The Extafie’ (I, 51), a title which might be taken to refer simply to the intensity of the pleasure of the lovers in the poem who are so suspended in their mutual attraction that
Wee like sepulchral statues lay;
All day, the same our postures were,
And we said nothing, all the day (I, 52, ll. 18–20).

but in which Grierson unveils Donne’s use of Neo-Platonic philosophy:

In a letter to Sir Thomas Lucy, Donne writes: ‘Sir I make account that this writing of letters, when it is with any seriousness, is a kind of extasie, and a departing, and secession, and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate itself to two bodies’. Ecstasy in Neo-Platonic philosophy was the state of mind in which the soul, escaping from the body, attained to the vision of God, the One, the Absolute. (II, 42)

As evidence of this intellectual context, Grierson quotes Plotinus’s definition of ecstasy as ‘a simplification, an abandonment of self, a perfect quietude...a desire of contact, in short a wish to merge oneself in that which one contemplates in the Sanctuary’ (II, 42). This, which Grierson translates from the French of Bouilet (1857–8), accounts for the structure of the poem: ‘the exodus of the souls (ll. 15–16), the perfect quiet (ll. 18–20), the new insight (ll. 29–33), the contact and union of the souls (l. 35)’. Grierson speculates that ‘Donne had probably read Ficino’s translation of Plotinus’ (1492), but that the same concept could be derived from the Christian tradition, since ‘the doctrine of ecstasy passed into Christian thought, connecting itself especially with the experience of St Paul, (2 Cor. xii 2)’ (II, 42). Similarly, various linguistic issues have to be resolved before the speaker’s request that his lover should return to the pleasures of the body are comprehensible:

But O alas, so long, so farre
Our bodies why doe wee forbear?
They are ours, though they are not wee, Wee are
The intelligences, they the sphære.
We owe them thanks, because they thus,
Did us, to us, at first convey,
Yielded their forces, sense, to us,
Nor are drossè to us, but allay.
On man heavens influence workes not so,
But that it first imprints the ayre,
Soc soule into the soule may flow,
Though it to body first repair. (I, 53, ll. 49–60)
The third line above had been given in the previously printed versions as ‘They’ are ours, though not we, wee are’; Grierson adopts his version from the MSS. which, he believes, is ‘metrically, in the rhetorically effective position of the stresses, superior’ (II, 43). In the seventh line, ‘forces, sense’ is ‘senses force’ in the previous editions, but Grierson thinks ‘forces, sense’ is ‘more characteristic of Donne’s thought’ because it distinguishes ‘with his usual scholastic precision’ the functions of soul and body’, where perception is the function of the soul (for which he offers an example from Satyre III) but,

The body has its function also, without which the soul could not fulfil its; and that function is ‘sense’. It is through this medium that human souls must operate to obtain knowledge of each other. The bodies must yield their forces or faculties (‘sense’ in all its forms, especially sight and touch – hands and eyes) to us before our souls can become one. (II, 42)

Equally, the notion that ‘heavens influence . . . first imprints the ayre’ is illustrated by a quotation from Du Bartas’s La Sepmaine, &c. (1581) which explains how some of the ancients believed that the air was able to allow the secrets of the stars and planets to be conveyed to the earth. Finally, ‘Soe foule into the foule may flow’ is a replacement for ‘For foule into the foule may flow’ because it fits better with the repeated ‘So’ in the later lines, ‘So must pure lovers foules descend/T’affections and to faculties’ (ll. 65–6). To justify his decision, Grierson gives a detailed account of two contrasting theories – which have become unfamiliar to us (II, 44) – about the nature of heavenly bodies and how they might influence human behaviour:

Now if ‘Soe’ be the right reading here then Donne is thinking of the heavenly bodies without distinguishing in them between soul and intelligence . . . If ‘For’ be the right reading, then Donne is giving as an example of soul operating on soul through the medium of the body the influence of the heavenly intelligences on our souls. But this is not the orthodox view of their interaction. I feel sure that ‘Soe’ is the right reading. (II, 45)

Such explications and revisions allow Grierson to claim ‘The Extasie’ as ‘one of the most important of the lyrics as a statement of Donne’s metaphysic of love, of the interconnexion and mutual dependence of body and soul’ (II, 41).

In addition to providing this interpretive context, however, Grierson makes two very significant changes to Donne’s text. The first is at line 9 which, in previous editions, had read, ‘So to engraft our hands’ but which Grierson revises
as ‘So to entergraft our hands’, because, he argues, ‘entergraft’ gives the reciprocal force correctly, which ‘engraft’ does not: ‘Donne’s precision is as marked as his subtlety’ (II, 42). The second is at l. 42, where previous editors had printed the word ‘Interanimates’ but which Grierson reads from the MSS. as ‘Interinanimates’ because it is the form of the word ‘which the metre requires’, as well as linking to Donne’s later usage in the sermons: ‘That universall power which sustaines, and inanimates the whole world’ (Sermons 80, 29. 289). Both of these word choices emphasise the mutuality of influence between the lovers and between the universal forces of which they are types. No previous editor of Donne had seen these possibilities but they help fulfil what, in his ‘Introduction’, Grierson had argued to be a key element in Donne’s work – his challenge to the mediaeval conception of love as it had developed in the ‘the dialectic of the mediaeval love-poets, the poets of the dolce stil nuovo, Guinicelli, Cavalcanti, Dante, and their successors’ (II, xxxv), a poetry in which, ‘On the one hand the love of woman is the great ennobler of the human heart’, but ‘on the other hand, love is a passion which in the end is to be repented of in sackcloth and ashes’ (II, xxxv–xxxvi). This dualism could only be transcended by ‘making love identical with religion, by emptying it of earthly passion, making woman an Angel, a pure Intelligence, love of whom is the first awakening of the love of God’ (II, xxxvi). The consequence is that earthly love can only be a ‘long and weary aberration of the soul from her true goal, which is the love of God’ (II, xxxvi). In opposition to this tradition, Donne’s conception of love is ‘less transcendental than that of Dante, rests on a juster, because less dualistic and ascetic, conception of the nature of the love of man and woman’ (II, xxxv); it has ‘a clearer consciousness of the eternal significance of love, not the love that aspires after the unattainable, but the love that unites contented hearts’ (II, xlvi), the love which ‘in which body and soul alike have their part, and of which there is no reason to repent’ (II, xlvi), the love which is ‘a natural passion in the human heart the meaning and end of which is marriage’ (II, xlv). Donne’s poetry is thus a ‘justification of natural love as fullness of joy and life’ (II, xlvi), and ‘The Extasie’ is the metaphysical elaboration of that ‘new philosophy of love’ (II, xxxv) and of the value it attributes to the body. To give expression to this new philosophy of love Donne had to develop a new poetic, one which involves a ‘vivid realism’ (II, xxxiv); one that revealed ‘a passion which is not ideal nor conventional, neither recollected in tranquillity nor a pure product of literary fashion, but of love as an actual, immediate experience in all its moods’ (II, xxxiv). It is this combination of subject matter and style – both its ‘record of intense, rapid thinking, expressed in the simplest, most appropriate language’ (II, xxxiii) and its expression in abstract and subtle thought’ (II, xxxiv) – which makes Donne so radically different from other poets of his times.
Grierson's detailed readings of Donne's poetry produced its own version of a new poetic, one in which poetry should be judged by its psychological realism rather than traditional conceptions of 'beauty': indeed, it is failure to recognise the poetic purposes of his poetry that have led critics to deny that he 'is a great poet', 'because with rare exceptions, exceptions rather of occasional lines and phrases than of whole poems, his songs and elegies lack beauty' (II, xxxi). The issue which Donne's work poses is,

Can poetry be at once passionate and ingenious, sincere in feeling and witty,—packed with thought, and that subtle and abstract thought, Scholastic dialectic? Can love-poetry speak a language which is impassioned and expressive but lacks beauty, is quite different from the language of Dante and Petrarch, the loveliest language that lovers ever spoke, or the picturesque hyperboles of Romeo and Juliet? Must not the imagery and the cadences of love poetry reflect 'l’infinita, ineffabile bellezza’ which is its inspiration? (II, xxxi)

The Wordsworthian expectation that 'Beauty is the quality of poetry which records an ideal passion recollected in tranquillity' is displaced by a dramatic poetry, attempting to capture 'the very movement and moment of passion itself' (II, xxxiv). The consequence is that 'Donne’s interest is his theme, love and woman, and he uses words not for their own sake but to communicate his consciousness of these surprising phenomena in all their varying and conflicting aspects' (II, xlii). Donne’s poetry is not simply, however, the expression of immediate emotion, precisely because

It is metaphysical, not only in the sense of being erudite and witty, but in the proper sense of being reflective and philosophical. Donne is always conscious of the import of his moods, and so it is that there emerges from his poems a philosophy or a suggested philosophy of love to take the place of the idealism which he rejects. (II, xliv)

The realism that explores the consciousness of the lover is also in the service of the 'new philosophy of love', so that, like the lovers of 'The Extasie', style and theme are united in a poetic of the soul and the body to which mere beauty is irrelevant:

... Alchemy and Astrology, legal contracts and non obstantes, 'late schoolboys and sour prentices,' ‘the king’s real and his stamped face’ – these are the
kind of images, erudite, fanciful, and homely, which give to Donne’s poetry a texture so different at a first glance from the florid and diffuse Elizabethan poetry. (II, xxxviii–xxxix)

Donne’s is a ‘poetry of an extraordinarily arresting and haunting quality, passionate, thoughtful, and with a deep melody of its own’ (II, lv), and only in Burns will one find an equivalent ‘intensity of feeling and directness of expression’, only in Browning ‘the same simplicity of feeling combined with a like swift and subtle dialectic’ (II, xliii).

In his exposition of the aesthetic virtues of Donne’s poetry, Grierson effectively challenged the relevance romantic conceptions of ‘beauty’ both to the content and to the form of poetry: poetry should not strive after beauty but should seek to do justice to the complexity of human experience:

A great poem is not simply the expression in verse of a poet’s articulate thought. It is something much more complex. It is the reflection, the embodiment in a form adequate to communicate it with delight to himself and to his audience, of the interaction of thought and feeling, the whole complex web of a personality. (C, 236)

This is from Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century, published in 1929, and summarises the new aesthetic criterion for all poetry that Grierson had derived from his study of Donne. It represented a radical challenge not only to previous evaluations of Donne but to the whole trajectory of the history of literature in English. Donne becomes the measure by which all other poetry in English should be judged because Donne’s is a poetry which, though apparently expressing a

hot-blooded sincerity of feeling [. . . ] reveals on a closer study a greater complexity of moods, a wider dramatic range, than the first impression suggests, so much so that one comes at moments to the conviction that his poetry is a more complete mirror than any other one can recall of love as a complex passion in which sense and soul are inextricably blended. (C, 143–4)

Donne, it appears, was the last poet to achieve such a combination, and, therefore, the model for any modern poet seeking to recover the integration of mind and body, of intellect and art that was to become central to Brooks’s account of modernism. Grierson’s reading of Donne had not only transformed Donne’s
reputation: it had shown how criticism could, by historical contextualisation and by detailed linguistic explication, demonstrate the true qualities of a poem.

III
In 1921 Grierson published an anthology of *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poetry of the Seventeenth Century*, with an extensive introduction which sought to justify the continued use of the term ‘metaphysical’ in relation to Donne and his followers, despite the fact that none of them aspired to the kind of exposition of a philosophical conception of the universe that characterises Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura* or Dante’s *Divina Commedia*. Nonetheless, Grierson argues, Donne ‘is metaphysical not only in virtue of his scholasticism, but by his deep reflective interest in the experiences of which his poetry is the expression, the new psychological curiosity with which he writes of love and religion.’

The anthology was reviewed by T. S. Eliot in an essay which declared that ‘Mr Grierson’s book is in itself a piece of criticism, and a provocation to criticism’, and the provocation in Eliot’s case was to develop Grierson’s analysis of the qualities of Donne’s poetry – its combination of intellect and passion – into a historical account of the change in ‘the mind of England’ between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries –

Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility.

– and into an account of how the poet’s mind differs from that of the ordinary person:

When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the poet’s mind these experiences are always forming new wholes.

Seventeenth-century poets had sensibilities that ‘could devour any kind of

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25 Ibid., 287.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
experience but their successors in the eighteenth century ‘revolted against the ratiocinative’, a revolt which meant that though ‘the language became more refined, the feeling became more crude’. Eliot’s efforts to come to terms with Grierson’s definition of ‘the metaphysical’ were to dominate the Clark lectures he was invited to give in Cambridge in 1926 and the Turnbull lectures presented at John Hopkins in 1933. Following Grierson’s suggestion about the originality of the psychological realism of Donne’s poetry, Eliot declared that Donne’s work was indeed the turning point of ‘modern’ thought and that Donne was the first writer to adopt a properly psychological perspective on human experience.

Often it had been remarked, the state of mind appropriate to a particular science comes into existence before the science itself. Diderot in this sense ‘anticipated’ Darwin: Dostevski, it is often said, though the evidence is less satisfactory, anticipated Freud; . . . But in Donne we are concerned with a connection closer and less interrupted; though I cannot tell you in detail how it came about. But certainly Donne is in a sense a psychologist. You find it in his verse compared to earlier verse, in his sermons compared to earlier sermons . . .

In effect, Eliot’s Clark Lectures of 1926 were an attempt to provide a detailed explanation of Grierson’s judgment that Donne was ‘in certain aspects of mind and training the most medieval, in temper the most modern, of his contemporaries’, and to explain how twentieth-century readers have come to a consciousness or a belief that this [seventeenth-century] poetry and this age have some peculiar affinity with our own poetry and our own age, a belief that our own mentality and feelings are better expressed by the seventeenth century than by the nineteenth or even the eighteenth.

It is from this sense of affinity that ‘Donne is more frequently used as a critical measure than ever before’. And it is Grierson’s account of Donne’s new

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28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 288.
30 Ibid.
33 Schuchard, The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, 43.
34 Ibid.
philosophy of love and, in particular, the lyric ‘The Extasie’, to which Eliot points as the central feature of Donne’s ‘modernity’:

One of the capital ideas of Donne, the one which is perhaps his peculiar gift to humanity, is that of the union, the fusion and identification of souls in sexual love. To state it, to deposit it gnomically or analyse it is nothing; to express it, to evoke it, is everything . . . how many centuries of intellectual labour were necessary, how much dogma, how much speculation, how many systems had to be elaborated, shattered and taken up into other systems, before such an idea was possible! The soul itself had to be constructed first: and since the soul has disappeared we have many other things, the analysis of Stendhal, the madness of Dostoevski, but not this. . . .

And, like Grierson, Eliot finds the ‘metaphysical’ nature of Donne’s poetry in its ability to combine the abstract – the ratiocinative – and the sensuous: ‘it elevates sense for a moment to regions ordinarily attainable only by abstract thought, or on the other hand clothes the abstract, for a moment, with all the painful delight of flesh’. For Eliot, of course, the modern world is a world in decay, and while Donne, as compared with Milton or Dryden or Tennyson, reveals the later loss of that mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience, by comparison with earlier writers such as Dante, Donne’s poetry reflects a religious and intellectual disorder, ‘capable of experiencing and setting down many super-sensuous feelings, only these feelings are of a mind in chaos, not of a mind in order’. Nonetheless, Grierson’s exposition of Donne’s relationship to Dante – ‘Donne had read Dante. He refers to him in the fourth Satyre (II, 106) – and his knowledge of medieval scholasticism as well as his familiarity with classical literature – Satyre IIII [sic], Grierson tells us, ‘is based on Horace’s Ibam forte Sacra (Sat. i. 9)’ (II, 117) – is affirmation of the continuities of Donne’s poetry with the European tradition. This, for Grierson, was part of Donne’s importance: his was a poetry which it is impossible to read in its fullness without a knowledge of poetic tradition stretching back to the Greeks, a knowledge which was part of the shared consciousness of poet and audience. A poet, Grierson argued in his The Background of English Literature of 1915,

is connected with his audience by other links as well as that of a common language, – by a body of common knowledge and feeling to which he may

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35 Ibid., 54.  
36 Ibid., 55.  
38 Schuchard, The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, 133.
make direct or indirect allusion, confident that he will be understood, and not only this, but more or less accurately of the effect the allusion will produce. He knows roughly what his audience knows, and what are their prejudices. A people is made one, less by community of blood than by a common tradition.  

The loss of that common tradition in the modern world poses poets with new problems:

Can any writer of to-day feel confident that a classical allusion will be understood by any wide circle of readers, and not only understood but will awaken certain definite emotions of respect and admiration?  

The answer is that no ‘common tradition of knowledge and feeling’ now unites the poet with his audience, and ‘knowing no traditional, commonly accepted background, our poets have grown curious of strange new vistas, Celtic or Indian or Chinese, and their poetry has become exotic in character’. It was an outcome that Eliot aimed to confront four years later in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, by insisting that poetry is necessarily founded on a ‘historical sense’ which ‘involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not only with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order’. Eliot makes the tradition of which Grierson despairs the necessary foundation of the creation – and presumably the consumption – of poetry, and tradition, in this sense, ‘cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour’ – the kind of labour by which readers of Grierson’s edition of Donne were confronted in the 275 pages of his notes on the poetry.

By 1943 the distinguished American critic of English Renaissance literature, Rosemond Tuve, could rhetorically enquire whether ‘any introduction to a scholarly edition of an early English poet ever had a more marked influence upon contemporary criticism of contemporaries than Grierson’s of Donne

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40 Ibid., 31–2.
41 Ibid., 32.
42 Ibid., 34.
44 Ibid., 14.
(1912) had on ours’, but Grierson’s influence was not only on the ‘criticism of contemporaries’ – it was on the whole methodology of the ‘New Criticism’ that taught the acquisition of ‘tradition’ as central to the understanding of poetry, an acquisition which required ‘great labour’ and therefore many university courses for students. The influence of Grierson’s work on the methods of ‘close reading’ which were central to New Criticism can be traced in the work of I. A. Richards and his reiterated use of Grierson’s discovery – or invention – of ‘interinanimation’, a word unknown till it appeared in Grierson’s version of ‘The Extasie’ in 1912. In an essay of 1957 on Donne, Richards glossed interinanimates as being ‘like two logs each of which makes the other flame the better’, and then used that image as the definition of what poetry, and, therefore, all art strives to achieve, because two minds, the mind of the artist and the mind of reader or observer, are united by the artwork in an experience which interinanimates both. Indeed, in an essay he retitled as ‘The Interinimations of Words’, Richards compared Donne with Dryden to show how different is a poetry in which words are ‘in routine conventional relations’, where ‘they do not induce revolutions in one another’, as compared with a poetry like Donne’s, in which there is prodigious activity between the words as we read them. Following, exploring, realizing, BECOMING that activity is, I suggest, the essential thing in reading the poem. Understanding it is not a preparation for reading the poem. It is itself the poem. And it is a constructive, hazardous, free creative process, a process of conception through which a new being is growing in the mind.

‘Interinanimation’ represents for Richards the highest achievement of poetry, the creation of a communication in which all of its words interact with one another to create a new potential of meaning:

I conceive then a word, as poetry is concerned with it, and as separated from the mere physical or sensory occasion, to be a component of an act of the mind so subtly dependent on the other components of this act and of other acts that it can be distinguished from these interinanimations only as a convenience of discourse. It sounds nonsense to say that a word is its

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47 Ibid., 77.
48 Ibid.
interinanimations with other words; but that is a short way of saying what Poetics is always in danger of overlooking. Words only work together. We understand no word except in and through its interinanimations with other words.\(^{49}\)

As John Paul Russo notes, ‘interinanimation’, for Richards, ‘stands above and includes the “equilibrium of opposed impulses” for mental integration and poetic wholeness’, producing that ‘multiplicity, the limitless variety, of the linkages among phrases, and likewise among thoughts’\(^{50}\) that characterises the highest forms of literature. Richards’s insistent use of Grierson’s ‘found’ term in Donne – it appears in almost every book that Richards wrote – echoes into modern accounts of the New Criticism, such as Peter Childs and Roger Fowler’s *Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, where they contrast ‘Romantic organicist’ accounts of the literary work with the linguistically-based theories of the early twentieth century:

> the revolutions in philosophy of Frege and Wittgenstein, and in linguistics of Saussure, substituted for the ‘referential’ or ‘representational’ model of language an idea of meaning as a result of complex interaction. Criticism took the point that if the meaning of a word is everything it does in a particular CONTEXT, then analysis of the words of a poem, of their total interinanimation, would be nothing less than an account of the poem itself. The metaphysical abstractions which Romantic theory identified as the form of poetry could now be located as linguistic realities, and since language has a public existence, independent of the psychologies of poet or reader, they were open to analysis.\(^{51}\)

No context is given for the use of the term ‘interinanimation’: it is the word by which, retrospectively, the ‘New Criticism’ is defined, as though its meaning, for a modern audience, can be taken for granted.

What came ‘before theory’, and shaped both the theoretical perspectives and the critical practice of the New Criticism, was a new kind of textual criticism, of which Grierson’s *Donne* was the defining example, making Donne’s poetry relevant to a contemporary audience by the detailed explication of its historical meanings and the world-view which they expressed. Critical theory as it emerged in Britain and the United States was *interinanimated* by the textual analyses of Grierson’s *The Poems of John Donne*, and it was on the researches and analyses of a Scottish

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 76.


professor, inheritor of the philosophical traditions of Scottish rhetoric, that twentieth-century Anglophone ‘theory’ was built.

University of Aberdeen
“the incorrigible Irishman”: Roger Casement and the ‘greening’ of Irish Studies

Eóin Flannery

I had accepted Imperialism – British rule was to be extended at all costs, because it was the best for everyone under the sun, and those who opposed that extension ought rightly to be ‘smashed’. I was on the high road to being a regular Imperialist jingo – although at heart underneath all, and unsuspected almost to myself, I had remained an Irishman. Well, the war, [i.e., the Boer War] gave me qualms at the end – the concentration camps bigger ones – and finally, when up in those lonely Congo forests where I found Leopold – I found also myself – the incorrigible Irishman.

Letter from Roger Casement to Alice Stopford Green from Santos, Brazil, 20 April 1907.

I
Postcolonial studies has been the object of much vexed discussion and frequent approbation on account of its perceived preoccupation with discursive analyses and theoretical self-reference. Marxist critics such as Aijaz Ahmad, Benita Parry and Epifanio San Juan Jr., among others, have repeatedly, and differentially, accosted postcolonial studies for the abandonment of its longer-term genealogy founded on anti-colonial activism and Marxist politics, and for its abdication of materialist critical responsibilities in the present.1 However, a number of critics and publications have sought to redress these materialist lacunae by ‘greening’ the terms of reference of postcolonial analyses. In many ways postcolonial studies has always been attuned to the politics of space and place, and to the ecological traumas of exploitation, as Edward Said notes in Culture and Imperialism: ‘Imperialism is after all an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted and finally brought under control.’2 Said points to the incremental but relentless discursive objectification of human and non-human ecologies of the colonised world, processes under which landscapes,

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1 For example see, Aijaz Ahmad, In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures (London, 1992); Benita Parry, ‘Directions and Dead Ends in Postcolonial Studies,’ in David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson eds., Relocating Postcolonialism (Oxford, 2002), 66-81; and Epifanio San Juan Jr., Beyond Postcolonial Theory (Basingstoke, 1998).
languages and cultures were catalogued and often sundered. Thus the literary histories and cultural histories of postcolonial ecocriticism provide telling reminders of the intrusive footprints of both the material realities and the signifying exercises of imperialism. Equally, in aggregating the critical tools of postcolonial criticism and ecocriticism there is the potential for historically informed and theoretically sophisticated critiques of the material and discursive agents of power in the contemporary politico-economic conjuncture. With such sentiments in mind, Malcolm Sen concludes that: ‘postcolonial ecocriticism broadens this field [ecocriticism] by placing power relationships at the centre of analysis.’

Reflecting on the relative novelty and, by implication, dearth, heretofore, of exchanges between ecocriticism and postcolonialism, Pablo Mukherjee leans on the obvious materialist ties between the two fields: ‘considering both positions are fundamentally concerned with the environments and cultures of capitalist modernity, it seems to me that there has been nothing like the degree and intensity of cross-fertilisation that potentially offer each other.’ Indeed, tracking the genealogical origins of both ecocriticism and postcolonialism, Mukherjee discloses a high rate of common ground between the two discourses. If, as he suggests: ‘both fields claimed nothing less than a comprehensive critique of European modernity, in particular, its core component of capitalism, colonialism/imperialism and patriarchy,’ then it is all the more lamentable, and currently exigent, that a critical alignment of ecocriticism and postcolonialism is facilitated. Such potential solidarity is voiced by another prominent advocate of ‘green’ postcolonial studies, Graham Huggan, in equally bold terms: ‘both are equally concerned with critically analysing the representational mechanisms that lend legitimacy to these practices [corporate expansionism and technological managerialism], demonstrating the power of culture to (re)shape the world, and through it, the world.’ In this extract Huggan appears to confine his argument to the ‘representational mechanisms’ that underwrite global capitalist modernity, but elsewhere, with Helen Tiffin, he clarifies

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his position on this point: ‘Both postcolonialism and ecocriticism are [...] aimed at providing conceptual possibilities for a material transformation of the world [original emphasis].’ These latter aspirations are freighted with still more utopian intent, and in their materialist impulses find common cause with Mukherjee’s earlier agenda for the critical convention of ecocriticism and postcolonialism, and with arguments alive within the field of environmental justice.\(^9\) Having learned the hard way for many years under critical and political scrutiny from Marxist commentators within and without the field, it seems that ‘green’ postcolonialists are now more sensitised to the \textit{material} dimensions of the objects and subjects of their criticism. Convening postcolonialism and ecocriticism under a materialist banner is, then, one of a skein of philosophical and critical coalitions rooted in broadly ecocritical circles.

\textbf{II}

In many ways, despite Gerry Smyth’s hopeful prediction in 2001 that ‘it seems likely that Irish Studies and ecocriticism will have much to say to each other,’\(^11\) the field of Irish Studies has yet to exploit fully the critical and analytical resources of ecocriticism. Though some recent ‘green’ shoots have appeared within literary studies in book-length publications and editions by Christine Cusick, Eamonn Wall, Maureen O’Connor, Donna Potts, Lucy Collins and Andrew Carpenter, Robert Brazeau and Derek Gladwin, Alison Lacivita, and Tim Wenzell.\(^12\) Overall, there has been a relatively laboured emergence of sustained ecocritical writing within Irish Studies that might productively contribute to international conversations on the political and cultural implications of global environmental change. There have always been creative and critical engagements with the Irish landscape


– a trend partly occasioned by the country’s protracted history of colonialism, which is, more recently, a prime concern of ecocriticism. While there have been isolated interventions in both literary studies and economic history, these creative and critical legacies have yet to yield a body of ecocritical writing, though there are emerging collaborations and publications. Perhaps in some measure on foot of the cynical, and ultimately self-defeating, transvaluation of the Irish landscape under the yoke of the Celtic Tiger, and its accompanying property ‘boom,’ there have been belated and sobering critical responses that have taken impetus from some international ecocriticism.

One signally productive step in ecocritical Irish Studies is the appearance of a specially-themed ‘Irish’ issue of the open-access on-line *The Journal of Ecocriticism*, which coheres theoretical, literary historical, materialist and feminist perspectives within the limits of the issue. In his contribution, ‘Challenges to an Irish Eco-criticism,’ John Wilson Foster addresses this very prospect; what form can a putative Irish franchise of ecocriticism take? What parameters should be set in the inauguration and the development of such a disciplinary new departure within Irish literary and cultural studies? Wilson Foster’s essay is simultaneously speculative and suggestive; the piece asks questions about the form and contents of an Irish ecocriticism, while at the same time offering indicative texts and authors. Spanning mainstays of the Irish literary canon such as James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, Heaney and Padraic Colum, as well as essayists and nature writers, Foster argues for a sundering of the intractable intellectual borders that have long persisted between science and the arts and humanities in Ireland. As he concludes:

I have tried to enumerate Irish paradigmatic perceptions and representations of the natural world that still exert great cultural influence on and in our literature – the aesthetic, the scientific, the economic, the Romantic, the nativist, the religious, the folkloristic. Of these, only the economic and scientific have not been culturally celebrated by many literary critics, while science’s productions – from nature-writing to scientific papers and monographs – are largely ignored by critics and anthologists, and by writers who are scientifically unsympathetic, indifferent or unconversant. Yet eco-criticism requires the scientific paradigm.13

The contribution is an informative metacritical intervention in the burgeoning area of ecocritical Irish Studies, and it engages with recent international and Irish publications on culture and ecology, including those by scholars such as Glen

A. Love, Cusick and Wenzell. Foster’s essay, then, asks as many questions as it answers, provoking scholars to trace and to test the boundaries and the possibilities of this novel field within Irish Studies. And, with such thoughts in mind, the current discussion retrieves and re-positions a relatively familiar historical figure, the Irish humanitarian pioneer and revolutionary nationalist, Roger Casement. Reading Casement through materialist, postcolonial and ecocritical filters, we locate Casement’s early twentieth-century humanitarian and environmental justice campaigns as anticipatory of equivalent contemporary writing and activism. In this way Casement is exemplary of the ways in which postcolonial and ecocritical analyses are complementary and adjacent in the Irish and global contexts. Casement’s career and legacies highlight the continuities that wed the structural unevenness and iniquities of the capitalist, (neo-) imperialist regimes that are historically and contemporaneously culpable for local and global environmental degradation and injustice.

III

Opening his 1964 essay on Casement, William Roger Louis gestures to the incendiary effects of Casement’s investigations in and subsequent reports on Leopold II’s Congo. In Louis’s view, Casement’s work was both a matter of exposing, and providing evidence of, the long rumoured human rights abuses in that region, but also galvanising a widespread public campaign against Leopold’s tyrannical reign in the Congo. For Louis:

In 1903 Roger Casement fired the smouldering Congo dispute into a controversy that blazed high and hot. By providing evidence of ‘wholesale oppression and shocking misgovernment’ in the Congo, he enabled the British Foreign Office to take a decisive stand against the Congo State. It was Roger Casement who inspired E. D. Morel to found the Congo Reform Association, one of the most effective propaganda instruments in the twentieth century. The history of the Congo […] was profoundly influenced by Roger Casement.¹⁴

Louis quotes from one of Casement’s letters to Lord Lansdowne, British Foreign Secretary at the time in September 1903, in which we encounter details of the extreme violence, mutilation and exploitation witnessed by Casement across the summer of 1903 in the Congo. But Louis also notes the key role Casement played

in furnishing material first-hand evidence from other actors in and witnesses to Leopold’s regime for the British Foreign Office. And some of the key features of Casement’s *Congo Report*, and his later *Amazon Journal*, are the methodological approaches adopted by Casement, as well as the tonal variety with which he articulates his experiences in Central Africa and South America. Casement’s meticulous and impassioned responses to, and indictments of, these two crucibles of imperial expropriation and violence must, then, be read in terms of the longer brutal history of European globalised imperialist capitalism. In both cases wild rubber is the sought-after natural resource; it is pursued at all costs as the extractive companies dispense with legality and human rights with remarkable ease. From one perspective, according to Andrew Porter: ‘At a time when, despite the extent of the issues calling for its attention, the humanitarian movement was in danger of being overwhelmed, Casement’s various efforts made sure that it did not become defunct [...] In his was he helped to ensure the survival of the humanitarian strand in British nationalism and imperial thought well into the twentieth century.’ But Casement’s legacy is also legible in relation to issues pertaining to the critique of empire and colonialism; the dehumanising violence of global capital; and the ecologically deforming imprints of such capital across the Global South. Each of these strands are differentially germane to the period and places in which Casement worked, but are equally relevant to our contemporary period of global ecological devastation. Thus, Casement’s work, writings and potential legacies must be framed in the context of current political and cultural resources and debates including, postcolonial ecocriticism, ecological Marxism, the environmentalism of the poor and environmental justice.

Just as Casement cast his own experiences and the systematic slaughter and exploitation he witnessed in broad transhistorical terms – as part of the mercantilist colonisation of South America by the erstwhile Iberian monarchies – so too Angus Mitchell stresses the relevance of Casement’s work to ongoing postcolonial and neo-colonial analyses. And it is this strand of Mitchell’s iteration of Casement that is most relevant to our location of his legacy in relation to current debates within materialist and postcolonial ecocriticisms. Casement’s implication within, and self-conscious articulation of, anti-colonial movements and ideas during his lifetime has more often been eclipsed by the controversies surrounding the authenticity of the ‘Black Diaries.’ The ravages and slaughter

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15 Michael Taussig addresses such issues as they relate to Casement’s *Putumayo Report* in his *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago, 1987).
17 On the controversies surrounding the veracity of Casement’s ‘Black Diaries’, see W.J. McCormack, *Roger Casement in Death: Or Haunting the Free State* (Dublin, 2002); and Jeffrey
encountered by Casement were enduring and widespread, though they cannot be historicised out of significance to equivalent contemporary actions. In candid terms, Mitchell suggests that: ‘Casement’s interrogation of empire defined the unthinkable and articulated the unspeakable. Above all it exposed conceits, fantasies and lies at the heart of the ‘civilizing’ project and in the relationship between the periphery and the metropolitan.’

Mitchell’s analysis is both ethical and materialist, reclaiming the morality of Casement, a figure long encoded as irredeemably immoral, but also suggesting that Casement should be considered within the pantheon of twentieth-century anti-imperialist thinkers and activists. While some of the company – at first glance – might seem incongruous, each of the figures and/or organisations were aware of the living or dead Casement. The gallery of political thinkers arrayed by Mitchell spans a diversity of hues of Marxist and Socialist politics; Irish nationalism; African-American politics; as well as anti- and post-colonial African politics:

Between 1911 and 1916 Casement evolved into a revolutionary Leviathan. Evidence for this might be found in the tremendous intellectual support surrounding him at the end: Leon Trotsky and W.E.B. du Bois both wrote obituaries for Casement. Those who signed his appeals ranged between Leonard Woolf and other figures connected to Bloomsbury to representations from the Negro Fellowship League and AOH. His legacy can be found in the writings of Rosa Luxembourg, Marcus Garvey, James Connolly, Robert Monteith, Kwame Nkrumah.

It is not difficult to see, then, how Mitchell builds his case for Casement’s relevance to both anti-colonial politics and to more contemporary debates with postcolonial studies. As we have noted, race, nationalism[s], left-wing politics all felt affinities with Casement’s exposures and diagnoses of the systemic destruction of peripheral ecologies and communities in Africa and South America. And these are all discourses that manifest, in various ways, in his writings on these two locations. But what is pertinent for the moment is one of Mitchell’s conclusions on Casement’s critical symmetry with contemporary critical engagements with imperial histories and newer forms of imperial action. Again, as Mitchell explains: ‘It is often hard not to think that Casement was not anticipating various postcolonial paradigms

Dudgeon, Roger Casement: The Black Diaries - With a Study of His Background, Sexuality and Irish Political Life (Belfast, 2002).


in his production of history, certainly many of his attitudes towards history fit in with significant areas of postcolonial discourse theory. Robert Young begins his historical introduction to *Postcolonialism* with Casement travelling out of the Amazon in 1910.\(^{20}\)

Equally, ‘nationalism’ and ‘republicanism’ had themselves become incendiary terms within Irish political and intellectual circles by the 1990s. And it is, perhaps, unsurprising that many Irish people took the easy option and chose what appeared to be an uncomplicated ‘global’ identity within the neo-liberal capitalist conjuncture, rather than attempt to come to terms with or re-imagine Irish civil society on egalitarian republican principles. Thus, both the unfettered zeal with which the Irish State, and large sections of the Irish economy and its population embraced the tenets and lifestyle options of global capitalism, together with the larger period of the Northern Irish ‘Troubles,’ form a backdrop to Mitchell’s introductory defence of Casement and his socio-political actions and beliefs at the beginning of the twentieth-century. The final contextual point that informs Mitchell’s rehabilitation of Casement’s global humanitarianism is the larger imperial background. Historical patterns of imperial exploitation are explicit here in Mitchell’s argument, but Ireland’s status as a postcolonial society is also implicit in Mitchell’s case. For our purposes, what Mitchell infers is that not only is the ‘dimming’ of historical memory about Casement’s humanitarian work a tragedy in itself, its potential exemplarity in the face of recent and contemporary forms of neo-imperial global capitalist exploitation – human-ecological and non-human ecological – is just as dispiriting. The importance of recovering and appreciating Casement’s work is not so much to define the work, or the man, for that matter, as belonging to any single national culture or cause, or as an agent of any specific cause of dispensation. Rather, as Mitchell suggests, Casement’s legacies are, potentially, global and inclusive, and can transcend narrow definitions of race, ethnicity, nationality and locality. As Mitchell argues: ‘Casement’s legacy cannot be exclusively claimed by any one political group or religious domination. His achievement belongs to that universal understanding based on humanity, tolerance, justice, decency and respect for difference.’\(^{21}\)

And this is an argument re-iterated recently by Luke Gibbons in a piece on the on-going Irish financial crisis. For Gibbons, Casement’s life and legacies represent convincing alternatives to the abstract logic of neo-liberal capital, and he utilises Casement as he counters Slavoj Žižek’s orthodox Marxist critique of the current global financial crisis. In Žižek’s view, according Gibbons: ‘capitalism functions as a “totality,” melting the solidity of all cultural difference into thin

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\(^{20}\) Ibid.

Still further, for Gibbons: ‘Žižek’s argument operates on the assumption that globalization has divested itself of all national moorings, and is free to roam the world at will.’ But this is radically contradicted by the example set by Casement in his ‘localization’ of solidarity across colonised cultures. It is hardly surprising in the context of Gibbons’s previous work that Casement’s work and legacies are figured in terms of the politics of postcoloniality. Casement may well have been an influential figure on the global stage of nascent humanitarianism at the beginning of the twentieth-century, but, persuasively in Gibbons’s view, the motivations for and the effects of this labour were local: ‘The radical humanitarianism of Roger Casement, for example, defended indigenous peoples […] but it did not emanate from an abstract universal humanism addressing the plight of a benighted local culture. Casement’s universalism took the form, rather, of an encounter between two specific endangered cultures […] This “rooted cosmopolitanism” challenges Žižek’s reluctance to pursue the disavowed local or national attachments that often lie submerged beneath surface cosmopolitanism.’ In other words, Casement’s affiliative and empathetic relationships with the endangered and exploited cultures he encountered in both the Congo and the Putumayo were founded upon a shared sense, and history, of colonial expropriation. Where the levelling logic of global capital disallows any degree of resistance through differential identification, in Žižek’s case, for Gibbons, Casement’s does not stem from a paternalistic sense of abstract justice, but from recognition of shared suffering across cultures. While Casement was alive to the systemic nature of the regimes of cruelty and expropriation thriving in the Congo and the Putumayo, his identification with those under duress arose from specific experiences and empathy with particular local cultures. Thus one strand of our consideration of Casement is in terms of what is currently trading as postcolonial ecocriticism, as well as materialist ecocritical analyses. Simply put, attention needs to be given to the colonial context of Casement’s experiences and writings in synchronicity with his commitment to indigenous human rights and environmental justice.

While there are conflicts among historians as to the exact level of Casement’s achievement as a systematic thinker, Séamas Ó Siocháin, confesses to treading the middle-ground in this particular debate, and he traces consistent and evolving

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23 Ibid., 132.
threads of thought across Casement’s writing and his correspondence. Ó Síocháin identifies: ‘some patterned ideas of Casement[’s] moving from regional experiences to wide level: (i) exploitation in the Congo and Putumayo as systemic; (ii) his growing recognition of exploitation in other parts of the world; (iii) a range of ideas he expressed on such topics as “empires,” “capital,” “civilization,” and “land”.’

Casement was attuned to the longevity of historical colonial violence in Latin America, but also to the breadth of human suffering across the globe under differentiated regimes of colonial terror. In this latter respect, Ó Síocháin quotes from an impassioned letter sent by Casement to his fellow-traveller in the Congo Reform Association, the journalist and campaigner, Edmund Dene Morel.

In this letter Casement identifies the localities preyed upon by the excesses of colonialism: ‘These slave pits of the earth – Congo, French Congo, Mexico, Peru, possibly Korea and Formosa under the Japanese, Angola with Sao Tome under the Portuguese [...] Tackling Leopold’s Congo has set in motion a big movement – it must be a movement of human liberation all the world over [...] you must remember that the cause of human freedom is as wide as the world.’

The specific and multiple local exposures to the degradations of imperial capitalist exploitation – and accompanying mutilation, sexual violence and genocide – alerted Casement to the extremities of local manifestations of the globalised exertions of empire.

Identifying with these longer histories of colonial oppression, as an Irishman, Casement chafed against imperial paternalism – often apathy – of many of his peers and contemporaries. At least part of Casement’s moral repugnance at the treatment of, and ethical solidarity with, such populations was conditioned by historical contiguities and symmetries across cultures – historical and cultural differences were not prohibitive of historical, moral and political unity for Casement. And one of the ways in which Casement’s work can be read in colonial, postcolonial and ecocritical frames is his devotion to the plights of indigenous communities, and the sundering of their environments – an interest which resonates with contemporary campaigns for the preservation of indigenous cultures and lands within environmental justice movements. As Ó Síocháin once more makes clear: ‘Casement was not unique in not sharing the dominant ideology, but by personality, by values and by historical circumstances, his support for indigenous rights developed into a life commitment. What comes across very strongly is that throughout his career Casement was possessed of a deep feeling

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29 Ó Síocháin ““More power to the Indians”: Roger Casement, the Putumayo, and indigenous rights,” 7.
for other humans, colonial subjects.\textsuperscript{30}

IV

Casement’s first humanitarian foray took him to the Congo, that emblematic crucible immortalised in *Heart of Darkness* by Casement’s contemporary and acquaintance, Joseph Conrad. On foot of the infamous Berlin Conference in 1884–5, and abetted by the establishment of a number of spurious humanitarian organisations, Leopold II of Belgium had secured an effective personal fiefdom in the Congo Free State, located on the upper Congo River. However, as Ó Síocháin and O’Sullivan note: ‘By the mid-1890s, […] a steadily increasing trickle of reports had reached Europe and the United States concerning the treatment of the State’s black population. The reports, if they were to be believed, were shocking, suggesting a regime, not only of pervasive coercion and exactions, but also of floggings, mutilations and widespread killings.’\textsuperscript{31} Such reports prompted significant numbers of protests among humanitarians – among them Edmund Dene Morel – and during the early summer of 1903 Casement was instructed to depart for the upper Congo and attempt to establish the accuracy of these persistent reports. By the end of September 1903, after journeying through a selected number of areas, Casement was moved enough to write to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne:

\begin{quote}
I am amazed and confounded at what I have both seen and heard; and if I, in the enjoyment of all the resources and privileges of civilized existence, know not where to turn to, or to whom to make appeal on behalf of these unhappy people whose sufferings I have witnessed, and whose wrongs have burnt into my heart, how can they, poor, panic-stricken fugitives, in their own forest homes, turn for justice to their oppressors. The one dreadful, dreary cry that has been ringing in my ears for the last six weeks has been ‘Protect us from our protectors’.
\end{quote}

Though having spent the better part of two decades in colonial service across Africa by this point, Casement’s experiences in Leopold’s Congo were of a violent extremity far beyond those previously witnessed. And, as became apparent during his later Putumayo investigation, though there are figurehead individuals highlighted

\begin{itemize}
\item[30] Ibid., 10.
\end{itemize}
– Leopold and Julio Arana respectively – Casement’s diagnosis centres on the entrenched and widespread effectiveness of systemic exploitation and murderous violence. In his own words, and at the conclusion of his Congo investigation, Casement declares in a letter dated 12 September 1903 that: ‘I do not accuse an individual; I accuse a system.’ Casement’s was not an overarching critique of a unitary global system – though it had materialist bases, his respective investigative reports arise out of specific, local manifestations of Western capitalist, imperialist. Casement’s report documents both the human and non-human sundering of the upper Congo region by Leopold, and the reign of terror – to use Michael Taussig’s term – maintained by the Belgian monarch’s Force Publique, in forcibly policing the sourcing and harvesting of wild rubber.

Casement’s report to Lansdowne was based upon two and a half months spent in the upper Congo region: ‘during which time I visited several points on the Congo River itself, up to the junction of the Lulongo River, ascended the river and its principal feeder, the Lopori, as far as Bongandanga, and went round Lake Mantumba.’ Given the scale of Leopold’s Congo concession, the area of territory covered in the compilation of the report is minimal. But Casement justifies this methodology on the grounds that this is one of the most productive regions in the Congo for wild rubber, and therefore is strongly representative of the larger operation. And furthermore, it is an area that he is familiar with, having spent time there in 1887 when: ‘I had visited most of the places I now revisited.’ This prior knowledge provides Casement with another justification for his modus operandi as he ‘was thus able to institute a comparison between a state of affairs I had myself seen when the natives lived their own savage lives in anarchic and disorderly communities, uncontrolled by Europeans, and that created by more than a decade of very energetic European intervention.’ And Mitchell accents the efficacy of Casement’s previous experiences in his role as investigator: ‘his [previous] direct experience of working practices from within made him an exceptional witness to its excesses and hypocrisies.’

In this comparative vein, Casement opens his Congo report with a commentary on the sharp decline he notices in the resident population of the Lower Congo. And, initially at least, this denuding of the area’s population is attributed to the effects of ‘sleeping sickness,’ or ‘African Trypanosmiasis.’ There is some justification

33 Cited in Ó Siocháin and O’Sullivan, 40.
34 Ó Siocháin and O’Sullivan (eds), The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement’s Congo Report and 1903 Diary, 49.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Mitchell, Casement, 19.
38 Ó Siocháin and O’Sullivan, The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement’s Congo Report and 1903 Diary, 50.
for this conclusion because, as Ó Síocháin and O’Sullivan detail in their editorial notes: ‘According to one authority, an epidemic in the Congo between 1896 and 1906 killed 500,000 people.’ Though not having yet witnessed the ravages of the Leopoldian system, or the brutalities enacted by his Force Publique agents on the ground, there are elements of foreshadowing in Casement’s introductory description of the lower Congo. Again, at this point, there is no direct placement of blame or culpability, but the ruination is consistent with what he encounters later, and throughout, his relatively brief excursion across the region. Yet the subtext anticipates that other factors – not necessarily related to disease – have accounted for the sharp population decline: ‘The natives certainly attribute their alarming death-rate to this [sleeping sickness] as one of the inducing causes, although they attribute, and I think principally, their rapid decreases in numbers to other causes as well.’ It is not just the information that is arresting here; we get a further insight into Casement’s methodology in the production of this report, but also the later Amazon-Putumayo report. One of the noteworthy aspects of Casement’s humanitarian work is his apparent concern for indigenous populations on both continents, and this finds form in the ways that he permits them a voice within the texts of his official reports. While Casement alludes to the stark fall in population – a quantitative loss – he goes on to demonstrate sensitivity to the qualitative effect of such an acute decline: ‘Perhaps the most striking change observed during my journey into the interior was the great reduction observable everywhere in native life. Communities I had formerly known as large and flourishing centres of population are today entirely gone, or now exist in such diminished numbers as to be no longer recognizable.’ While this pattern is not entirely attributable to the exercises of violent capitalist imperialism, both the quantitative and qualitative diminutions of this region are, at least in some measure, consequences of the Leopoldian regime. Casement here refers to ‘native life’ and to the ‘communality’ once evident in the lower Congo. What are on display are, of course, the impacts of Western capitalist operations on indigenous modes of living; exploitation of resources (labour and natural), together with widespread processes of violent dehumanisation contribute to the sundering of both human and non-human ecologies in this area.

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Casement’s later achievement in exposing the genocidal industry of the Peruvian Amazon Company was quickly noted by the British press on the publication of

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39 Ibid., 318.
40 Ibid., 50.
41 Ibid., 50.
his ‘Blue Book’ on the topic. Two days after the appearance of the ‘Blue Book’ the editorial of *The Times* on Monday 15 July 1912 was lavish in its commendation of both the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, but particularly Casement who, it declared: ‘has deserved well of his countrymen and of mankind by the ability and zeal with which he has investigated under very difficult conditions an appalling iniquity.’\(^{42}\) The term ‘appalling iniquity’ makes the enterprise headed by Julio Cesar Arana sound as if it were unique or unprecedented, an anomalous outrage within the otherwise longer histories and broader geographies of imperial capitalism. But, of course, as Casement’s prior experience in Leopold’s Congo taught him, these regimes were historically consistent in so many ways; they were characterised by both longevity and brutality. Nevertheless, such reservations about the implications of the terminology used by *The Times* do not disqualify the appositeness of their use in the case of the Putumayo. What we are furnished with in Casement’s *Amazon Journal*, which documents his excursions across the Amazon, is ‘one of the most important indictments ever made against perpetrators of atrocities and imperial system building […] [it] exposes the genocide of which international commerce is capable.’\(^{43}\) Casement’s *Amazon Journal* provides a first-hand account of the atrocities committed in order to build and to enhance the profitability of a London-registered multinational rubber company. Though headed by the Peruvian Julio Cesar Arana and, largely, for practical purposes, run by an Arana-ist cabal of family members and other associates, what gave Casement’s investigation leverage was the company’s British registration and, crucially, its employment and alleged abuse of Barbadian labourers, who remained British subjects at the time.

The initial prompt for a Foreign Office investigation on the ground in the Putumayo was provided by the publication of a series of articles in the magazine *Truth* by a young American engineer named Walter Hardenburg. On an ill-fated journey across the South American continent, Hardenburg and a colleague had the misfortune to fall into the hands of, and into dispute with, Arana’s company officials. Having witnessed the appalling conditions of the company’s operations in the Putumayo, Hardenburg resolved to attempt to expose the company to public censure, which was duly accomplished on foot of Casement’s inquiries. In a letter sent to William Goose Tyrell, Private Secretary at the Foreign Office, from Iquitos, Brazil, dated 12 September 1910, after initial interviews and investigations in this, one of the principal advanced trading posts along the Amazonian interior, Casement’s initial stirrings of disenchantment are explicit. He writes: ‘Altogether

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42 Cited in Jordan Goodman, *The Devil and Mr Casement: One Man’s Struggle for Human Rights in South America’s Heart of Darkness* (London, 2009), 166.

43 Angus Mitchell *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (Dublin, 1997), 53.
what has been declared to us here in Iquitos is sickening and confirms the infamous character of the treatment of the Indians Hardenburg alleged [...] So far as I can see the staff of the Coy. [Company] on the Putumayo consists of “devilish criminals” – with a few exceptions and the attitude of the Peruvian government to it is – well hard to describe. The so-called “Comisario” on the Putumayo is a farce, and is undoubtedly an agent of the Company.”

Casement quickly discerned that violence and incarceration without impunity were staples of the economy that reigned in the forests of the Putumayo. Wilful ignorance and active complicity on the part of the judicial and political systems in Peru precluded dissent that might, heretofore, have afforded any measure of justice or basic human rights to the resident indigenous populations – principally Huitoto Indians.

As Casement divines through a steady, if not always initially willing, stream of first-hand testimonies, there is a systemic corruption to the Peruvian Amazon Company. Certainly some rubber stations and managers were far more brutal than others, but there is a consistency to the levels of violence and expropriation across the Putumayo. Indicative of these first-hand accounts is that detailed in another of Casement’s letters, on this occasion to Gerald Sydney Spicer, which includes the testimony of one of the Barbadian labourers, Adolfus Gibbs. Gibbs, Casement writes: “told me his story – he was very frightened, and refused twice to come, but probably thinks it safe to keep in with me than with the company. It [his statement] refers to Abisinia and Morelia, and he was witness of the murder of an Indian chief (his head cut off by Jimenez, chief of Morelia), and of innumerable floggings for insufficient rubber, all last year.” The initial reticence of Casement’s witness is consistent with the absence of legal accountability, and further into the Putumayo it registers the culture of terror and fear established and maintained under the sway of Arana’s company. This witness describes what has been seen: summary execution and indiscriminate, often fatal, beatings and mutilations. But what Casement also encounters and records are the self-implicating testimonies of other Barbadian overseers in the service of the Company and its pursuit of rubber. Thus, the ecological denuding of the Putumayo’s rubber stocks is inseparable from the systemic terrorisation of its indigenous inhabitants. Shortly after the interview with Alfonso Gibbs, Casement notes the complacent complicity of the agents in the Company’s systemic extraction of rubber from the Putumayo. If violent excess is one operational feature of the Peruvian Amazon Company’s policy in the Putumayo, the system itself is one based on nothing less than slavery, according to Casement. In both attitude and practice, the Indian population are viewed, and treated, as property. Reflecting on a conversation with the British Vice Consul in

44 Ibid., 105.
Iquitos, David Cazes, Casement writes: ‘Again and again I find slipping from his lips and those of others in Iquitos the unconscious admission of this system of wholesale slavery. Everyone nearly talks of “his Indians” just as if they were sheep or cattle – or rubber trees.’

The humanity of the Indian population faded behind the prospects of extracting ever more quantities of wild rubber; the disposable Indian was harnessed into servicing an alien economic system that simultaneously destroyed their indigenous ecologies and terrorised and decimated its human communities. With neither orthodox waged labour nor basic human rights to consider, the Peruvian Amazon Company could yield unadulterated profit from this remote local ecology. The eye-witness, first-hand accounts, and confessions, of the Barbadians form a telling part of Casement’s primary material for his final report. And few are as self-incriminating as that of Joshua Dyall; Casement describes Dyall’s statements as ‘so grave,’ and with good reason, as Dyall admitted: ‘to five murders of Indians by his own hands, two he shot, two he beat to death by “smashing their testicles” with a stick under Normand’s orders and with Normand helping, and one he flogged to death.’ Dyall’s is not an isolated case and it gives an acute indication of the ferocity, not to mention the variety, of the murderous violence enacted upon the indigenous Indians as part of the machinery of what was a legitimate capitalist enterprise. Providing a basic and highly valuable, yet also increasingly everyday, commodity for Western markets and consumers, the Peruvian Amazon Company’s success partly depended upon a system of summary execution. Not only is Dyall’s account remarkable for its indication of the sheer diversity of methods deployed against the indigenous Amazonian communities, but what is even more telling is the sheer level of physical effort and time invested on the part of the perpetrator in their role as murderer. The three latter murders are laborious and sadistic, revealing much about the attitude of the killer – and his superiors – to the non-humanity, or sub-humanity, of the enslaved labour. Yet again Casement does not lay ultimate culpability with the individual capo – final guilt resides with architects, managers of and profiteers from this system. As he records: ‘the real criminals, in my opinion, were the supreme agents or heads who directed this system of wrong-doing, and enslavement of Indians, and drew profit from it, closing their eyes to the inevitable result of the application of such a system in such conditions of lawlessness – or absence of law – as prevailed in the Putumayo.’

The human cost of the rubber system is at the forefront of his mind, and his emotions, yet in both his Amazon and Congo writings we glean that he is

46 Ibid., 110.
47 Ibid., 124.
48 Ibid., 128.
not insensitive to the widespread sundering of the non-human ecologies in these locations. In many respects, as the non-human environment is destroyed, the cultural and social ecosystems of its human inhabitants dissipate at the same time. At one point, while at the Occidente rubber station, Casement records on 1 and 2 October that the razing of the forest is endemic and merely a function of the ecological collateral damage of rubber extraction. In a passage that has resonance for contemporary patterns of environmental exploitation in the Amazon and elsewhere, Casement writes:

That the forest was gradually giving out its stock of rubber seemed almost apparent to me, as we found these ‘stations’ were continually changing their locality […] Look at the list of abandoned stations on the company’s own map, abandoned or shifted. The stations were following the rubber tress. I understood that Fox was disappointed with the poor show of rubber tress he had encountered, and those, he said, exhausted and hacked to exhaustion. I enjoyed the walk. The forest extremely poor, small stunted trees, and I only saw one rubber tree in the whole 4 miles tramp, and it hacked to death.49

If Casement applied his extensive previous knowledge and experience of Africa as a comparative gauge in his evaluation of Leopold’s Congo, the latter became a regular reference point in the later Amazon Journal. Undoubtedly there are emotional factors to be mindful of when we encounter such cross-colonial comparisons, but they are at least revealing of the comparable levels of ill-treatment meted out to the respective indigenous populations. More obviously, the two contexts are wedded by the common extraction of wild rubber and by the methods employed to compel industrial levels of extraction. Yet there is also a sense that Arana’s Putumayo regime actually exceeds the iniquities of Leopold’s Congo. And the things that jar with Casement most of all are the duplicities and evasions of fact on the part of the British ‘company’ men, such the company accountant. Henry Gielgud. On 5 October, at the Occidente station, Casement dilates on the systematic terror and violence confronting him and his commission in the Putumayo. And part of Casement’s reflection centres on the obtuseness of Gielgud’s conclusions regarding the personalities and sites they have seen, as well as the damning testimonies they have received. In a rhetoric that, again, reveals a contextually-specific cultural hierarchy, Casement records: ‘I don’t object at all to Gielgud trying to defend his Company, that is loyal and right, but an Englishman educated at an English University should be able to smell right and wrong in a case

49 Ibid., 150.
of this kind.\textsuperscript{50} We note the easy conflation of nationality, education and ethical judgement, yet in the very next sentence, Casement invokes a concept that resonates across the twentieth century, and that continues to inform specific conflicts around social and ecological justice campaigns: ‘This thing we find here is carrion—a pestilence—a crime against humanity, and the man who defends it, consciously or unconsciously, putting himself on the side of the lowest scale of humanity, and propagating a moral disease that religion and conscience and all that is upright in us should uncompromisingly denounce.’\textsuperscript{51} Casement forcefully invokes the nomenclature of human rights, in the process acknowledging and valuing the common humanity of the victims of Arana’s profiteering. And this is not a minor issue; it is widely understood that the denial of humanity and subjectivity, or, at least, a significant diminution of humanity underwrote the varieties of imperial land seizure, resource extraction, enslavement, and genocide across historical sites of imperial incursion.

\textbf{VI}

For Richard Kirkland, both Casement’s anti-colonial political imagination, as well as any retrospective assessment of his legacies in anti-colonial and/or postcolonial thought, must be appreciated in international, comparative terms. Chiming with Mitchell’s location of Casement’s work within the longer critical genealogy of postcolonial critique, Kirkland focuses on the analogical nature of Casement’s political consciousness: ‘In reconciling the various experiences of colonialism he witnessed, Casement found analogies irresistible and structured his entire political philosophy around them; a tendency which led inevitable to a form of postcolonial analysis in his writings. The logic of the parallels he drew between Ireland’s status and the atrocities he witnessed in the Belgian Congo allowed for an analysis of the vagaries of identity formation.’\textsuperscript{52} Kirkland is correct in his reference to the centrality of Casement’s Irish nationality, and of the Irish colonial experience, to his work in both the Congo and, later, in the Putumayo. Casement constructs concrete links between his own conscientisation as an anti-colonial Irish revolutionary and the depravities of Belgian imperialism, but also suggests in his \textit{Amazon Journal} that ‘Irishness’ renders one more sympathetic to the plights of oppressed communities. In this way we see analogies of historical experience and analogies of affect structuring Casement’s anti-colonial consciousness. Elsewhere Kirkland re-iterates the comparative vein within Casement’s anti-colonialism, but he also considers the macro-structural implications of Casement’s legacy for Irish

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 178.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 178–9.

\textsuperscript{52} Richard Kirkland, ‘Rhetoric and (Mis)recognitions: Reading Casement,’ \textit{Irish Studies Review} 7, 2 (1999), 166.
postcolonial criticism:

Casement’s own history of deliberate anti-colonial agitation constitutes one of many possible starting points for such a process within Irish Studies. Just as for Prakash, Frantz Fanon and Gandhi are examples of historical figures located within anti-colonial struggle whose relationship to that struggle provides the precondition for theory, so the dissidence seemingly implicit to the Casement case should be seen as an extension of his own anti-colonial intervention. It is important to recognize that Casement’s own writings on Ireland draw heavily on colonial frameworks and analogies with other colonized nations, and in this proposed their own form of ethical critique built around a narrative of decolonization.  

If Kirkland’s argument gestures to how Casement might be productively informative of a postcolonial-inflected Irish Studies, then the current chapter extends that inflection to include an ecocritical or environmentalist element. As a critic of a series of resource-driven imperial regimes, Casement’s work cannot but be read in postcolonial and ecocritical terms. The alignment of these two interlinked political and theoretical fields in Casement’s work is not confined to the places and personalities of his period, but, we can suggest, anticipates and can inform equivalent contemporary struggles. In a sense, we can utilise, with Casement’s imprimatur, as Kirkland argues, a qualified comparative frame of understanding to link his pioneering anti-colonialism to recent and on-going postcolonial-ecocritical theorisation and activism.

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A Voice: In the Hall of Deputies, the Kremlin. December 1985. Aleksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov, the World’s Oldest Living Bolshevik. (Lights up on Prelapsarianov at a podium before a great red flag. He is unimaginably old and totally blind).

Aleksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov: The Great Question before us is: Are we doomed? The Great question before us is: Will the Past release us? The Great Question before us is: Can we Change? In Time?
And we all desire that Change will come.

(A little pause, then with sudden, violent passion:) And Theory? How are we to proceed without Theory? What System of Thought have these Reformers to present to this mad swirling planetary disorganization, to the Inevident Welter of fact, event, phenomenon, calamity? Do they have, as we did, a beautiful Theory, as bold, as Grand, as comprehensive a construct? You can’t imagine, when we first read the Classic Texts, when in the dark vexed night of our ignorance and terror the seed-words sprouted and shoved incomprehension aside, when the incredible bloody vegetable struggled up and through into Red Blooming gave us Praxis, True Praxis, True Theory married to Actual Life … You who live in this Sour Little Age cannot imagine the grandeur of the prospect we gazed upon: like standing atop the highest peak in the mighty Caucasus, and viewing in one all-knowing glance the mountainous, granite order of creation. We were one with the Sidereal Pulse then, in the blood in our heads we hear the tick of the Infinite. You cannot imagine it. I weep for you.

And what have you to offer now, children of this Theory? What have you to offer in its place? (Blistering Contempt) Market Incentives? American Cheeseburgers? Watered-down Bukharinite stopgap makeshift Capitalism! NEPmen! Pygmy children of a gigantic race!

Change? Yes, we must must change, only show me the Theory, and I will be at the barricades, show me the book of the next Beautiful Theory, and I promise you these blind eyes will see again, just to read it, to devour
that text. Show me the words that will reorder the world, or else keep silent.

Tony Kushner

Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes

Carnival

In 2018 Marianne Elliott’s production of Tony Kushner’s Angels in America, was an unmitigated triumph. Critics crooned at its poignancy in Trump’s America. It wracked up a record eleven Tony Award nominations, winning in several categories including “Best Revival of a Play.” According to Ben Brantley, of the New York Times, Kushner gives ‘the sense of a world in which the center no longer holds.’ But it is a feel that is ‘freshly and frighteningly relevant to this fraught year of 2018. Such times, Angels makes clear, are crucibles in which moral and mortal worth are tested. God may no longer be around to judge those of bad faith, but Mr. Kushner definitely is’ (Brantley). A timely stage revival that attends to the unraveling of perceived constructs of social unity ranging from Reaganite politics to hetero-normative values in the United States is certainly salient to the present American cultural climate. But might this staging suggest relevance to a contemporary Irish cultural context too? What features of a decaying political and cultural theory, front and center in Kushner’s Angels, suggest connections to features evident in contemporary Irish art and letters as well?

The interconnectedness of our global economy, and its links to cultural institutions in the English speaking West, suggest that Kushner’s play depicting ways in which the “center that will not hold” certainly echoes across the Atlantic Ocean. Kushner’s play attends to the existential threat of AIDS before the days of protease inhibitors and Magic Johnson’s “success” story. It was a historical circumstance where the aging propaganda of the Cold War (East and West) still whispered its menacing warnings, by Bolsheviks and Reaganites alike. It was a world where the particular varieties of newer American Christian values, exemplified in Kushner’s particularly depressing depiction of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are pitted against the seemingly ancient monotheistic traditions of the Old Testament, portrayed through the play’s opening at a Jewish funeral. In short, Kushner’s Angels depicts a world where theory and dogma abound.

Equally present, however, are disruptive interventions that challenge these power constructs, even in the face of grave mortality. Belize, an ex-drag queen and Registered Nurse, who can offer care and solace, can also cramp the establishment’s style, whether telling off the conservative and closeted Roy Cohn or the smug and cowardly intellectual, Louis Ironson. Belize and Prior, respectively,

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1 W. B. Yeats “Second Coming.”
suggest a myriad of alternative world orders that model enlightened (rather than Enlightenment) principles in the midst of a glitzy, neon bacchanal that is counter to the dowdy and aging theories of the past. With the rise of a global economy in the 1980s, shaking the foundations of the post-World War II geopolitical order, America and Ireland alike were subject to these disruptive forces, set adrift in the latter iterations of nationalism and capitalism at the close of the twentieth century. And these features suggest they might be the bedrock that bolsters our current confusion and future uncertainty today.

The ‘Oldest Living Bolshevik’ might be a specter, but perhaps he is also an angel? Perhaps the Bolshevik is the angel of days gone by, the seduction of a theory that might make order of the seeming chaos that is human progress at the turn of the twenty-first century? Blind, aging and on the precipice of irrelevance, Prelapsarianov screeches Stalinist propaganda. ‘Are we doomed?’ he asks, without seeing or engaging with his audience. ‘Will the past release us? . . . Can we change?’ Grasping for order in the face of impending chaos he frantically asks, ‘And Theory? How are we to proceed without Theory?’ (Kushner, 137–8). In a political context where some in Ireland might claim that the legislative and cultural climate is not unlike Kushner’s ‘Gay Fantasia on National Themes’, one has to consider what the Oldest Boshevik asks his audience to consider: What theory might offer a framing for a seeming fantasia of competing cultural, political and religious constructs in an Ireland that is both at the mercy of and a contributor to European and world economies and geopolitical orders? What theoretical systems might allow ‘incomprehension’ to be ‘pushed aside’ as we bumble through a chapter in human history where what we once knew may indeed be in the past, beyond our grasp, and an untrustworthy map for the future?

Nationalism was a defining cultural and political feature of the twentieth century the world over, particularly in Ireland (Gellner). Seeds of nationalism drew Irish volunteers to the trenches in 1914, fighting in the name of small nations like Belgium. Closer to home, volunteers marched to the General Post Office in Dublin under the command of Padraic Pearse and James Connolly, riding waves of a socialist revolution with an international front to be achieved through local battles for socialist republics with a rise in nationalist politics (Foster). The war for Irish independence led to the partition of the island nation in 1921, solidifying a bifurcated national psyche: a fledgling Irish Free State and a partitioned statelet in the North kept under the British Union, as the region barreled into the Second World War. Ireland’s expression of nationalist values through neutrality drew a red line in relationships between the newly established Free State and its former colonial oppressor in Britain. In the fog of the Second World War, however, Irish nationalists demonstrated a penchant for fascist tendencies as they delicately walked
the line of neutrality between Britain and Germany (Keogh & O’Driscoll). An undercurrent of socialist theory that threaded through DeValera’s mid-twentieth-century Republic of Ireland, was kept in check by the theocratic privilege afforded to the Catholic Church. But another iteration of militant nationalism, which began with civil disobedience and strife in response to Unionist rule in Northern Ireland, suggested that Irish nationalism was unlikely to fade, even if it had demurred some in the Republic of Ireland.

Mary Robinson’s presidency, considered the beginning of a deliberately outward-looking and potentially transnational economic and diplomatic stance for Ireland, was buttressed and affirmed with progress in Northern Ireland. The transnational Good Friday Peace Agreement of 1998 mapped steps toward an end to armed conflict in Northern Ireland and a demilitarized Northern Irish border by 2006. A suggested European consciousness, supported by the economic evolution of a European Economic Community, and its progeny, the European Union, also pointed to a relaxation of nationalist ideologies and values that had dominated geopolitical ordering and theoretical guideposts for evolving democracies the world over. But what would come to replace an aging ‘Theory’ for national vision in Ireland and elsewhere (Brown)? In Ireland, unforeseen legislative reform was underway in the wake of these cultural and economic changes. The Catholic Church’s cultural and political stronghold, its position of legislative privilege, has been foundationally compromised in the midst of relentless allegations of abuse from the 1990s onward. The 34th Amendment, supported by over 60% of the voting public, granted rights to marry for all citizens, without distinction to their sex in 2015. Shortly thereafter, the electorate voted to abolish the 8th Amendment in May 2018. An amendment that had granted equal legal status to the lives of a fetus and its carrying mother, rendering abortion illegal, was overturned.

A legislative and cultural revolution has been underway. An anomaly in the seeming liberal, transnational trajectory of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century came in the wake of a slowing economy and near economic collapse in 2008. Suddenly, vulnerability of an interconnected economy and culture, in the form of the EU and its NAFTA counterpoint in the U.S., rendered individual countries like Ireland vulnerable to the very same vulnerabilities of the partners and allies of transnational confederacies. A transnational global economy suggests the prospect of shared prosperity but how do individual nations fare if their neighbors economically or politically falter? The last decade, with its rise in hyper-nationalist rhetoric, the evolution of international relationships and exhibitions of anxiety and uncertainty associated with global economies, has captured compelling explorations in art and literary work. Much of this suggests that the specter or angel of a nationalist theory both fails on its delivery in the
current climate and leaves a staggeringly sparse map for possible pathways in to the future. Aesthetic explorations, however, offer useful visions for possible futures that we can consider as possible trajectories to actualize or perhaps attempt to avoid at all costs.

**Democratic Unraveling**

Perhaps the strongest indicator of the complexity of nationalism and transnational political vision, as is associated with the European Union, have become infinitely more complex in the current invocation of Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty by the British Government, commonly known as ‘Brexit.’ Here the vision of transnationalism evident in the Good Friday Peace Agreement and the notion of porous national borders between members of the European Union are undermined. Twentieth-century concepts of nationalism do not hold in the nuance of our current material reality, yet their simplicity and mythological luster threaten to seduce. Our jester, the World’s Oldest Living Bolshevik, might ask:

> What have you to offer now, children of this Theory? What have you to offer in its place? *(Blistering Contempt)* Market Incentives? American Cheeseburgers? Watered-down Bukharinite stopgap makeshift Capitalism! NEPmen! Pygmy children of a gigantic race! (Kushner PG).

Presently, aesthetic explorations, rather than nationalist theories, might offer a road fashioned for an uncertain and potentially precarious future.

In Ireland, democratic experiments North and South of the 1921 border have yielded enormously different societal structures and value systems that are evident in legislative developments in each state. In the United Kingdom, abortion remains illegal only in Northern Ireland. Gay marriage, while legal in the Republic of Ireland, is not legal in Northern Ireland. Theresa May’s government in Westminster, as of June 2017, is buttressed by the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland. Legislators, who have not sat in Stormont’s suspended power-sharing assembly since January 2017, uphold the United Kingdom’s Parliamentary Government. The majority of their electorate, though not DUP constituents, voted to ‘remain’ in the European Union when casting ballots for the recent ‘Brexit’ referendum. Sinn Fein representations will not sit in Westminster due to their policy of absentia. Yet Northern Ireland, like the rest of the UK, is likely to leave the European Union in March 2019.

Evidence of such permutations and fissures in democratic processes throughout the island of Ireland appear in artists’ work, illustrating palpable unease and confusion. In April 2017, Ursula Burker’s embroidery frieze, ‘The
Politicians’, exemplified these motifs. Exhibited at the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Burke’s work was part of ‘So It Is’, an exhibition curated by John Carson that included new work by Burke, Willie Doherty, Rita Duffy, John Kindness, Locky Morris, Phillip Napier and Paul Seawright. All work was developed in Pittsburgh for this exhibition, bridging Pittsburgh to Ireland and Northern Ireland in compelling and deliberate ways. The show brought broad support from ARAD, an Anonymous Donor, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Benter Foundation, the British Council, Culture Ireland, Foster Charitable Trust, The Heinz Endowments, National Endowment for the Arts, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and the Roy A. Hunt Foundation. The work demonstrated a cultural connection that illustrated broad support for an exploration of links and distinctions between Irish and American contexts amidst considerable global uncertainty.

In the frieze, bold and vibrant-colored threads pop in contrast to delicate and carefully wrought needlework. Strands of thread cascade down white walls, suggesting an unraveling or a shedding that is in apparent contradiction to the tightly configured construct of the work. In each panel, Burke depicts exclusively male enactments of democratic processes, codified in representations of senate and parliamentary proceedings that are haunted by specters of dysfunction. Grown men, in formal business dress and costume – jackets, collared shirts and ties – devolve into street fighters. Neat and tidy needlework depicts bloody noses, chairs upturned and grown men climbing over one another to reach (or hold off) a violent opponent on senate and parliamentary floors. There are no guns. There are no knives. There are no drones or atomic weapons. There are only men, and they fight fist-to-fist.

‘A lot of my work is about the abuse of power in the political sphere’, Burke recounts. ‘I can see it happening in the American contexts a lot, as well as in multiple other contexts, Britain obviously. That is my route into the work, having an international reading. It makes sense for everything. That is a universal concern, the abuse of power.’ When considering the illustrations that offer testimony to the erosion of order and the faltering of democratic systems in various international locations, she pushes further. ‘It is simple in one way but it is actually quite nuanced. Because the fact is that they care enough to fight. It isn’t an apathetic image’ (Burke. 2017). The medium and form of the frieze is deliberately fashioned as well.

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2 https://mattress.org/archive/index.php/Detail/occurrences/1228
3 All Burke quotes are from interview with author at the Mattress Factory for ‘So It Is’ exhibition in 2017.
Typically, you know, embroidery and porcelain are the domain of the female. They are non-provocative, they’re decorative, and they are delicate. And they weren’t ever charged with big ideas; sociopolitical concern was never the focus. I thought that would be interesting to take something, [a] notion of politics with a small ‘p,’ to charge it that way, to take something that is decorative and inane, maybe, in some respects, to make something quite provocative (Burke).

In this exercise Burke suggests an alternative view of democracy in crisis. The notion of hyper-masculinity, violence and the dysfunction of democratic processes in the nationalist experiment are certainly viable interpretations of the work. The tension, however, of such interpretations of ‘The Politicians’, alongside Burke’s intention to depict ‘the fact that they care enough to fight’, unleashes the fragility of nationalist and transnational constructs. They are amorphous, organic vessels of human ambition. Like the strands cascading from the tight and neat embroidered compositions, Burke’s exercise suggests a winding in and out of order, much like the passage of historic ages and trends.

‘I create this conceptual continuum’, Burke states in relation to temporality in her work. ‘I slide backwards, into the past. I rest in the present.’

And then I’ll always defer to the future. The element of the surreal in the work always ejects it into some future potential realm. And then I have signs and symbols relative to the here and now. But the formal qualities make it sit somewhere in the antiquity. But we don’t know where. It slides. That is what I do in all the work in the embroidery because I use a medieval pallet. And as you know, the classical construction of a painting like Carvaggio, where they are all gesturing out. Those politicians are doing that very thing. They are fighting but their limbs are extended.

As the temporal continuum slides, we gather the influx of theoretical framings and the abandonment of theoretical framings. Perhaps gender informs the work; feminine embroidery, subverting the male-dominated political realm, wracked by violence. Nationalist paradigms, another construct that demands governance. In this case, the prospect of democratic rule, whether functional or not, that yields the political (and physical) wrangling that ‘The Politicians’ depicts. But also temporality, where Burke’s pallet speaks to a medieval past but the images are drawn from YouTube videos of legislators in action of an extraordinary kind. Our theoretical framings pull analytical threads in a myriad of categories, offering lenses for our analysis, our inquiries that push order on the chaotic. But what
tools might we rely upon, however, if the temporal continuum slides in such ways that the theoretical tools demonstrate their age and perhaps their inefficacy? Are Irish writers and artists suggesting that the aesthetic, rather than the theoretical, can guide us with tangible narratives that are not tenably managed, captured or controlled with our past and present theoretical tools? If nationalist paradigms or Marxist framings capture only a portion of the historical or lived experience, how adept are such theoretical tools in the midst of our infinitely complex current world and national orders? What maps or tools will we need to explore or imagine our collective or individual futures?

**Futures: Scientific Catalog**

In *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Frederic Jameson states

...that very distance of culture from its social context which allows it to function as a critique and an indictment of the latter also dooms its interventions to ineffectuality and relegates art and culture to a frivolous, trivialized space in which such intersections are neutralized in advance. The dialectic accounts even more persuasively for the ambivalences of the Utopian text as well: for the more surely a given Utopia asserts its radical differences from what currently is, to that very degree it becomes, not merely unrealizable but, what is worse, unimaginable (Jameson, xv).

Jameson’s version of the feebleness of art’s capacity for resistance contrasts with Burke’s depictions of powerful subversion; delicate and seemingly ‘inane’ decorative art illustrate masculine, dysfunctional yearnings for a symbolic political process. Democratic systems suggest a mechanism that can lift societies out of a fist-to-fist violent will to power, to a theoretical exercise that can accommodate varying and contending visions for a future. Burke’s work, however, suggests that this reality is actually uncertain in current climates. Utopian visions, as Jameson suggests, might be unrealizable or ‘worse, unimaginable’. But what of dystopian visions of Ireland? Will post-apocalyptic narratives that slide along a temporal continuum, like Burke’s work, depict ‘element[s] of the surreal in the work [that] always ejects it into some future potential realm’? Will ‘signs and symbols relative to the here and now’ legitimize the prospect of imagining dark and melancholy futures in Ireland and the world over? How might such Irish art and literature suggest a theory in the making through exercises in aesthetic futuring rather than reliance on nationalist theories of the past century?

Two dystopian visions of note suggest that the ‘absurdly unrealizable’ is
nonetheless chilling and palpable. Willie Doherty’s short film, *No Return*, and Kevin Barry’s *City of Bohane* each suggest Ireland’s explorations of the future are bleak, devoid of nationalist vision and desperate. In *No Return*, filmed in Pittsburgh’s industrial wasteland, Braddock, Doherty imagines a post-apocalyptic catalog of an environmental disaster. A fictional visiting scientist who narrates the film recounts:

The residents initially noticed a gradual loss of light.  
A slow fading of color.  
A lack of definition on the edges of things.  
As if a very fine layer of dust swathed every natural and man-made object, producing a diminished sharpness …  
A visual disturbance, a distortion …  
A dimming to an ashen grey (Doherty).

In explorations of a future vision, Doherty cites Donald Trump’s election and subsequent withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement as having heavily influenced his vision for the film (Doherty). His film suggests long-term international implications for these decisions and potential long-term damage to the environment, but such damages and implications as both hyper-local and internationally relevant. Although filmed on location in Braddock, Doherty reflects on how work in Ireland informs his work elsewhere:

I think the experience of working in Ireland, and its contentious situation, shapes almost everything I do. Way back, one of the first responses I had as a young artist, to the way in which the conflict was documented by photographers and news crews, was a feeling of disenfranchisement of the story. My early work was to participate in that process and to put in another layer in all of that. I think that same kind of impulse has informed most of the work that I have made since then, in Ireland. But it actually shapes how I respond to other places. To come to Pittsburgh, or more specifically to Braddock, [where] as a consequence of its own socioeconomic history [it] has suffered a decline, and all the issues and problems that come with it … I am sure there’s no end of journalists who come and participate in a kind of ‘ruin porn,’ is the expression used. You know, a kind of indulgence in looking at this object that has fallen apart. And I didn’t want to do that. But I knew just to do that with a camera you are kind of documenting what the place looks like.

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4 Willie Doherty interview with the author as part of “So It Is,” 2017.
Relying on a documentary style for the short film, Doherty uses the medium of a fictional dystopian future to access the aesthetic exploration that he seeks. As an aesthetic strategy, he

...deliberately de-saturated it. The color is de-saturated by 40 percent. And also I kept it in a tonal range where the black by contrast are barely there. The black is there but it is muted, the tonal range is somewhere in the middle. So it kinda stays there.

A muted gray-scale of moving image haunts the viewer. As an audience is positioned in alignment and vantage-point with the scientist narrator, Doherty suggests that all audience members are interlopers and voyeurs. We bear witness to the unraveling of a society, the poisoning of a population that ‘could not be explained using tried and tested scientific analysis of air quality’. This toxic wasteland was not comparable to ‘the smogs of the previous century that were often exacerbated by atmospheric conditions’ (Doherty).

*No Return* is one of very few pieces that Doherty creates outside of Ireland or Northern Ireland. This work looks forward, suggesting a need to reckon hopes for a future against reckless national and international politics and lapsed environmental protection policies. It is a dramatic turn from his eerie, oftentimes backward looking efforts to square a present cultural anomaly or cultural artifact in Derry, for example, with historical circumstances of the past. Instead, *No Return* is not about documentation of an inevitable reality or prospective vision. Rather, it bridges place, Northern Ireland, Ireland and America, and temporal nodes, the present and some kind of future. But is it perhaps also a call for action? An interrogative interaction with an audience or viewer where engagement with this vision calls on the individual to act, react or otherwise engage in the making of a path forward or a path away from this vision of prospective shared future?

Doherty suggests, ‘the work is about that sense of unease but at the same time a desire to make a piece of work about not just the place but all of those problems and the things and the responsibilities that come with that’ (Doherty). In contemporary Ireland, and the United States, wealth, privilege and relative power offer an electorate and citizenry that has access to the appropriate levers to shift, change and demand stability and predictability in governance through electoral processes. Doherty’s work serves as an aesthetically disciplined argument that with or without a theoretical framing we can acknowledge aesthetic safeguards against our current trajectory. When other tangible warnings of societal strife fail, depictions of Jameson’s ‘unrealizable’ or perhaps the ‘unbelievable’ vision of a future, can pry audiences from comfort zones of inaction (or worse yet, apathy)
into a sufficiently shocked level of attention that can agitate for precipitous political and cultural change. Was this Doherty’s goal? Can Doherty, as Jameson suggests, use his film to ‘function as a critique and an indictment’ of its social and cultural context? Or absent of a theory, in its aesthetic form, will it be relegated to a ‘frivolous, trivialized space in which such intersections are neutralized in advance’?

**Futures: Along the Riverside**

In Kevin Barry’s *City of the Bohane*, aesthetics rule supreme. Unlike Doherty’s vision of a fully de-saturated gray-scale, color and style abound in the Hartnett Fancy but only in pointed and strategic fashions. Individual comportment, careful grooming and the parade of such aesthetics dominate the novel. As Macu, the grand dame enters the stage, she is described as though trouncing a catwalk.

Macu wore:

A silk wrap, in rich plum tone, with her dark hair stacked high and shellacked, and her bearing was regal, and a jeweled collar-belt was clasped about her throat; the dullness of its gleam was in the evening light a soft green burn.

By custom, this was the hour of the paseo for the Bohane Dacency – the hour when a parade of the New Town was decorously made. Here was Macu among the delicate ladies as they gently wafted along the pretty greystone crescent.

Pageantry and performance are the lexicon of power in Logan Hartnett’s domain. The currency of personal aesthetic, as the delicate ladies ‘gently wafted along the pretty greystone crescent’, indirectly indicates that they are not gentle ladies at all. These are the bosses’ wives, likened to new money in centuries gone by. They parade their ‘dark hair stacked high and shellacked’ and the ‘jeweled collar-belt’, as tropes of rank in the gangland pecking order. As Logan’s partner, Macu is positioned and paraded, as a regal overseer. But this world is small. It is isolated. It is grey. And its only color comes from personal comportment, performance and Machiavellian schemes for positioning.

In Barry’s 2053 Ireland, the landscape is poisonous, blanched, and ominously open. The City of Bohane is isolated geographically and politically. This is no tech-future. As though Belfast City were drained of all political history, rhetoric or affiliations, Barry’s gangland Bohane suggests a post-apocalyptic, post-nationalist Ireland doomed to its own devices. It is by all accounts, a cultural, social and environmental wasteland:
Whatever’s wrong with us is coming in off that river. No argument: the taint of badness on the city’s air is a taint off that river. They is the Bohane river we’re talking about. A blackwater surge, malevolent, it roars in off the Big Nothin’ wastes and the city was spawned by it and was named for it: City of Bohane (Barry, 3).

Unlike Doherty’s future that bridges contemporary Ireland and Northern Ireland to America and to a prospective future, Barry’s Bohane suggests severing. There are tropes of an Irish landscape where the Bohane river winds as a tributary to the sea, but the tributary suggests further pollution and desolation upon reaching the wide expanse of ocean. The Bohane will poison all that it touches, directly and indirectly. While Big Nothin’ threatens its emptiness at the outskirts of the city, urban isolation and loneliness are also emblematic of this text.

The ‘badness on the city’s air is a taint off that river’. The environmental toxicity spills into dysfunction and scrapping for power and pull in the cross-section of lies, drugs, alcohol and deceit that are emblematic to local culture. The heroine, Jenni, is a new heir-apparent in Irish letters, an Irish-Chinese teenager who works the Hartnett Fancy from bottom to top.

Jenni was seventeen that year but wise beyond it. Careful, she was, and a saucy little ticket in her loweriders and wedge hells, her streaked hair pine-appled in a high bun. She took the butt of her stogie from the tit pocket of her white vinyl zip-up and lit it …

There was a canniness to Jenni. It was bred into her – the Chings were old Smoketown stock. Smoketown was hoors, herb, fetish parlours, grog pits, needle alleys, dream salons and Chinese restaurants. Smoketown was the other side of the footbridge from the Back Trace, yonder across the Bohane river, and it was the Hartnett Fancy had the runnings of Smoketown also. But the Cusacks were shaping for it (Barry 5–6).

Like Doherty’s No Return, Barry de-saturates the natural landscape to greys, blacks and low tonal distinctions. If the pallet is poison, the range of that pallet is both muted and limited in its range. Color comes from the language, the plumage of his character’s style and their outlandish penchant for violence and intrigue. Jenni, as heroine, is the epitome of this poison and pageantry. Put in proximity and comparison to Macu throughout the novel, Jenni is at once revered and displayed as all that is dirty, sinister, shadowy and uncertain in both the physical environment and in poisoned relationships in the City of the Bohane. She is its youth and its tradition, its progeny, its future. But the dynamics of gender, power, ambition and
performance depicted in Jenni’s ventures pull readers in to the tensions between individuals, cultural groupings and gangs alike. Nothing is safe, nothing is sacred, nothing is clean.

The cross-section of Irishness in Barry’s Bohane is indicative of a bridge from current Irish demographics to a vision for the mid-twenty-first century. It is a future that is at once recognizable and fantastical. But portrayal of a nationalist or political heritage, that links Barry’s fantastical City of Bohane to present-day Irish nationalism or politics, is explicitly severed, seemingly with gusto. The Harntnett Fancy is twenty-first urban defined in its diverse grittiness. But it is devoid of the ambitions or optimism depicted in Burke’s *Politicians*. The parties care enough to fight but their political system will be on the streets, not in the symbolic space of a senate or parliament.

Yes, here they came, all the big-armed women and all the low-sized butty fellas. Here came the sullen Pollacks and the Bace Trace cones. Here came the natty Africans and the Big luns of bog-spawn polis. Here came the pikey blow-ins and the washedup Madagascars. Here came the women of the Rises down the 98 Steps to buy tabs and tights and mackerel – of such combinations was life in the flat-block circles sustained. Here came the Endeavor Avenue suits for a sconce at a ruder life. The Smoketown tushies were between trick cycles and had crossed the footbridge to take joe and cake in their gossiping covens. The Fancy-boy wannabes swanned about in their finery and tip-tapped a rhythm with their clicker’d heels. De Valera Street was where all converged, was where all trails tangled and knotted, and yes, here came Logan Hartnett in the afternoon swell. He was … Gubernatorial (Barry 31–2).

One of very few references to political constructs throughout the novel, Logan Hartnett as Governor is both apt and comical. The bedraggled diversity of humanity, desperate and counter-cultural in the context of Irish social, political and cultural history of preceding centuries, Logan Hartnett is of course the apparent leader (and boss) of this city. And yet, the prospect of framing political structure on the bedlam of human power negotiations in the City of the Bohane is as laughable as a ‘Clean the Bay’ venture along the Bohane riverside leading to the coast. There is not politic but the raw ambitions of individuals and gangs within the gangland culture.

In Barry’s Bohane, there are only mantras for survival and unmitigated drives for dominance. There are no ‘Systems of Thought’ or ‘Classic Texts’ as the Oldest
Bolshevik demands from the children of theory. There is simply life. There is comportment, costume and dress but there is no nationalism; there is no representative politic; there is no theory. Beyond the outskirts of the City, past the 98 Steps, the towers and Smoketown, Barry suggests there is only the ‘Big Nothin’.

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Bibliography
We have Never been Theoretical: 
Scottish Literature in Theory

Maria-Daniella Dick

I After Theory
The question animating this article is whether Scottish literature is ‘after’ theory, but it contains a postulate that requires an initial parsing, namely, the assumption that a relationship to theory already exists. Accordingly, in this first section I examine the current relationship of Scottish literature to theory within the context of the post-millennial ‘after theory’ debates, while in the second section I foreground one particular discussion within world-literature theory, analysing Emily Apter’s treatment of the ‘New Scotologists’ from The Translation Zone in order to indicate the possible contribution of Scottish literature to a current theory of world-literature as conceived by the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) in their provocative 2015 collaboration, Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature.\(^1\) As Christopher Whyte remarked in his Letter to the Editors of the International Journal of Scottish Literature special issue on ‘Theory and Scottish Exceptionalism’ in 2007, ‘\[t\]heory can mean a multitude of different things’.\(^2\) Conjoined with the preposition ‘after’, it circumscribes a specific age, one increasingly given the label of ‘high theory’ but which effectively signifies French poststructuralism and the advent of continental philosophy into the academy. It also indicates two contrary dispositions: the first, a reactionary claim that theory is no longer relevant – that we are ‘after’ the age of theory – and the second, a fidelity to the discipline which counters that, although the epoch of ‘high theory’ has passed, it nonetheless remains relevant even at the same time as a new contemporary theory simultaneously flourishes in a diffuse and atomised configuration. Since the turn of the twenty-first century a profusion of monographs have argued the latter position;\(^3\) while lone voices within Scottish

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\(^3\) See, for example: Jean-Michel Rabaté, The Future of Theory (Oxford, 2002); Terry Eagleton, After Theory (London, 2003); Nicholas Birns, Theory After Theory: An Intellectual History of Theory from 1950 to the Early 21st Century (Peterborough, Ont., 2010); Jane Elliott and
literary studies were calling for the belated entrance into theory of a discipline traditionally resistant to it, its death and paradoxical survival were being debated elsewhere in the academy.\(^4\) If Scottish literature wished to come to theory after the fact, the question of whether it is ‘after theory’ might be similarly belated within a debate that belongs quintessentially to the decade post-millennium.

Writing in 2010, Nicholas Birns noted that the academic world was perceived already by the early 2000s ‘to be living in an age “after theory”’ (Birns, 11). In the self-titled After Theory, published in 2003, Terry Eagleton outlined the nuanced terms of that supersession:

> The golden age of theory is long past […]. Those to whom the title of this book suggests that ‘theory’ is now over, and that we can all relievedly return to an age of pre-theoretical innocence, are in for a disappointment. […] If theory remains a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever. But we are living now in the aftermath of what one might call high theory, in an age which, having grown rich on the insights of thinkers like Althusser, Barthes and Derrida, has also in some ways moved beyond them. (Eagleton, 1–2)

If theory is our past, therefore, it is also our future; Eagleton’s assessment is close to the Eliotic position that ‘they are that which we know’, a knowledge and legacy that is historicised but assimilated.\(^5\) Concurrent with this continued legacy of high theory is the contemporary ‘theory renaissance’ heralded by Vincent B. Leitch, who confirms the ongoing importance of twentieth-century movements alongside what he identifies as a new, proliferating and disaggregated twenty-first century theory, and dismisses as reactionary the possibility of being ‘after’ theory in the abject sense by asserting that ‘[a]ntitheory and posttheory sentiments of recent decades only make sense in the context of theory as a dominant paradigm’.\(^6\) Leitch testifies to a persisting anxiety within the academy to ‘know’ the latest theory, arguing that this gestures to a market logic in which theory becomes ‘swept up in fashion’, including, presumably, the fashion for ‘after’ or

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\(^4\) For discussions of Scottish Literature and theory see, for example: Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller (eds.), Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Culture and Literature (Amsterdam and New York, 2004); Michael Gardiner, From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory since 1960 (Edinburgh, 2006); Eleanor Bell and Scott Hames (eds.), International Journal of Scottish Literature, Issue 3 Autumn/Winter 2007.


no-theory, predicated on and reincorporated into the theoretical paradigm.⁷

The declaration of being ‘after theory’ thus seems a now-passé trend within the temporality of theory itself, ‘after’ therefore signifying a renewed thriving of theory pursuant on its classical twentieth-century formations, as Jeffrey R. Di Leo suggests when endorsing the Leitch position in his introduction to *Dead Theory* (2016).⁸ What is now simultaneously constructed as the ‘after’ and, by virtue of that ‘after’, the future of theory, risks however becoming profoundly anti-theoretical in many of its forms. Certain new epistemologies embody a renewed humanism that hazards reinforcing and reproducing late capitalist ideology in the guise of either a promotion of the material, or a reversion to the experiential, the affective and the individual. To accept theory in this qualified mode evinces a misapprehension contingent on a perceived rebalance towards a conceived politics or ethics of the everyday and is further implicated in, rather than challenging of, a tendency towards valorisation of the empirical as illustrated by the proliferation of science-based ‘studies’ and the mimetic language of science within the humanities. For this reason, it is especially disquieting that among this twenty-first-century profusion of theory are contemporary discourses claiming the ground of the ethical in contradistinction to what is then postulated as ‘high theory’, locating novelty in a self-perceived turn towards praxis by which they too seek to identify as both ‘after’ theory, and as the ‘after’ of theory by which they are formed through that epochal break. This fundamental misunderstanding of theory’s genealogy implies that the theory of language particularly may be figured as a moment through which we have passed, rather than one which, as Eagleton states, has been assimilated and must remain foundational to our reading strategy and understanding of literature thereafter. There is no way we can legitimately claim to be ‘after theory’ in this sense: on the one hand, such a declaration comes from an explicitly dialectical position that misapprehends theory’s history in order to efface the dialectic strategy and to claim this temporal divide. On the other, it also re-enters that opposition

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⁷ Leitch, 153. This is particularly true in a U.K. context of grant-capture pressure within the academy and the empiricism privileged by that approach, which demonstrates that the death or survival of theory is partly governed not by intellectual currents but by the market forces that seek to institute as an intellectual position capital-driven methodologies and modes of inquiry.

⁸ Jeffrey R. Di Leo (ed.), *Dead Theory: Derrida, Death and the Afterlife of Theory* (London and New York, 2016), 1–3. A passing observation made by Di Leo is also salient in beginning to illuminate the resistance of Scottish literary studies to theory. He remarks that a sense of ‘disciplinary homelessness’ attached to theory, constructed as it was outside of the instituted Humanities disciplines, such that ‘[d]epartments who allowed it entry did so at their own peril – a peril fraught with the potential of disrupting their traditional self-identity’ (Di Leo, 4). The implications for the composition of Scottish Literature as a proper identity are clear, as is the threat that theory, concerned philosophically with destabilisation and interdisciplinarily constituted, might be perceived to pose.
back into theory, insofar as the claim, by positing an ‘after’ of theory, occupies a metaphysical position.

Not only are we not then ‘after theory’, it might be suggested that there can be no ‘after’ of theory, either in a disciplinary sense within the academy or qua theory itself. In his invocation of an Enlightenment-to-come in ‘Modernity: An Unfinished Project?’ Jürgen Habermas argued in support of a theory of communicative reason against postmodernism and those ‘Young Conservatives’ who

[...] essentially appropriate the fundamental experience of aesthetic modernity, namely the revelation of a decentred subjectivity liberated from all the constraints of cognition and purposive action, from all the imperatives of labour and use value, and with this they break out of the modern world altogether. [...] [I]n Manichaean fashion [they] oppose instrumental reason with a principle accessible solely to evocation, whether this is the will to power or sovereignty, Being itself or the Dionysian power for the poetic. In France this tradition leads from Georges Bataille through Foucault to Derrida. Over all these figures hovers, of course, the spirit of Nietzsche, newly resurrected in the 1970s.9

It is evident even in his characterisation of a ‘postmodernism’ synonymous with nihilism that, at this stage at least, Derridean postructuralism has not been fully confronted, but nonetheless for Habermas modernity is unfinished because the Enlightenment project remains to-come, and the stakes are located in the necessity to overcome or achieve precisely that ‘after’ of theory that would allow the project to be realised. This debate is structured explicitly as one of temporality: of the past and the future, or, to invoke the parameters of this volume, ‘before’ and ‘after’. Such bracketing within disciplines speaks to the time of theory in an attempt to absent theory, by figuring it as an epochal movement; a function achieved by constructing a beginning and an end of theory that frame it as already belonging to an historic past.

As outlined thus far, the question can therefore be framed as either historical or conceptual, as one of Scottish Literature in a post-theory era or as one that considers Scottish Literature in relation to theory. Addressing the latter, to propose that Scottish Literature can claim such a division as ‘before’ and ‘after’ implicitly presupposes having first been theoretical: of being in theory, so to speak.

We have Never been Theoretical

Structurally, if not individually, this has not been the case. To paraphrase Bruno Latour, we have never been theoretical.\(^{10}\) In the introduction by Eleanor Bell and Scott Hames to the 2007 journal issue quoted above, the editors approached the question of how Scottish literary criticism had, even at that late point, ‘largely ignored theory’, citing as dual contributing factors a disciplinary denial of its ideological basis, and its institutional constitution in opposition to an English Literature which had embedded theory into its practice. Within the same issue, Alex Thomson emphasised the problematic for theory of a national literary history which presupposes a national narrative in order to establish a symbiosis between literary and political autonomy.\(^{11}\) The remainder of this section engages with Thomson’s argument, and specifically its discussion of a national paradigm in literature, to assess the continued eschewal of theory by Scottish literary studies more than a decade after Bell and Hames’s analysis.

As Thomson argues that national historiography constructs rather than describes national identity, this is implicitly then also true of a literary historiography wherein historicist methodologies of interpretation assume a prior understanding of the text as an expression of that identity. This ‘extrinsic’ critical method refers the text to the nation so that, as Thomson contends, ‘[n]ational identity here is not so much the product of historiographical analysis as the organising principle of its narrative construction’ (Thomson, 5–6).\(^{12}\) An ideologically determined historiography narrativises a history that it then renarrativises as history, through the material support of a textual evidence that is already conceptually regulated. Thus, ‘[f]ramed in national terms, the study of literature in Scotland will always tend to become the analysis of Scottish literature, and ultimately, of what is “Scottish” about that literature’ (Thomson, 6). Thomson situates what he terms this ‘national principle’ within the context of the ‘national paradigm’ identified by Christopher Whyte and Laurence Nicoll,\(^{13}\) according to which Scottish literature


\(^{12}\) Thomson derives his usage of ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ from René Wellek and Andrew Warren, defined as follows: ‘[a]n intrinsic approach to literature focuses on the work of art as an autonomous artefact; an extrinsic approach seeks to explain particular works, or the development of series of works, in relation to social, political or historical events’ (Thomson, 2).

is governed by what might also be called a national ‘dominant’ through which
the literariness of the text, and literary criticism per se, is subordinated to a view
of literature as a documentary representation and expression of national identity
mobilised by historical reading.  

Whyte aspired to the dissolution of the national paradigm in a post-devolution literary landscape, writing in 1998 that ‘[o]ne can hope that the setting up of a Scottish parliament will at last allow Scottish literature to be literature first and foremost, rather than the expression of a nationalist movement’; Scott Hames remarked in 2007 that Whyte’s call to what is essentially intrinsic reading continued to be a ‘still-distant critical condition’ (Hames in Schoene, p. 246), and it remains so ten years later. While Thomson also argues for the autonomy of the text, he contends that theory has been utilised for two purposes in Scottish literary history, both of which are impedimentary to that autonomy. According to his reading it serves first to legitimise Scottish literature as an object of study, particularly in the period between the failed independence bid of 1979 and the granting of devolution in 1997, wherein there is an investment in the postmodernism of Scottish literature as an index for national postmodernity (Thomson, 12). Its second function is to negotiate the competing claims of a national literature which also adheres to and, within the national paradigm, must reflect, values of ‘liberal multiculturalism’, thus resolving the tension between the need for a singular national literature and the simultaneous necessity for that literature to endorse a desire for the diverse, in so far as diversity constitutes a celebratory signifier of a non-essentialist nation. When viewed from this perspective theory supports rather than critiques ‘romantic nationalist positions’, serving as a ‘theoretical nationalism’ (Thomson, 13).

While critics identify the late-coming of theory into the discipline as a function of canon-formation and traditionalism, or of literary historiography, the common discussion of the national paradigm within such debates perhaps points to the continued problematic of theory within Scottish literature as a symptom of a more profound disquiet: its belated entrance into Scottish literature may not indicate a


14 See also Hames and Bell’s introduction to the issue, where they discuss the national paradigm and its limiting effect on the reception of Scottish Literature, and Hames in Schoene, where it is termed the ‘culturalising’ tendency (247). In his Introduction to the collection, Berthold Schoene quaintly describes the intrinsic approach as ‘Whyte’s promotion of an aesthetic turn in Scottish literature and criticism’ (Schoene, 7–8), and a ‘renegade gesture’ (Schoene, 8).


16 Thomson points to the importance of Bakhtinian readings in this project, his heteroglossia a model ‘that looks attractive if projected onto the nation’ as it promotes heterogeneity within the ostensibly unitary (Thomson, 12).
primary attitude to theory, but a preordained relation dictated by the extension of the national dominant already extant in what Whyte critiques as the evacuation of literary criticism from ‘Scottish literature’ understood as an extension and representation of the nation. That same relation may furthermore be argued to govern the apparent admission of theory into Scottish literature, however qualified. In 2004, Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller identified ‘a lingering parochialism’ in Scottish literary studies, attributed to that same paradigm whereby ‘literature from Scotland must first be explained in terms of its Scottishness, rather than in terms of its history or aesthetic qualities’; they proposed a futurity through theory for a Scottish literature which had (even into the new millennium and in the year of Derrida’s death) suffered an ‘absence of, and perhaps resistance to, newer forms of thinking’, drawing a comparative analogy with Ireland and its rich engagement with theory. In that the evidence cited for the engagement of Irish literature with theory was a proliferation of books on ‘postmodernism, postcolonialism, and feminist readings of nationalism and national identity’ (Bell and Miller, 11), a partial reading of the Irish field emerges that signals an underlying difference between Scottish and Irish literary-critical perspectives. The disciplinary structuration of both literatures arguably differs in part due to the ceding of a national dominant in Irish literature, a function of the political construction of the Republic and the North, but also of its sympathy to theory as an effect of the interrelation of Irish literature with modernism and the subsequent correspondence of theory to modernism. If Irish literary studies embraced poststructuralist theory from the 1980s onwards it is largely because of that affinity of theory to modernism, the international emergence of which was already indexed to Irish literature through the figures of James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and Flann O’Brien, among others, while the Scottish Renaissance was conversely not appropriated to the same extent to academic narratives of its formation. The identification of modernism and theory as homologous, inhering particularly in their mutual concern with language and formalism, consequently engenders intrinsic aesthetic reading, resulting in Irish literary studies assuming the literary focus aspired to by Whyte, yet still absent in Scottish literature. The different statuses of Irish and Scottish literature as national literatures could suggestively be linked to divergent foundational relations to theory as grounded in differential relationships to modernism, as much as their ongoing relation, or non-relation, to theory is predicated upon those foundations as dictated by the institution of literary and national paradigmatic methodologies respectively. While nation is prominent in Irish critical discussions, it is arguably

17 Bell and Miller, 11; also cited in Hames in Schoene, 246. That this section of my argument traces several examples of evidence also included in Hames’s argument emphasises that the contours of the question have remained collectively (if not individually) relatively static, ten years later.
not the critical paradigm, and the identification of national approaches to theory in Bell and Miller’s appraisal of Irish literary criticism could be construed more accurately as reflecting the dominance of that principle in Scottish criticism.

While their call advocates for the postmodern and postnational, Bell is yet moved simultaneously to state that

the inclusion of postmodern and postnational readings of the nation here are not intended to negate the importance of tradition and tradition-inspired readings. Rather, the objective is to suggest that these newer discourses may help enrich historical readings rather than undermine the discipline in an unscholarly fashion.¹⁸

Where the self-determination of a nation depends on consensus, an implicit equivocation regarding relativism is understandable, as is a rejection of theory wherein the nation could be referred to a signifier rather than understood as a referent. In the classical Freudo-Marxist construction, theory destabilises epistemological categories such as nation; its rejection emphasises the dependence of Scottish literary studies upon that category, and on the construction of nation via culture. In the excerpt above Bell refers to ‘postmodern and postnational readings of the nation’ (Bell, 86, emphasis mine), rather than of its literature, implying that the two are synonymous and that national literature is therefore an ideological category rather than a descriptive taxonomy of a locus of production. For that reason, theory must first be brought to bear upon the national dominant before it can be employed within a literary studies that is under its sway; the very fact of the latter, however, precludes the former and further prevents the entrance of theory into Scottish literature. This emphasis upon the national-theoretical resonates with their earlier statement that ‘many Scottish critics recognise the need for plural readings of nationhood rather than literature (Bell and Miller, 11, emphasis mine), but in adhering to the national dominant it opposes rather than supports the explication of text through its ‘literary or aesthetic qualities’ to which the ostensible call to enter into theory is addressed. What has been admitted into Scottish literary studies as theory are instead concepts and lenses for conceiving nation (e.g. Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities;¹⁹ Bakhtinian heteroglossia²⁰; theory of national literatures (e.g. Gilles Deleuze and Félix

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¹⁸ Eleanor Bell, ‘Postmodernism, Nationalism and The Question of Tradition’ in Bell and Miller, (eds.), Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Culture and Literature (Amsterdam and New York, 2004), 83–96 at 86.


Guattari’s minor literature;\textsuperscript{21} the archipelagic modernism of John Brannigan\textsuperscript{22}); and postcolonialism and postmodernism, where direct equivalences could be drawn with political and cultural states as predicated upon a geographical framework.

Cleaving to a predominantly socio-political formulation, postmodernist readings align again with the national paradigm and are appealing precisely because they allow for the continued avoidance not only of theory but also of literature, such as in Katherine Ashley’s welcoming of a postmodern Scottish literary scene, with its discrepancies between traditional views of Scottishness and twenty-first-century production, on the basis that ‘[f]ortunately, these discrepancies are beginning to be addressed in such a way that Scottish literature is being freed from its traditional shackles and is being interpreted as the expression of a fully modern nation’.\textsuperscript{23} An appropriation of the vocabulary of the postmodern here retains the national as dominant, while quieting those previously expressed fears of relativism that adhere to a theorised postmodernity; within this conception the ‘postmodern’ means diversity of identity, broadening that nation out to a necessary heterogeneity that nonetheless confirms and sustains the national model as a justification for the continued turn from theory and from a study of literature that is its precondition. Thomson points out that ‘[h]ailing the alien within has become the boast of Scotland’s democratic aesthetic’ (Thomson, 7). If juxtaposed however with the observation that we may come to understand, through theory, that, as Julia Kristeva writes, ‘[t]he foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners’,\textsuperscript{24} then to be confronted with the suggestion that we are strangers, not only to each other but to ourselves, disrupts the presupposition of stable identity, both personal and national, required for a mode of nation-construction contingent on identity. As such, it deconstructs a national unity, even one established on ethnic heterogeneity. A lexicon of alterity and inclusivity can further veil investments with which it is apparently at odds; as Terry Eagleton notes, ‘capitalism is an impeccably inclusive creed: it really doesn’t care who it exploits’ (Eagleton, 19), and as globalisation continues to leverage difference, concepts of macro-identity – the transnational, postnational, etc. – and of micro-identity – plurality and diversity on the individual level – can become appropriated to its extension on the national plane.

\textsuperscript{21} Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, \textit{Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature} (1975), trans. Dana Polan and foreword by Réda Bensmaia (Minneapolis, 1986).
\textsuperscript{23} Katherine Ashley, ‘Scots Abroad: The International Reception of Scottish Literature’ in Berthold Schoene (ed.), \textit{The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature} (Edinburgh, 2007), 345–53 at 345.
‘Theory’ could then be argued quite literally to have been mapped onto Scottish literature in an extension of the national dominant upon which it is also called to strengthen, its putative entrance occluding the perpetuation of that paradigm, glossing rather than challenging the underlying need to move towards a literary critical model. It could be mooted as a result that Scottish literature has not yet been in theory: the required shift of dominant from national to literary critical paradigm has not yet taken place. Maintaining an umbilical link between the nation and its literature, where the latter is modelled as an expression and substrate of the former, locates literature predominantly within an area studies model as a cultural rationale for nationhood and privileges an historicist methodology that seeks to establish connections between text and context. The apparent progression towards theory (and even the possibility of being ‘after’ theory) provides an alibi for the dominant in so far as, so conceived, it allows space for its continuation, whereas a decoupling of the literary from the national paradigm would potentially allow for a maturation of the discipline as a signifier of a more developed Scottish nation with autonomous cultural spheres that are not primarily understood and interpreted as proxies for the nation.

To be in theory also entails the achievement of a stage where the national model has ceded to autonomous and intrinsic reading. This stage has not yet been achieved, partly because, where the nation remains culturally out of joint with its political state, literature remains both a privileged symbolic site and, with reference to literariness, a secondary one. Alex Thomson draws attention to the statement, made by Liam McIlvanney, that Scottish literature operates “as a kind of substitute or virtual polity”.

25 Thomson perceives the connection being made as one of ‘aesthetic achievement [as the] forerunner of political autonomy’ (Thomson, 4), yet there is also arguably a deeper conflation of cultural particularity, as discerned in the literary sphere, with a political autonomy that (as Thomson indicates elsewhere in his article) relies upon cultural exceptionalism as a grounds for self-determination. This is closer to Ryan D. Shirey’s argument that the national paradigm endures because the nation is reliant upon culture to legitimise its construction in lieu of a legal legitimation, so that ‘consequently, it is the objects of culture that come to stand in as a substitute for the non-existence of a state-sanctioned political identity’. To be ‘after theory’ might imply either

26 Ryan D. Shirey, ‘A Shrinking Highlands: Neil Gunn, Nationalism, and the ‘World Republic of Letters’, International Journal of Scottish Literature, Issue 3 Autumn/Winter 2007, 1–20 (2). As Scott Hames has recently observed, in discussion of Duncan McLean’s declaration of a ‘parliament of novels’, ‘this narrative of antecedence is now a commonplace in Scottish literary criticism, though it is often unclear whether the primacy of culture is a matter of causation, displacement or surrogacy – culture driving politics, culture instead
a reversion or a development; while the question of theory and its absence is determined by the underlying dominance of the national paradigm, there has not yet been an advent.

II  *Shurely Shome Mishtake? Emily Apter’s “Unhappy Scottishness”*

“‘I wouldn’t have been reading English literature, because of the class barrier. Why would you want to read things that were treating you as an animal? The Scottish voice was equated with being working class’”.

In 2015 the Warwick Research Collective published *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, a call for a fresh theorisation of world literature on the basis of what it perceives as a renewed crisis of the Humanities. Beginning by charting the production of theoretical movements in the 1980s – postcolonialism, ethnic and women’s studies, cultural studies, poststructuralism, postmodernism and deconstruction among them – as stemming from a contemporaneous crisis in literary studies, WReC suggests that a similar reorientation is now overdue because (in an echo of the ‘after theory’ debates), ‘the current moment is marked by the recognition that these “new formations” have themselves now passed their sell-by dates’ (WReC, 3–4). Mobilising the economic theory of combined and uneven development, which emphasises that modernity is constructed by the co-existence of new capitalist formations alongside extant prior socio-economic relationships, their project is concerned with the ‘literary registration and encoding of modernity as social logic’ and follows Franco Moretti in conceiving of a world-capitalist system premised on inequality as the basis of a world literature (WReC, 15).

Their theory therefore advocates a displacement of what they term an ‘idealist fantasy’ of comparative literature as the “level playing field” described in *Death of a Discipline* by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in favour of a politicised discussion of the discipline (Spivak 13, quoted in WReC, 22). In that respect they take issue with Emily Apter’s claims, from *The Translation Zone*, that comparative literature “was in principle global from its inception” and that the current globalisation of politics, or culture as politic’. Scott Hames, ‘Narrating Devolution: Politics and/as Scottish Fiction’, *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings*, 5(2): 2017, 1–25 at 3.


28 WReC is a joint research collaboration. For *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World Literature*, the collective comprises Sharae Deckard, Nicholas Lawrence, Neil Lazarus, Graeme Macdonald, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, Benita Parry, and Stephen Shapiro.
of literary studies represents the ceding of national to comparative literatures (Apter, 41, quoted in WReC, 23; WReC, 24). Citing the anomaly represented by English literature within that formation, and critiquing as naïve her aspiration to “a paradigm of *translatio*” that stresses the importance of multilingualism ‘against “national” particularism’, they adduce in evidence the ongoing prevalence of Eurocentrist conceptions of multilingualism and indicate moreover that Apter’s method of ‘close reading with a worldview’ is ‘itself unconvincing […] in its apparent assumption as to the ideological neutrality of critical method’ (Apter, quoted in WReC, 25; WReC, 25–6). Developing insights from Lawrence Venuti and Louis-Jean Calvet, WReC argues instead that

> [...] languages, literary forms and literary productions never enter the world on their own terms. A fundamental inequality – not intrinsic, but fully social – marks their capacities as representational practices; and this inequality is then overdetermined by the social logistics of translation, publication, reading, pedagogy, and so on. (WReC, 26)

In the following section, I will be particularising these objections with attention to the issues posed by Apter’s ‘close reading’ of contemporary Scottish literature, focusing on my own reading of her argument in order to elucidate its guiding principles, the logic of linguistic Anglocentrism that underlies what she describes as the ‘intralingual’ translation of Scottish texts (Apter, 152), and the precise ways in which that reading demonstrates WReC’s acknowledgement that translation ‘is bound up with cultural misrepresentation, linguistic domination and social inequality’ (WReC, 26).

*The Translation Zone* argues for a reconceptualisation of comparative literature through a developed translation studies. In a chapter entitled ‘The Language of Damaged Experience’, Apter attempts an analysis of contemporary Scottish literature to that end; labelling Iain Banks, James Kelman, Duncan McLean, and Irvine Welsh the ‘New Scotologists’, she utilises the theory of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno to suggest that the texts under discussion constitute a form of ‘English to English’ translation that reveals the condition of the Adornian ‘withering human’ exiled within the confines of a post-industrial nation (Apter, 152; 150). The first issue to emerge is, ironically, one of language: describing their vernacular writing variously as ‘accent’; ‘idiom’; ‘language’; ‘vernacular’; ‘regional utterance’; ‘slang’; ‘subcultural *Sprache*’; ‘subcultural language’ (suggesting a difference from ‘language’ similar to the Saussureian distinction between *langue* and *parole*); and ‘prolespeak’, Apter exhibits a conceptual uncertainty over categorisation that reenters the thesis into the political subordination of periphery to centre she
wishes to expose (Apter, 149–59). The first designation – accent – is especially interesting in that it links Anglophone but non-Standard English language to phonic expression and presents it as a variation inhering solely in orality, closer to a definition of vernacular as the everyday spoken language of the people rather than to the definition of vernacular as the European languages which emerged in written literary form from the usurpation of Latin by demotic languages, as, for example, in Dante’s *Divina Commedia*. According to this formation, the characters who reside in these urban Scottish *demi-mondes* do so via a corporeal experience located in the eye and the ear; ‘[t]ypically,’ Apter writes, ‘how the narrators see the world is filtered through how the narrators speak the world, that is, through orally inflected interior monologue’ (Apter, 153). This is, however, also true of Standard English within a phonocentric conception of interior monologue, if denuded of its status as the ‘neutral’ and understood as ideological; the elision of awareness of that broader narratological strategy suggests that the particular character of phonocentrism on display here reveals itself as indicative of an underlying assumption of English as the Standard from which any Anglophone deviation is an enacted orality.

This logic of the ‘natural’ versus the Standard, wherein the former is unmediated, therefore construes non-Standard Anglophone language not as linguistic difference but as deviation, and the vernacular as an oral supplement to Standard English rather than a separate, parallel Anglophone signifying system. Though it might be expected to be the fundamental point of contestation in a debate on language and comparative literature in the Scottish context, the foundational principle of the argument, one which not only goes unquestioned by Apter but, indeed, is assumed as the basis of her reading, conceives vernacular writing in contemporary Scottish literature as a secondary and degraded deviation from a primary Standard English. By homogenising their aesthetic positions, vernacular differentiations, and literary history, Welsh, Kelman, Banks and McLean are constructed as a grouping who have ‘created a fashion for Scottish “minor literature” by inventing a contemporary idiom orthographically transposed into what often seems to be another language, or at the very least a pseudo- or intralingual (English to English) translation’ (Apter, 152), an assessment that is problematic in that it represents already-extant linguistic communities as a synthetic literary construct and identifies the vernacular as a translation from an original and preceding Standard. Such presumptions are evocative of the attitude identified by Kelman in satirising those who both elide his textual formalism and associate his writing with an unmediated and primary orality admitting access to an ‘authentic’ voice: ‘It jist comes oot, ah says, it’s the natchril rithm o the workin
klass, ah jist opens ma mooth and oot it comes’. Apter’s argument paradoxically figures the author as both constructor and ventriloquiser; a lack of understanding that these Scottish linguistic communities pre-exist their literature allows for the former position, while the phonocentric position necessitates the latter. It requires language to be at the same time both synthetic and natural, as well as directly evocative of the texture not only of lived experience, but of the body as the locus of that experience. Drawing on Adornian concepts (from Minima Moralia) of ‘subjective damage’ and the ‘withering human’ ([1951] Apter, 150), Apter conceives these contemporary Scottish texts as documents of a degraded being within a postcolonial context: the logical misstep within the argument is that, in order to link that conception to a discussion of language and translation, she conceives of their language as a constitutively degraded form of English, performative and even determinative of that diminished humanity.

A comparison might here be sketched with WReC, which also reads Kelman as an exemplar of social dissolution in a deindustrialised age. Its argument might prima facie appear close to Apter’s in the way in which it interlinks language and the body via its analysis of The Busconductor Hines, particularly in the claim that ‘the breakdown of his linguistic ability is better read as a psychosomatic registration, on one disintegrating body, of the effect of generalised top-down social violence’ (WReC, 140). An important distinction is that WReC does not refer that linguistic collapse to an original standard, so that the complicity it perceives is rather between a disintegrating body and a formal instability of language that is referred to as modernist technique: unlike in Apter, where linguistic collapse is inferred to be a degradation from linguistic competency that finds analogy in the immediacy of the corporeal, WReC conceives the interrelation of social, corporeal and linguistic fragmentation as explicitly and textually formalised. To theorise that subjective damage inheres in language is concerning because the claim that it carries such damage must rest on the assumption that language in Welsh, Kelman et al. is read as objectively damaged, and that its objective damage provides the basis for the claim. This is evidenced in the positing of ‘internal colonisation as a kind of linguistic depressant’ (Apter, 152): while it is commonplace to figure language as political and, furthermore, to suggest that it can both represent and encode a political status, the statement implies that the Scottish vernacular is formally depressed. While Apter argues that contemporary Scottish literature represents a political debasement that has a somatic effect on the lives of its characters, a prior assumption regarding language governs the logical extension of that debasement to language, such that a reading of Kelman,

29 James Kelman, Afterword to An Old Pub Near the Angel (Edinburgh, 2007; 1973), 124.
Welsh and McLean’s work as narratives of weakened bodies is preconditioned by the implication positing vernacular as a weakened English. Beyond debilitated, they furthermore are corrupted and offensive: Kelman’s bodies are placed linguistically and conceptually in proximity to what Apter terms his ‘linguistic splicing and deformities of utterance’ and compared in turn with McLean’s ‘equally abusive orality’ (Apter, 154). A preceding view of language clearly conditions this equation with the damaged body, and that subtext of deformity becomes explicit in the semantic field; this position emerges more overtly in the judgment that McLean’s prose ‘starts off relatively clean of Scottish burrs or swear words, but [...] becomes increasingly freighted with foul slang’ (ibid). The conflation of ‘burr’ (note the recurrence of accent) and profanity is notable in itself, but also telling is the choice of the adjective ‘clean’. If Standard English – that which is free of ‘Scottish burrs’ – is clean, then what, by default, is Scottish vernacular?

Apter suggests an answer with her comparison of Kafka to Welsh’s ‘minoritarian English’, proposing that the latter allows the ‘animality’ of language to shine through (Apter, 155). One example is that of accent transliteration, in which is identified ‘the “goatiness” of the word “goat”, the Scots pronunciation of “got”’ (ibid). Further to the confusion of dialect with Scots language and in addition to the rendering of vernacular as an issue of pronunciation, the misreading of the signifier is intensified due to the fact that the standard English ‘goat’ (the animal) and Scottish ‘goat’ are homonymic. That Apter co-identifies them is indicative of the priority within the argument of Standard English as the semiotic guarantor, and of the act of meaning-making as it is derived from that prioritised Standard. Herein, the apparent semiotic link between the vernacular and animality (‘goat’ as ‘goat’) is in fact predication, rather than proof, of the guiding assumption that the vernacular is a crude derivation of official language and, by implication, that contemporary Scottish literature is derived from an official Standard. Developing the Adornian analysis of Cockney and East Berlin speech via the Benjaminian theory of ‘crude thinking’ as expressed in his evaluation of Brechtian dialect – ‘the raw, prole, commonplace’ (Apter, 150) – her position draws on Adorno’s characterisation of a mutilated ‘proletarian language’, close to the body, in her reading of Scots, within which she identifies ‘a harrowing, yet mesmerizing language of expletives and downbeat social realism – a “crude thought” lying in wait to feed its hunger on the defiles of standard language’ (Apter, 152). Apter’s Scottish vernacular is an incarnated word-made-flesh that ‘pricks the reader into awareness of the deathliness of humanness, its proximity to meat or matter’ (Apter, 155): figured as a tartan tartare, a corporeal
idiom that embodies the bypassing of consciousness for soma, this is an ‘animal’ language, a ‘raw immanence’ (ibid.). The class politics that Apter mistakenly identifies in Welsh and others is less interesting than the one that resides in her own reading, in which the ‘raw’ is opposed to the ‘clean’.

When seeming to praise Welsh’s ‘subcultural Sprache’ and its ‘effect of wounding Standard English with the slings and arrows of warped speech, at least for a Brit or Anglophone reader outside of Scotland’ (Apter, 155), the argument not only returns to the oral but, via the paraphrase of Shakespeare, invokes the English doxa in describing its ‘warped’ nature. Most instructive is the simultaneous distancing and positioning around the ‘Anglophone’; it suggests that Scottish literature is intuitively inaccessible by virtue of its language while at the same time making this claim pursuant on a critical misreading that derives from a position of assumed knowledge, by virtue of the casting of these texts as ‘intralingual’ translations. The argument position therefore hinges on an internal equivocation predicated upon the Anglophone, where vernacular is both already-known and radically exceptionalist, and is reliant on the latter being evaluated not on the principle of difference that governs language-to-language translation but as the interior warping of a standard. The association of ‘Brit’ with ‘Standard English’ in the context of a ‘warped speech’ underscores the presumption of the latter as both deviant and inferior, damaged by rather than damaging in relation to forces of imperial power. If Scottish literature is a matter of pronunciation, such a reading illuminates the question of world literature through the question posed by the ‘Anglophone’ within it. Apter is correct in identifying a postcolonial politics adhering to these works, yet her own reading evinces a politics that inheres in the situation of Standard English as the normative (rather than the dominant) language of the British Isles and Ireland. This is especially misleading in relation to Kelman as it makes the vernacular the subject of his art, an assumption that steers misreadings of Kelman’s work in general and neglects its philosophical and formalist investments. While Kelman begins from a presumption of linguistic legitimacy rather than making a claim to that legitimacy the subject of his writing, his work is yet often read as either constructing (rather than constituting) a politico-linguistic statement or, in putatively more sophisticated readings, as the performative and titillating gap between philosophy and enunciation. This remains critically underrecognised because vernacular is identified as form rather than as the semiotic system of a rigorous neomodernist aesthetic formalism, and is thereby elevated from form to subject. Kelman spurns this position before the fact when, in discussing How late it was, how late, he notes:

The gist of the argument amounts to the following, that vernaculars, patois,
slangs, dialects, gutter-languages etc. [...] are inferior linguistic forms and have no place in literature. And a priori any writer who engages in the use of such so-called language is not really engaged in literature at all. It’s common to find well-meaning critics suffering from the same burden, while they strive to be kind they still cannot bring themselves to operate within a literary perspective; not only do they approach the work as though it were an oral text, they somehow assume it to be a literal transcription of recorded speech.

At this juncture, the Apterian view – which asserts Kelman and Welsh as primarily political commentary – coincides with the national paradigm, which sacrifices the literary to the representational and the representative. Kelman’s observation forms a critique of an imperialist perspective on the English language as it obscures the literariness of the non-Standard Anglophone in the context of world literature. By virtue of a privileging of the multilingual, this theory of world-literature marks non-‘foreign’ but non-Standard Anglophone literatures as a divergence that is simultaneously a degradation, their language understood as synonymous with an essentially social content. Within this paradigm, the specific reading produced by the presumptions upon which the argument rests is that of the false equation of social degradation with linguistic degradation, the latter a medium of the former. The principle of difference cedes to similitude when treating of Scottish Anglophone literature, and a respect for heteronomy to a perspective wherein Anglophone vernacular is not viewed as autonomous but as a ‘wounded’ Standard. To compare vernacular writing to an intralingual translation process implies not only that Standard English is paradigmatically prior, with Scots vernacular the variant thereof, but also that the latter requires that translation to return it to a communal language. This in turn suggests not only an implied readership for Apter’s text and its particular politics of translation (‘Brit or Anglophone [...] outside of Scotland’), but for a theory of world literature as it is refracted by this singular reading of Scottish literature.

The principal misreading is compounded by localised ones that inscribe a hermeneutics of the text in which phonocentrism unites the oral and the aural to produce an extrinsic reading of language as immediate (if not immediately available, at least to the ‘Brit’ reader), while the transposition of the embodied everyday to the page evacuates the literary from Scottish literature within a world-literature context as it is also evacuated through the national paradigm in Scottish

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literary studies. Such a sentiment is evident when Apter writes that ‘Welsh [...] lends a new ear to “damaged life” as the aural incision of capitalism on experience’ (Apter, 156), a formulation that accentuates the stated postcolonial perspective on vernacular as a *wounding* of English to recast it as a *wounded* English. While a critique of capitalism is central to his texts (in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, for example, ‘the scheme was a concentration camp for the poor’), Apter suggests that capitalism is immanent to the language because it is itself damaged or incised by the system. To suggest that it is immanent to the language is to suggest that language is the expression of that degradation, therefore constituting a ‘fall’ from the Standard English which presumably, if following this logic, is the manifestation of the favour of the system. This relation of experience to an English Standard leads to some of the most problematic claims of the piece, such as in the following excerpt, a quotation from the scene in *Trainspotting* (in which Sick Boy toys with Asian tourists) followed by an analysis thereof:

– Can I help you? Where are you headed? ah ask. *Good old-fashined Scoattish hospitality, aye, ye cannae beat it, shays the young Sean Connery, the new Bond, cause girls, this is the new bondage ...* (T, 29)

The “Sh” sound signifies unhappy Scottishness. It may be read as a verbal tic of class resentment – smarmy, sarcastic and malevolent – erupting violently inside the words “hospitality,” and “pish.” The fear of impotence swirls through Sick Boy’s speech; even the evocation of Scotland’s only genuine action hero, James Bond, spirals self-defeatingly out of control in the form of a pun on girls in bondage. (Apter, 158)

Ironically, given her insistence on voice, Apter misses the clear cultural reference here: the ‘sh’ that she extrapolates into the ‘unhappy Scottishness’ of Simon is an impersonation of the famous Sean Connery accent and belongs in fact to Bond (‘Scotland’s only genuine action hero’), rather than being a postcolonial Tourettes – a ‘verbal tic of class resentment’ – proper to Sick Boy. That political misinterpretation is effected by linguistic misinterpretation becomes exacerbated by a further interpretative error: the statement that ‘[i]n simplest terms, the dole-and-dope social formation [of *Trainspotting*] characterized as “wanked by wankers” is converted via language politics into “wanking the wankers” on a world stage’, a declaration emblematic of the prior misreading that leads Apter to the conclusion that Welsh is ‘capitalising’ exploitation by commodifying it (Apter, 158). ‘Wanked by wankers’ is a mistaken paraphrase of the famous speech by Renton, in which

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he professes that he hates the Scots rather than the English: whereas the English are ‘just wankers’, the Scots are ‘colonised by wankers’. Apter transposes noun as verb, producing a logical fallacy that shows a misunderstanding of the linguistic term and thus the underlying point, namely that Scots are servile to the coloniser; her reading suggests that the colonised are being serviced by the coloniser (‘wanked by wankers’) who is thus servile to the servant, and then that the colonised are servile to the master (‘wanking the wankers’), a formula that cannot therefore represent a subversive exploitation.

This signals the wider significance of referring Scottish linguistic communities (or Hiberno-English, Northern, or any other non-Standard English Anglophone vernacular of the British Isles and Republic of Ireland) to Standard English, and evidences at the same time an issue therein whereby the plurality of world-literature is subverted by the homogenising of the Anglophone within it. It indicates a concomitant need to consider the Anglophone literatures of what is presently the United Kingdom and Ireland within a world-literary framework which could be mutually reflective for the development of an understanding both of the complexity of the Anglophone as refracted through that lens, and for world literature developed through a consideration of that Anglophone context. World literary studies requires attention to these forms of Anglophone difference, and Scottish literature can be significant to the field in this regard; while Apter’s reading illustrates one of the spaces into which further work in world literature is required, it also demonstrates the need for Scottish literary studies to shift from the national literary dominant to an intrinsic literary paradigm to be able to understand and represent its own position among this field, and to situate itself therein in order to contribute to a theory of world literature. Discussing national literary history, Thomson evinces wariness that ‘[t]he comparative solution to which we are directed by advocates of “theory” compounds the problem, […] projecting an ideal horizon within which the deficiencies and partialities of literary histories are redeemed’ (Thomson, 15). My reading points to a specific inequality that exposes the ‘fantasy’ of an ideal horizon as denounced by both Thomson and WReC, while suggesting at the same time that a reading of Scottish literature within a theory of world literature might offer avenues away from the national dominant towards the literary. If Scottish Literature has belatedly attempted to open itself to theory, this belatedness accords us an opportunity to think against the grain of dominant temporality in a way that also pertains to questions in world literature. If disciplinary formation can be traced by the belatedness of theory, so too does a late coming to theory afford a prospect for disciplinary divergence.

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One imperative for combining social with aesthetic enquiry stems from the recognition that literary texts constitute a specialized set of cultural artifacts that may under certain conditions acquire significant social prestige in relation to the articulation of group identities, and may also inform, albeit in highly mediated ways, the understanding by social groups of the historical or political changes they experience. These aspects of modern societies in turn contribute to expectations that shape the experience of writers and may set conditions for their work. The first point leads socially-oriented critics to ask how reflection on the production, reception and circulation, but also the interpretation and evaluation of these unusual cultural goods might contribute to rich and nuanced understanding of continuity and change in contemporary social worlds. The second must also prompt reflection on the risks attendant on such analyses, given the implication of the scholarly and educational study of literary texts in social processes of evaluation, as one of the major modes through which texts become invested with larger cultural significance – that works become valued by particular groups as the bearers of values felt to be held in common or as the persuasive articulation of shared experience. Indeed, within contemporary print capitalism the overwhelming majority of published texts must be reckoned unlikely to contribute directly to observable social change in themselves, no matter what their significance for individual readers, whereas the construction and reconstruction of the significance of works for particular groups via the mediation of literary historical narratives is always a social fact, and therefore embedded in the production and reproduction of society.

Here is a contemporary example of the dilemmas that may follow. In 2014 the poet Tom Leonard was approached by the Scottish Qualifications Authority for permission to use an excerpt from his short prose work ‘Honest’ in an examination paper as an example of ‘The Use of Scots in Contemporary Literature’. He refused permission, commenting in his reply that this work ‘is not an example of “Scots”’.

whatever that highly politicised term means, and I will not allow any of my phonetic work to be used as a false aunt sally within such a defining context. Leonard contrasts this approach with that taken by an English publisher of educational resources, who had also requested permission to use one of his poems, but in a context where students would be invited to reflect on the relationship between ‘proper English’ and their own unique natural speech, between phonetic transcription of voice and standard written forms. Encouraged to write their own poems to explore these questions further, students were also to be given a line from his Leonard’s ‘100 Differences Between Poetry and Prose’: ‘Poetry is the heart and the brain divided by the lungs’. Writing to his publisher, Leonard reflected: ‘There is no one in Scotland just now that I know capable of making that connection, let alone in an exam board. Nationalism like a virus here is pushing the possibility of there being such perception further away.’

The implied contrast between English and Scottish receptions of Leonard’s work reflects an ironic double-bind by which greater acknowledgement of diversity of all kinds within writing in English has been internalised in Scotland as a greater recognition by others of its literature as distinctively national, which in turn creates new pressure to conform to those themes, forms and styles most easily identified with Scottish cultural difference. For example, as Kathleen Jamie has recently observed, the politicization of language in the public sphere has revived debates about the authenticity and orthographic usage of Scots. She sees this as undercutting the experimental freedom embodied in the use of synthetic Scots as a constructed, poetic language, reporting that it has made it impossible for her to write in Scots: other poets, by contrast, have seen this as enabling. Changing political circumstances have given a new force to debates satirised in the same early works by Leonard that have often led him to be described by unwary literary historians as a poet working primarily in vernacular Scots, and therefore emblematic of a group, despite his repeated and explicit association of his work with a challenge to all such ‘defining contexts’. Like other Scottish iconography in widespread circulation, Jamie suggests that ‘a Scots which is just orthodox English with a few braw words displayed, as on a tee-shirt, that’s just signalling. Isn’t it?’ – a manifestation of what Scott Hames has described in his work on literary uses of vernacular language in Scotland as ‘display identity’. Indeed Leonard’s and Jamie’s sense of the politicization of voice in relation to national identity corroborates Hames’s detailed analysis of the ways in which literary explorations of individual agency as expressed in vernacular speech have been

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co-opted by political discourse in devolutionary Scotland. What Hames describes as 'the appeal of recent vernacular Scottishness' is its combination of individual subjective expression, conceived of as an unruly excess over formal representative structures, with the appeal of rootedness in linguistic community that have been characteristic of ethno-culturalist nationalism. The reason that Leonard's pigeon-holing by a government body as a poet who works in Scots matters is not simply that it exemplifies the miscarriages of literary justice to which the generalisations on which literary history relies may give rise. Rather, it highlights the fact that the recent upsurge of literary and cultural historiography in Scotland has been closely aligned with political discourses of nationhood, meaning that critics have effectively acted, whether deliberately or unwittingly, as brokers for symbolic capital in the public sphere.

II

The implication of literary history within those social and cultural formations which it describes, the political pressure that results and which seems to connect literature inexorably to nationalism, and the burden of reflexivity this places on the critic have long been recognised within Scottish studies, and are reflected in what has now become a long series of interventions. Prominent examples over the last decade include Berthold Schoene’s call for a new cosmopolitanism, Carla Sassi’s suggestion that we ‘glocalise’ Scottish literature in light of the transnational turn in literary studies, and a new wave of work adopting the post-colonial perspectives that had long been influential in Irish literary studies but were considered more problematic in the Scottish context. These more programmatic statements reflect anxieties regarding the dominance of the national question in the reception and evaluation of Scottish writing that were already being expressed around the time of devolution by writers, and given sustained attention in work by critics such as Christopher Whyte and Eleanor Bell. Yet while it is becoming common for overviews of the discipline to argue in the light of such concerns that a shift from national to post-national understandings of Scottish literature has taken


4 Christopher Whyte, Modern Scottish Poetry (Edinburgh, 2004); Eleanor Bell, Questioning Scotland (Basingstoke, 2004);
place in the period since devolution, there has been little consensus about the nature and extent of that shift. Given that proponents of reform have repeatedly been forced to define their positions against a persistent conservatism of the field, it may be premature to characterise these approaches as more than nascent. The apparent circularity of these debates might even suggest that the rhetorical disavowal of certain forms of nationalism is a constitutive gesture of the critical field. In this context it is striking that other commentators see little evidence of change at all: in their 2018 collection *Literature and Union*, Colin Kidd and Gerard Carruthers portray Scottish literary studies as an anachronism, concerned with tracing national essences through time.

Although characteristically presented as proposals for disciplinary renewal, these interventions might better be understood, to borrow a term from sociology, as critiques of ‘methodological nationalism’. They highlight bad habits and/or more pervasive interpretive flaws arising from the dependence of Scottish literary studies on its national frame. Because debates within literary studies often betray a pronounced normative dimension which tends to conflate weak interpretations and faulty politics, they can be helpfully clarified in relation to the sociological account. Methodological nationalism refers to a range of distinct problems: equation of the nation-state with society; defaulting to endogenous (internalist) explanations of change within nation-states; understanding of international relations as primarily the consequences of individual nation-states as actors; grounding an account of modernity in the history of nation states, assumed to be ideal types; over-estimation of the coherence of society by assuming the congruence of political, economic, social and cultural boundaries either in the contemporary era, or at points in the earlier history of nation-states. Despite the prominence given to the opposition between methodological nationalism and cosmopolitanism by Ulrich Beck, the critique of methodological nationalism need not entail a normative decision between national and transnational perspectives, but is in many respects an internal self-critique of tendencies towards reification of concepts within social theory, and the forms of path-dependency by which contemporary institutional frameworks for funding research, gathering data on contemporary society and making available historical data may lead empirical social analysis to continue to be framed in relation to national societies even where particular problems arise from

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6 See the first and last chapters of *Literature and Union: Scottish Texts and British Contexts* (Oxford, 2018).
the interaction of internal and external conditions.\(^7\)

In Scottish studies, the critique of methodological nationalism has developed in two directions. The first identifies methodological nationalism as the counterpart of cultural nationalism: such critics tend to appeal to ‘theory’ in order to foreground political assumptions, and by depoliticising the field, they seek to allow greater scope for understanding of political debates within it and of the pressures those debates have exerted on critical practice and canon-formation. Such critiques hope to foster more nuanced critical attention to a more representative and more diverse range of literary texts, and in some cases to enhance recognition of the relative autonomy of literary and aesthetic form from social contexts. A second approach counters methodological nationalism with appeals to cosmopolitan or transnational perspectives. These critics also combine political and aesthetic concerns, reflecting on Scotland’s historical involvement with other places and cultures, the degree to which texts and forms cross social and territorial boundaries, and the ways in which literary works may be more interested in exploring boundary-crossing than cultural belonging. The oscillation between normative ethical and methodological claims can be extremely rapid in such arguments, which may connect the conceptualisation of literature as a global or universal system, pressing questions of transnational political solidarity or mobilisation, and the more thoroughgoing critique of identity categories as reification of mobile processes of identity formation at levels situated below, above or across the boundaries of the nation.

If these criticisms have by now become well-established, having been incorporated into later textbooks as alternative paradigms available to students, there are reasons for scepticism about the success of these endeavours.\(^8\) Conceptualising ‘methodological nationalism’ as a field effect can help explain why. In the first place, for these revisionist approaches to have any claim on the attention of scholars in the field, they have to offer new ways of reading texts whose critical place has already been established, or introduce new texts to the existing field. This may expand the total set of available interpretations, identify alternative thematic and stylistic clusters, or broaden the set of texts considered of critical interest, but to the degree that these critical interventions are recognisable as belonging to Scottish literary studies, it is doubtful whether they can successfully challenge any of the

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methodological concerns which arise from the very existence and identification of the field as such. Even close readings which highlight ambivalence, equivocation or outright rejection of social identities may strengthen both the contextualist premise that literary texts are primarily addressed to their immediate social environment and the modern culturalist assumption that identity is a core component of the selfhood. It has been a distinctive tendency of recent literary history to aestheticise society through its account of the relationship between literary texts and larger cultural categories. To take the presence of questions of transnational belonging, cultural solidarity and border crossings within some literary works as evidence of ethical dispositions towards inclusivity within society at large rather than its opposite – testimony to authors’ concerns about the narrowing horizon of cultural identity – may be wishful thinking. As Bruce Robbins has suggested, such cosmopolitanisms may ‘take over the undeclared evaluative functions of aesthetic terms like irony, ambiguity, and indeterminacy, rewriting them as an enterprise of geopolitical loyalty-in-multiplicity and thus quietly offering aesthetics some ethico-social backup’.9 In the context of efforts by political actors to portray Scottish national identity as distinctively accommodating to outsiders, as civic rather than ethnic, these projects may also be considered directly ideological.

Secondly, a similar point holds for the relationship between ‘theory’ and Scottish literary studies. Both the post-national and the theoretical critique of Scottish studies can be presented as indications of the modernisation and renewal of the field. The link has been made in apologetic mode, as in Robert Crawford’s assessment that given Scotland’s historical position, and the need to ‘identify and maintain concepts of tradition that underpin a cultural identity […] [e]fforts at reconstruction and construction rather than deconstruction dominate the recent study of Scottish Literature’.10 More polemically, the editors of Scotland in Theory argue that Scottish studies has been dominated by the ‘cultural-nationalist paradigm’ and as a result is characterised by its ‘absence of, and perhaps resistance to, newer forms of thinking’; refreshed by contemporary theory, the field might ‘take some tentative steps towards the future’.11 The same formula reappears in The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, whose editors take the developing ‘study of Scottish literature in terms of gender, psychoanalysis, postcolonial and cultural theory’ as a sign of its ‘coming of age as a subject of serious critical study’. Acknowledging a defensive strand in earlier work, justified by the need to establish a canon and authorize

9 Bruce Robbins, Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence (Durham, NC, 2012), 197 n.5.
its study, they relate theoretical study to a new confidence, closely related to the emergence from national to international visibility.\textsuperscript{12} Perceptions of disciplinary confidence, methodological sophistication and international recognition are closely linked: hence no doubt the inclusion of a ‘theoretical’ strand within the programme of the first World Congress of Scottish Literature, held in Glasgow in 2014. Yet because national literature and its study are so commonly confused with the society in relation to which they stand as a part to the whole, the very presence of theory and critique, conceived as ethically- and future-oriented, can itself be interpreted as a symptom of positive political change. Carla Sassi’s claim that there has been a ‘meaningful transition towards a more complex theoretical articulation of Scottish studies as a field of academic investigation’ since the establishment of a devolved Parliament in Edinburgh in 1999 is representative of widespread assumptions about the place of theory in narrating the relationship between Scotland, Scottish literature and Scottish literary studies as progressive and developmental.\textsuperscript{13}

This gives a third reason for caution about accepting this account: despite the plasticity of this term in literary studies, the relationship between ‘theory’ and Scottish literature can be seen as deeply embedded in the paradigms of literary history, in which the aesthetic production of a people, raised to a higher degree of self-awareness in light of the critical activity of its intellectuals, is conceived of not simply as symptomatic of a stage of cultural development, but as playing a formative role in that development. The future-oriented rhetoric of this recognition paradigm also suggests the solidarity between thinking of ‘theory’ in this way and traditional aesthetics: as Marc Redfield argues, ‘much of the political force of aesthetics resides in its historicism, in its projection of a temporal line running from the primitive to the modern, and then onward to a futurity, an ever-deferred end of history, that aesthetic experience prefigures’.\textsuperscript{14} Hence the paradox of many of these interventions: to treat theory as the increasing technical sophistication and ethical accomplishment of aesthetic historicism undoes the force of the critique of cultural nationalism. This may be one source of the frustration expressed by the editors of a later journal issue, who argue that not only has the cultural nationalist position successfully absorbed critical challenges thrown at it – which they read as ‘ignoring’ ‘sidestepping’ or ‘omitting to jump on the theory bandwagon’ – but complain that theory may serve within Scottish cultural studies as an exaggerated claim to national difference: what they

\textsuperscript{12} Ian Brown, Thomas Owen Clancy, Susan Manning and Murray Pittock, ‘Scottish Literature, Criticism and the Canon’ in \textit{The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, Volume 1: from Columba to the Union (until 1707)} (Edinburgh, 2007), 3–15.

\textsuperscript{13} ‘Glocalising Scottish Literature’, 1.

\textsuperscript{14} Marc Redfield, \textit{The Politics of Aesthetics: Romanticism, Gender, Nationalism} (Stanford, 2003), 12.
call ‘exceptionalism’.¹⁵

My own contributions to these debates are closely related to this last challenge, centring on the degree to which avowedly counter-hegemonic or anti-essentialist critiques of cultural nationalism on political and methodological grounds have been unable to radically modify the framework they inherit but seek to challenge, and in which the discourse of literary and cultural ‘theory’ has served not to critique but to underpin national self-assertion.¹⁶ To the extent that these tendencies are not symptoms of a particular pathology of Scottish studies, but are more broadly characteristic of the alliance of positivist literary history with cultural hermeneutics that dominates contemporary literary studies, a full explanation would require a genealogical deconstruction of the interlinked development of aesthetics and history within modern thought, and of the recurrent expression of tensions within the project of cultural history. This paper has the more modest aim of transforming the debate through clarifying its terms. Rather than simply identifying and criticising the sway of methodological nationalism within the field, my aim is to analyse it in such as to offer both internal (disciplinary) and external (social) explanations for its persistence. This entails attention both to the field’s relationship with its changing political conditions and to its interaction with dominant styles and modes within Anglo-American literary studies. Invited to consider the situation of Scottish studies ‘after theory’, the following sections will sketch a response by tracing the involvement of certain types of theoretical questions in the formation of the field, and then their persistence within what has been too easily described as a post-theoretical moment. In order to avoid endorsing either the conceptualisation of theory as an ethical or methodological supplement external to Scottish literary studies or the narrative which relegates theory to an historical episode which might in any simple way be considered over and done with, and to clarify a category which David Rodowick has characterised as ‘not a language-game but many, comprising various overlapping yet often contradictory and contested forms of life’, I will distinguish in this paper between ‘weak theory’ and ‘critical theory’.¹⁷

Recently discussed as a positive model within modernist studies, the term ‘weak theory’ catches effectively the tensions and ambivalences within the pragmatic cultural hermeneutics that emerged in the 1980s and has come to dominate the literary humanities, a distinctive style of scholarly and argumentative practice

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whose institutional hold, like the methodological nationalism in Scottish studies, has seemed impervious to the critical attention it has received.\textsuperscript{18} Gerald Graff has argued that the success of the New Criticism from the later 1930s through the 1960s in North America can be understood in terms of the partial reconciliation ‘at a certain level’ of the agonistic tension between literary criticism and historical scholarship: a ‘practical resolution […]’ was quietly achieved after the war by a new professional generation that had no vested interest in the old quarrels and was eager to merge history and criticism in its own work’.\textsuperscript{19} By the time Graff was writing a similar compromise could already be observed between criticism, literary history and the newer challenges associated with critical theory, a compromise described explicitly in the methodological writings and professional biographies of the scholars associated with ‘New Historicism’, but equally recognisable in other headings: e.g. ‘postmodernism’, ‘the cultural turn’. Weak theory is what justifies or rationalises contemporary hermeneutic practices which see literary texts and their social contexts as mutually formative, and understand interpretation as situated and horizon-bound; relinquishing metaphysics, it renounces strong claims for the autonomy or singularity of the literary artwork vis-à-vis its interpreter. Although often pronouncing itself politically radical, weak theory alternates between ethics and aesthetics in quite traditional ways, asserting the authority of the critic through masterful displays of close reading yet disavowing that authority through the association of literature with the singular, the local and the individual.\textsuperscript{20}

I contrast this with ‘critical theory’, which for convenience I will take to include those approaches strongly identified with the continuation of either the post-structuralist and Frankfurt School approaches to interdisciplinary social theory, as distinct from the partial incorporation of insights from these theories into cultural interpretation. I understand the ‘post-theoretical’ as both the historical moment, beginning in the mid to late 1990s at which those practices underpinning weak theory become the dominant epistemological and critical model in the literary humanities, with critical theory being relegated from discourse on method to a distinctive subfield, and as an indication of the retreat that had already taken place within forms of weak theory from certain kinds of questions or problems that had been associated with critical theory in its larger sense. In what follows I will elaborate the difference.


III

An implication of the debates traced in the preceding section is that there remains a close identification, among both practitioners and observers, between the field of Scottish literary and cultural history, its objects of study – artworks certainly, but also perhaps their creators and the institutions that have fostered or preserved them – and the nation, presumed to be both the subject and the principal addressee of such histories. Indeed, one reason why the theoretical and post-national critiques of Scottish literary studies have had relatively little impact may be that in the context of recognition struggles around minority cultures, critical and scholarly attention can serve a socially significant role in validating previously marginalised forms of literary and artistic production. Among the consequences of this are two characteristic forms of resistance to theory. The critique of disciplinary methodology may be mistaken for an attack on the validity of the cultural forms, leading to undue suspicion or even hostility; but at the same time, even strongly critical work can be rehabilitated as evidence of the field’s health and legitimacy. While for these reasons it is important to distinguish carefully between (and amongst) cultural systems and the modes of their observation and analysis, there may also be critical points at which the feedback between the two is itself generative of new possibilities.

The received view has long been that the emergence of Scottish studies in the 1980s can profitably be viewed as such a situation: the experience of the 1979 referendum on devolution is seen as the proximate cause of artistic and cultural renewal. This reflects longstanding habits of thought which treat the perceived ‘rise and fall’ of particular artforms within a society as a proxy measure for cultural health. I propose to qualify this: the continuities within artistic and cultural production of the 1970s and 1980s are stronger than the changes, and the referendum is an event in the sense that it provides a convenient point of articulation for subsequent political and historical claims. What is decisive for the emergence of the new Scottish cultural histories is not an endogenous but an exogenous factor: the impact of literary and cultural theories, and new scholarly fields with which these theoretical developments are associated, makes possible a new historiographic paradigm. This new paradigm is culturalist, self-consciously pluralist and stresses continuity rather than discontinuity. It can with some justification be described using the term ‘postmodern’ that was popularised in the same period because it displaced dominant forms of analysis that depended on narrowly economic conceptions of modernization and development. However, in line with my larger argument I will link it to the category of ‘weak theory’. By shuffling the familiar narrative in this way I hope to emphasise two points that are crucial to understanding the persistence of methodological nationalism: firstly,
that it is a mistake to underestimate the theoretical commitments driving Scottish studies in the 1980s by treating it as an unreflective continuation of older literary historical models; and secondly, that the paradigm shift in Scottish studies enabled by the reception of debates within literary and cultural theory is broad and deep enough that subsequent attempts to displace it have only ever operated within its terms: it is the internal, disciplinary basis for the persistence of methodological nationalism.

The heyday of ‘theory’ in the humanities coincides in Scotland with what has been described as ‘a legitimation crisis’ in which the longstanding integration of Scottish politics into the British state came under sustained pressure, undermining longstanding narratives which had served to explain and justify union.\textsuperscript{21} One consequence was that the emergence of a clearly defined disciplinary field of Scottish cultural studies in the 1980s was tied to a preceding theoretical debate about Scotland’s political and sociological modernity, driven primarily by economic and social analysis, in which cultural categories played a secondary role. As Jonathan Hearn has argued, ‘a peculiar Scottish reception and application of marxist [sic] critiques of modernization theory that developed in the 1960s and 1970s […] became part of a widespread understanding of Scotland’s situation, held particularly by the Scottish left’.\textsuperscript{22} Available models for articulating cultural struggles depended heavily on questions of representation, and on a dialectic between centre and periphery in which aesthetic advances were seen as diffusing out from the centre. In the immediate aftermath of the 1979 referendum, writers and critics rediscovered the pessimistic accounts of cultural crisis that had dominated the cultural debate of the 1930s. However, in the context of the close intermeshing of literary magazines, radical publishing and political debate around the Universities, a revival of Scottish literary and cultural studies sought to reassert the intrinsic interest and the continuous history of Scottish cultural production and to transpose questions that had been forcefully put by artists and cultural activists earlier in the century concerning Scotland’s ‘missing’ historiography into a more academic register. These were powerfully supported by the influx of literary and cultural theory, alongside developments in fields such as social history, women’s writing and world literature which afforded new recognition and visibility to marginalised textual forms. Finally, these developments also reflected a transition within social theory which allowed greater autonomy, and to some extent explanatory power, to cultural rather than economic phenomena. The most


powerful, prestigious and longstanding tool available with which to accommodate these new developments was the idea of a national literature.

National literature is a conceptual and narrative frame structure with a specific historical and geographical origin in eighteenth-century Europe, followed by rapid distribution across the globe. Since the globalisation of the nation-state model and the institution of a world system of literary capital over the course of the twentieth century, the idea of national literature has acquired a legitimating significance in relation to national-cultural institutions, and a symbolic significance in articulating cultural identity. In functional terms a national literature is a construct which helps articulate relationships between a given social formation and some portion of its cultural production, and from its origins it has served to make possible comparison between different social groups, inheriting older discourses of characterological description and inserting these within the framework for comparison provided by enlightenment historiography and the emerging conception of the nation state.

A national literature relies in large part on literary history as, in Alexander Beecroft’s words, ‘a crucial device that at once legitimates a literature and a nation it embodies, integrates it into an existing system of national literatures, and reduces the quantity of information within the literary system’.

Such histories are a way of organising, simplifying and clarifying a large body of textual production: by establishing authoritative models in relation to the circulation of symbolic goods, and by tending to foster the inclusion and exclusion of certain types of text measured against one or more criteria (e.g. theme, genre, audience, presence or absence of particular tropes). National literary history connects the past to the present through linear narrative plots, which whether progressive, evolutionary, or more cyclical, emphasise and assume the underlying continuity of a subject in time. It attributes symbolic goods to a ‘subject’, persisting and developing in time: the subject can be specified variously, in terms of race, ethnicity, social or personal characteristics, in terms of religious or spiritual destiny, as merely cultural, or in institutional terms. Crucially, the function of national literary history is the same whether the ontological existence of the nation is understood in essentialist or constructivist terms. Historically, language has often been a key component in these specifications, and this connection in particular has often served to associate literary history with both centralizing state formation processes, and the assertion of political claims to statehood by ethnic groups within states. Debate over those terms is also possible, and changes may sometimes indicate political change. Such a concept allows certain characteristics to be predicated of the relationship between the body of texts and the national subject, and may contribute to fostering certain ideals (that literature may be formative, educational, critical, improving). Through

positing either an expressive or dialogic relationship between literature and society the concept of national literature authorises the critic to construct and address a national subject, and allocates the critic a specific type of authority deriving from his expertise in handling recognised forms of symbolic capital. This is an important factor in its persistence.

The invention of a national literature in Scotland presupposed three major interlinked innovations. First and foremost is the assertion of continuity between past and present, by framing contemporary writing in positive relation to past traditions. While there has been no shortage of Scottish literary history written since the late eighteenth century, it has been characteristic of such studies to see a distinctively national literature as belonging to the past, lacking a continuous connection to present-day cultural production. Making such connections in its turn required a new grammar of distinctive formal characteristics: the second powerful contribution of cultural theory was to rethink the relationship between modern literature and its social and historical contexts by overthrowing authoritative models which stressed the autonomy of literary production while privileging a relatively narrow tradition of specific innovations. Thirdly, the loosening of aesthetic criteria makes possible a major reassessment of the flows of symbolic capital in Scotland, downplaying and ultimately displacing the long-running struggle in twentieth century between ‘high’ art and ‘popular’ art which had dominated the cultural criticism of both the Scottish Renaissance and the New Left. Describing these changes as ‘postmodern’ emphasises that the revaluation of Scottish cultural production takes place in the context of new articulations of political and aesthetic theories, but also of a global calling into question of modernist aesthetic traditions.24

The first distinctive strength of the new settlement was to offer new conceptual paradigms through which the literary production of the past centuries could be reintegrated into a continuous narrative construction of a relatively autonomous Scottish tradition, in parallel with developments in those history and sociology that explored the strength and distinctiveness of Scottish civil society over the centuries of Union, recontextualising the ‘strange death’ of Scottish history. This was particularly crucial for literary tradition, because the aesthetic counterpart to the models of British identity and historiography forged in the nineteenth century was not British but English literature, an integration forcefully reversed by the cultural criticism of the twentieth century Scottish renaissance, which treated such commitments as national betrayal and called for drastic aesthetic and

24 Randall Stevenson comments on the reluctance of Scottish commentators to use the category of the ‘postmodern’ in ‘A Postmodern Scotland?’ in Carruthers, Goldie and Renfrew (eds), Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature (Amsterdam, 2004). The most extended analysis can be found in Eleanor Bell, Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism (Basingstoke, 2004).
political renewal. Where modernist writers and critics had deployed a rhetoric of interruption and crisis to specify a prior breakdown in tradition and to call for renewal, the emphasis of the new historiography was more linear, stressing a continuous history, albeit one that might be revised to take account of internal conflict, difference and negotiation. Looking backwards, the historian Michael Lynch observed in 1993: ‘During the past generation, there has been a distinct tendency amongst historians to stress the overarching continuities – in social and economic history especially – which give some coherence to the complex story of Scotland’s past. In every century until the nineteenth, it has been asserted, the forces of continuity outweighed those making for change. In recent years, the same features have notably marked studies of the major components of Scotland’s culture – in art, historiography, music and philosophy, and to a lesser extent, in architecture and literature’.

In the literary sphere this restoration of tradition depended on the prior unsettled of aesthetic and political assumptions that had seemed to marginalise distinctively Scottish writing from the mainstream of English literature. This reconfiguration drew on theoretical developments within literary studies of the 1970s that had challenged the evaluative norms of the discipline, shifting attention from artworks themselves to processes of canon-formation and communities of reception. Challenging the received aesthetic premises of literary histories that had taken developments in English literature as normative, Scottish critics were to follow partisans of other national and minority groups towards a more pluralistic model of literary historical development. Once literature is conceived as not as a relatively autonomous and developing set of artistic problems, but as primarily a social institution, the opposition between formal and historical readings tends to dissolve, as the formal characteristics of texts are seen in light of their recognition by communities of interpretation. One result of these arguments, pursued in the 1970s both from the perspective of social commitment and from the internal critique of formalist accounts of the text as artwork, was that there can be no sense of a ‘proper’ trajectory for aesthetics, and tradition itself becomes reconceived as a site of struggle in which educational and scholarly institutions are directly implicated. This throws the emphasis of analysis from a single developmental model to a more variegated understanding of competing and conflicting styles, more or less embedded in institutional, regional or cultural paths.

The third critical component of the new approach to literary history flowed from the questioning of modernist assumptions about the link between significant art, formal or technical innovation and social or cultural critique. The combination

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of these premises could manifest as the polemical opposition of art to kitsch. Overcoming this dichotomy was particularly significant, for reasons that Gavin Wallace noted in 1987: ‘[i]n the course of the twentieth century, Scotland – more than is the case within other European cultures – has experienced an increasingly acute, and morbidly self-conscious, polarity between the values of its ‘high’ and its ‘popular’ culture’. The passage from understanding culture as the site of diremption between aesthetic ideals and mechanical civilization to reconceiving it as immanent surplus of creative possibility is characteristic of weak theories – in Gianni Vattimo’s words, ‘weak thought’ ‘offers us a chance to pass from a purely critical and negative description of the post-modern condition, typical of early twentieth century *Kulturkritik* and its more recent offshoots, to an approach that treats it as a positive possibility and opportunity’. Conceived not as the expression of a national soul, but as verification of social creativity, any artwork, however critical, can be recontextualised within its social horizons as an interpretation of, a response to and ultimately an affirmation of prevailing social conditions.

One consequence of the ‘postmodern’ invention of Scottish national literary history is its commitment to multiplicity, both as an aesthetic value in itself and as exemplary of changing political and social conditions worldwide. Cairns Craig, the key theorist of the new approach, had stressed this in 1987: ‘The fragmentation and division which made Scotland seem abnormal to an earlier part of the twentieth century came to be the norm for much of the world’s population. Bilingualism, biculturalism, and the inheritance of a diversity of fragmented traditions were to be the source of creativity rather than its inhibition in the second half of the twentieth century and Scotland ceased to have to measure itself against the false “norm”, psychological as well as cultural, of the unified national tradition.’

The contemporary post-national condition is thus taken as a premise for the construction of a national cultural tradition, while culture has been defined from the start as internally diverse and as a source of creative possibility. These characteristics, and his adherence to constructivist epistemology and narrative theories of the self, would allow Craig to defend his position against subsequent charges of essentialism: ‘not about holding to the “bedrock of tradition” and remaining in a comfort zone that resists “new possibilities of identity”: it is about remaining aware of traditions which have played a significant role in the national

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culture which has shaped the environment [...] in which we now live’.  

The commitment to pluralistic constructions of Scottish cultural tradition can be found in many of the cultural histories produced in the period. The editors of the next major multi-volume Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature (2007) take as their premise ‘that Scottish literature is a continuous and multilayered phenomenon. This is so even if at times it has been perceived, for political and historical reasons [...] as discontinuous. The fact that the content of certain chapters leads their authors to consider beyond their period boundaries is a sign of that rich continuity, manifest in interactions across time, space and linguistic idiom within Scottish literature in its international contexts’.  

Similar comments can be found in many other key texts of the time, most of which have been tended to be structured as chronological surveys of writers and topics, often authored by teams of scholars, decisions which underline the range and diversity of the material under discussion. These remarks are also characteristic in foregrounding the construction of history, implying that certain decisions of structure, periodization and organisation might have equally been otherwise and that continuous history does not mean a single clear-cut narrative line. However, if these histories tend towards what David Perkins has described as the ‘postmodern encyclopaedia’, and if individual chapters in many recent works of literary history often threaten to become simply lists of authors and publications, then this is better understood as the product of a romantic vision of history as non-totalizable excess of significant experience, rather than any more radically nominalist undermining of historical narrative and sense.

The success and continued prevalence of these transformations is attested by the willingness of critics and historians to cite successful popular fiction as well as poetry and the literary novel as examples of contemporary Scottish literary achievement; by the dying away of the language debate (in academic and critical contexts, if not in the popular press); by the continued outpouring of anthologies, companions, and histories; and by the revaluation of Scottish writing of earlier centuries within the new pluralist approach to literary studies. Local successes included the recovery of the history of Scottish women’s writing, sustained attention to gender as a discursive category in earlier periods, and some consideration of the intersection of nationhood with other categories of identity.

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30 Ian Brown, Thomas Clancy, Susan Manning and Murray Pittock, ‘Scottish Literature, Criticism and the Canon’, 9
IV

‘The shift towards cultural studies’ in the 1980s and 1990s, suggests the Argentinian critic Beatriz Sarlo, ‘initiated the social redemption of literary criticism by cultural analysis’. But as John Guillory has shown in detail, this redemption often meant the return of older categories and concepts within literary and cultural studies under the cover of a rhetoric of political and disciplinary renewal. The transformation of the disciplinary field, and its consequences for reflexive critical attention to the social contexts of Scottish literary texts and of the programme of Scottish literary studies itself, can be used to exemplify these problems. Conflation of the political and the epistemological force of ‘social construction’ lends a spurious critical rhetoric to the construction and reconstruction of Scottish literature as transnational or theoretical. As Cairns Craig has argued, there is no ‘essentialist’ political claim to be exposed in the older work; moreover, the new constructions may recalibrate, but ultimately reinforce the aestheticist account of culture as the resolution of social and ethical diremption. Confusion on this point, and the requirement to address an edifying discourse to a projected national subject from the standpoint of culture, leads to lack of attention to the methodological continuities between the ‘national’ and ‘postnational’ approaches, in which contextualist interpretations foster cultural holism by relating literary texts not to specific social segments or strata but to the nation as a whole. Although underpinned by constructivist epistemology, the national paradigm is easily naturalised, and its political operation is obscured by the vestiges of its critical power vis-à-vis the cultural hegemony of the British state, now reduced by the impact of political devolution and the parallel renegotiation of symbolic and literary authority in Scotland. These components of the field’s methodological nationalism may be considered unavoidable in theory, but in practice their exposure may have been further obscured by external political developments.

The rapid institution of a new political settlement in Britain between 1997 – when the New Labour government of Tony Blair was elected on a manifesto that included numerous measures for constitutional reform, including a referendum on devolved government in Scotland – and 1999 when the Parliament was first convened in Edinburgh, coincides with a groundswell of declarations that an epistemic or cultural shift in the literary humanities had taken place and that the questions and challenges associated with ‘theory’ had now been settled, set aside, or effectively incorporated into critical practice. This intersection of a regional or national political upheaval with the ongoing transformation of a globalized set of

institutional discursive practices, i.e. distinct processes of change taking place in different spheres and at different scales, transforms both the internal (disciplinary) and external (social) conditions of enquiry into Scottish cultural production. The development of devolution from a cross-party political and cultural demand to an achieved, if unstable, political settlement transformed the discursive space for politics, literature and criticism in Scotland, tending to naturalise the nation as the horizon for cultural production and policy processes. This would have implications not only for Scottish writers, but also for a field of study that had tended to align itself, along with its object of study, as oppositional in relation to English cultural hegemony within the British state.

In its post-theoretical moment, progress in literary studies has most often been conceived within the limits set by weak theory, as a series of new paradigms through which relevant sets of texts may be assembled and in accordance with which they may be interpreted. Despite a pervasive rhetoric of novelty and innovation, there is no progress in such developments, as each paradigm comes to define a sub-field, shaping a distinct tradition of enquiry which brings together specific interpretative strategies with characteristic thematic or social preoccupations. Moreover, paradigmatic framing of enquiry contributes to a tendency to reason from parts to wholes, identifying and classifying texts as examples of the paradigms they are taken to illuminate, and generating problems of reflexivity that have been discussed at length in relation to the major paradigms offered by periodization and styles (notably, romanticism and modernism). Constructivist epistemological assumptions – that the shaping of hermeneutic engagement with the past is authorised by the need to construct new forms of knowledge in the present – are easily conflated with political stances: this may be more or less apparent to both insiders and outsiders. For example, whereas the category of ‘postcolonial’ presents itself as constructed – a purposely unnatural way of assembling texts from diverse linguistic, national or cultural locations in order to foreground certain types of political question that the critic recognises in the relationship between those texts and their contexts – the active construction of Scotland within Scottish studies can easily be effaced by the naturalising force of the national, the preeminent modern category through which the relationship between state and society has been ideologically produced. Critics in this field have had to negotiate an ambiguity characteristic of nationalist political movements – that they may at the same time be perceived to be counter-hegemonic in asserting political claims on behalf of a minority population within a multi-national state, but at the same time exert powerfully territorializing and centralizing force within their own region. The shift in the political discursive field in Scotland at the turn of the century exposed the
fragility of this balancing act, and the risks attendant on the culturalist premises of weak theory.

The difficulty associated with navigating this shift, and the availability of stressing the international, cosmopolitan or transnational pole within the national paradigm as a remedial step, can be clearly traced within Robert Crawford’s classic 1992 study *Devolving English Literature*. In the final chapter, Crawford used a set of interlocking close readings to outline what he called a ‘devolutionary impulse’ in Scottish poetry, which he set within a ‘wider devolutionary – “barbarian” – cultural movement’ within literature in English, which he characterised as ‘a wish in recent poetry to be seen as in some manner barbarian, as operating outside the boundaries of standard English and outside the identity that is seen as going with it. Such a wish unites post-colonial writers (Murray, Walcott) with writers working within the “Anglo-Celtic archipelago”. It joins the colonial and the provincial’. In tracing a counter-intuitive connection through work by Philip Larkin, Seamus Heaney, Tom Leonard and others, Crawford’s paradigm (‘devolutionary writing’) links together otherwise diverse cases, while drawing on their recognised aesthetic value to insinuate the exhaustion of metropolitan English styles, and by implication, of the British state. As so often, literary history is an expression of the tension between singular aesthetic response and the desire to ground such response as somehow representative of established values or norms.

The plausibility of this demonstration could be assessed from two quite different perspectives, one political and one epistemological, which had overlapped in providing support for the development of Scottish studies, but the alliance of which was only ever partial and provisional. The demand for greater consciousness of Scottish cultural histories could be justified either in political terms – from the point of view of the self-understanding of a subaltern culture – or in more neutral, methodological terms, as a critical revision of reified and unitary historical models in the direction of more fine-grained understanding of historical and social differentiation and its interaction with literary production. Crawford’s aims in *Devolving English Literature* align with the same ‘devolutionary impulse’ he saw as characteristic of the most energetic literary productions. Recognising that in the British context the powerful dialectic between metropolitan cultural centrality and the provincial or marginal offered an unpalatable choice between a British literature that had little space for difference and a narrowly defined tradition of merely ‘Scottish’ relevance, Crawford shows the historical role of Scottish writers in the development of this dialectic, and by rewriting history in terms which cross national borders by demonstrating the shaping force of location in cultural

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Methodological Nationalism, Weak Theory

production, he makes surprising connections between what might otherwise be treated as discrete forms. Devolution, in other words, was not merely an assertion of national difference, but might contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the changing relationship between cultural systems and literary production within Britain, including its imperial and postcolonial relations. In political terms, the reterritorialization of English literary history in relation to the history of Britain might exert a powerful demythologizing force.

In the wake of devolution, the comfortable alignment of these two modes of legitimation which had fostered the development of Scottish literary studies was forced apart. In political terms, Scottish studies might remain a minority interest within its broader disciplinary contexts but as the expression of a majority culture within the newly established political borders, it could become a de facto supplier of cultural capital in support of the licensed autonomy of the new parliament. This reversal inevitably foregrounded tensions within the field between cultural nationalism and other forms of critique such as feminism or Marxism. At the same time, political recognition of Britain as a multinational state accelerated the methodological/historiographical move towards examining the shifting construction and interdependence of social, cultural, political and economic relations within the British Isles.

Revisiting his argument in 2000 for its second edition, after the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, Crawford notes the political intensification of the effects of the national literary field, manifest in the negotiation between the political mobilisation of verse, for example in the design of the Scottish parliament, and the jealously-guarded independence of authors: “The notion of poetry as a carrier of national identity continues to be felt, both as a challenge and (sometimes) a trap. Poets are rightly wary of being co-opted as spokespersons.”

Now, to define a devolutionary criticism runs much greater risk of either validating the existing settlement – which Crawford as a nationalist sees as a half-way house – or of asserting the national frame which he has previously insisted must be contested. In response Crawford stresses not the contribution of Scottish writers to British cultural debate, but the international visibility and recognition of Scottish authors. This is a characteristic move, relocating the focus through which Scottish studies articulates its value away from its contribution to more refined and nuanced understanding of the complexity of Britain, towards a much more direct relationship with the international recognition of Scottish culture.

This swerve away from the more radical implications of the devolutionary paradigm suggests the forceful assertion of the dichotomy between national and international, and crystallizes a relapse into longstanding forms of critical practice.

35 Ibid. 310.
Despite the alignment of his project with other affirmative accounts of cultural diversity, as James Chandler noted in a perceptive review, ‘Crawford betrays a certain anxiety about method in the very opening pages – some reflections on poststructuralist writing on “difference” that are, even on his own account, quite irrelevant to his argument’. Irrelevant but telling: recognising ‘difference’ as a catchword of the contemporary critical scene, Crawford is forced to distinguish between culturalism and its deconstructive critique: ‘Often what small or vulnerable cultural groups need is not simply a deconstruction of rhetorics of authority, but a construction or reconstruction of a “usable past”, an awareness of a cultural tradition which will allow them to preserve or develop a sense of their own distinctive identity, their constituting difference’. Difference can be at the centre of such a study, in other words, but only if it embodies a troubling equivocation in meaning: difference operating at a variable scale as an aid to understanding variation within and the interaction between British, English or Scottish cultural traditions; but also the ‘constituting difference’ of Scottish culture from established modes of cultural authority. In identifying the force of differentiation itself with artistic achievement, Crawford exploits the longstanding tendency within British cultural criticism to oppose culture as a living whole to social division and mechanistic society. Too often the attraction of Scottish studies has been perceived to lie in its implied political opposition to the British state, easily aestheticized in terms of the desired resistance of culture to politics, but in fact revealing the pathos of a discourse of oppositionality without institutional leverage. This is a partial inheritance of the culture and society tradition, in which a holistically conceived Scottish culture can never align with the artificial apparatus of the British state.

This situation can also be taken as exemplary of the larger dilemmas of literary studies in its post-theoretical moment. In his penetrating analysis of the same compromise formation that I have been calling ‘weak theory’, John Guillory has argued that the turn from literary to cultural studies in Anglo-American scholarship has very often licensed a disguised return to enduring models of cultural criticism. Colin Kidd has recently highlighted the reluctance of Scottish literary historians to embrace the archipelagic or four-nations historiographical paradigm that ought to follow from the methodological imperative above. Kidd sees this as an entrenched and unreflective commitment to national imaginaries, although this might be qualified as a methodological rather than essentialist nationalism.

37 Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 5.
38 ‘The Sokal Affair and the History of Criticism’; full citation at n. 33.
If the persistence of national literary imaginaries obstructs serious reconsideration of anything like ‘British literature’ despite its appeal as an analytic category, then it may also be the case that the dominance of the link between nation and the literary has militated against the development of Scottish cultural studies considered either as a unified field or as a substantial body of interdisciplinary work. Scottish literary studies has been reluctant to seriously question the models of cultural authority vested in authors, not as political agents in a public sphere, but as the originating sources of artworks whose aesthetic characteristics, interpreted in the light of contemporary political concerns, are then attributed to the society from which they are said to come. There has indeed been little engagement with developments in historiography, and more tellingly, there has been almost no concrete engagement with the social and political studies that have burgeoned since devolution. While a productive mutual dialogue between historians and social scientists has been characteristic of Scottish political history, sociology and political science since the 1980s, the division between this work and the kinds of approach characteristic of studies of literature, film or the visual arts has largely remained intact if not altogether unquestioned; the term Scottish Studies itself has little circulation, and most often signals a relationship to ethnology. Indeed, the fact that it is possible in 2018 for a prominent Scottish historian to portray the entire field of Scottish literary studies as working within a ‘national essentialist’ paradigm, despite the fact that the one criterion applied consistently across the field is opposition to ‘essentialism’ in the name of difference and diversity, suggests that what may turn out to have been a missed encounter between Scottish literature and cultural studies may have larger consequences for disciplinary visibility and reputation.

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Throughout this paper I have been concerned to stress that the situation of Scottish literary studies is hardly exceptional, but rather is typical of a contemporary moment in which, in the words of one scholar, ‘theory has become more and more invisible even as it has become more pervasive’. The dominant practice of cultural criticism, conducted within alternative paradigms on the basis of weak theoretical assumptions, aligns closely with the common-sense understanding of the humanities, summarised by Helen Small as ‘the study [of] the meaning-making practices of human culture, past and present, focusing on interpretation and critical evaluation, primarily in terms of individual response and with an ineliminable element of subjectivity’. The self-evidence of this circular link

40 Cary Wolfe, ‘Theory as a research programme – the very idea’, in Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge (eds), Theory After Theory (Abingdon, 2011), 34–48 at 34.
between the humanities and interpretative practices tends to obscure its historical foundation and its theoretical presuppositions. Moreover, this definition entails a socially-significant position for the scholar or interpreter within meaning-making practices that can provide the basis for a defence of the value of humanistic enquiry, but which might be unsettled by any critical theory that takes into account not merely the legitimating function of cultural practices, but the question of their normative justification.

The development of Scottish literary studies demonstrates with particular clarity the persistence within post-theoretical literary studies of the ideals of cultural criticism that critical theory had sought to question. Conceiving themselves to be etic participants within the interpretation of their own culture on the model of the writers they study, rather than emic observers on the model of the social sciences, literary scholars are tempted to appeal to shared cultural understandings – to those symbols and discourses whose identification with recognised social boundaries is most established. But such appeals must inevitably reinforce rather than challenge group boundaries: their pragmatic force depends in large part on the degree to which the audience identify themselves with the speaker. As a result, cultural criticism, like national literary history, tends towards an affirmative cultural holism. This can exacerbate political problems of identity and difference, and by territorializing analysis of overlapping and differentiated social systems in relation to the nation-state, it can contribute to methodological nationalism.

If such problems are essential to the constitution of the field, theoretical reflection might contribute to greater clarity in their understanding, and contribute to the fostering of methodological caution in framing social and literary enquiry. That might take the form of a sociological turn, along a number of axes. At the macro level an intra-national comparativism might frame and test hypotheses about the supposed diversity of literary and cultural production, while analogical rather than paradigmatic reasoning might make greater use of external comparison points to compare case studies rather than to generate characterisations of Scottish culture as a whole. At a micro level of close reading, this might mean greater sensitivity to the way that the internal address of texts frames the horizon of their reception in relation to discursive, ideological or cultural oppositions at national, British or international scales. Greater attention to the specificity of the sites at which literary texts are produced, the degree to which those sites are internally contested and therefore split, might be combined with sensitivity not only to how texts come to bear markers of symbolic and social capital but also seek to evade and challenge dominant forms of institutional recognition. This close reading might operate in parallel with a greater reflexivity about the ways in which disciplinary knowledge is produced, legitimated and in turn passes into spheres of social and cultural
reproduction. Against the assumption of cultural criticism that there is a single sphere in which politics, society and the aesthetic are articulated, and in which critic addresses national subject, these more sociological analyses might emphasise the mediated, differentiated and contested pathways between different spheres, and consider the possibility that the forms of one sphere (the aesthetic) cannot enter another (the political) without considerable distortion.

More broadly, the existing concern within Scottish literary studies about the tendency of cultural holism to produce a unified and continuous concept of culture, predicated of an expressive underlying social subject, can be transposed into a more critical register through recent work on the relationship between ethnicity, nation and race. It is widely recognized that Scottish ‘nationality’ or ‘ethnicity’ has been produced historically in the modern period, and that both literary and critical texts have participated in this process. This production continues in the present and Scottish literary and cultural studies contributes to this, albeit in combination with much more powerful forces – political discourses and the mass media. A thorough-going constructivism would mean moving beyond the critical evaluation of earlier literary production for its ‘essentialism’ – in practice, judging the degree to which it anticipates contemporary ethical nostrums – and instead pay closer attention to the changing ways in which ethnicity has been constructed over time. This might also open a clearer channel for thinking about the degree to which socio-economic class and other forms of identification have contributed to the development of contemporary Scottish ethnicity (with its complex relationship to English, British, and racially marked ethnicities) and which has in turn changed the character of identities that are available to political discourse, and the lived experience of identification as represented in literary texts.

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This essay will proceed from the premise that theory, far from being superseded, still holds a central role in the humanities. If between the 1970s and the mid-1990s Theory, with a capital ‘t’, was shaped by relatively few charismatic thinkers pursuing a ‘universal’ approach, post-1990s (lower-case) theory has been characterised by a much more pluralistic and fluid stance. As it has been observed, ‘theory after Theory’ has been marked by a re-territorialisation ‘back onto the lived’ and a relocation ‘in practical life, in doing’, as well as by a stronger engagement with ‘real life’ – the body, affects, or living systems – and by a more intense dialogue with scientific knowledge and information technologies. As a consequence, theory today may indeed be perceived as too compromised with praxis and thus a diminished theoria, ‘diluted in both intellectual substance and institutional prominence’. And yet, as many would argue, it still vitally supports and structures our making sense of the world. As Terry Eagleton puts it, ‘if theory means a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever.’

Like all major shifts, even this has entailed both a nostalgic and a forward-looking gaze – a regret for a ‘golden age of theory [that] is long past’ has been counterbalanced by, and at times replaced with, a sense of the potential benefits of a more direct and pragmatic engagement with the urgent cultural and political questions of our time. Scottish literature’s disciplinary history has intertwined with such shifts, sometimes problematically, but also as a potential opportunity, as the present essay will postulate and examine.

Shaped as a disciplinary field in its own right between the 1970s and 1990s, at the height of Theory, Scottish studies developed very much in tension, not to say in open antagonism, with any universalising methodology. Its notorious resistance

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2 Ibid., 62–71.
5 Ibid., 1.
against homogenising paradigms and its focus on local/national ‘uniqueness’ and ‘exceptionality’ suggested a picture of nativist isolation that was in sharp contrast with the cosmopolitan esprit du temps. If such insistence on a locally rooted and factual approach, focused on defining Scottish literature as an ‘authentic’ expression of the Scottish nation, can be seen with the benefit of hindsight as a justifiably defensive stance in the early phases of a vexed disciplinary history, it nonetheless generated a rift between Scottish studies specialists and mainstream scholars who considered their work as ‘universal’ and not bound to any particular society or culture.

Since the 1990s, a more theory-oriented generation of Scottish studies scholars has gradually stepped in, engaging with gender studies, postcolonialism, ecocriticism and a number of other critical approaches, and yet, the stigma of a theory-resistant (and thus ‘backward’) field still lingers. Criticism and concern have often been voiced from within the field: ‘why, then, has criticism of Scottish literature largely ignored theory?’ is the haunting question that opens the special issue of the International Journal of Scottish Literature devoted to ‘Theory and Scottish Exceptionalism’. ‘Side-stepping theory’ may indeed be revalued as ‘one of Scottish literature’s enabling conditions during the period of its establishment as a semi-distinct field,’ but there is no denying that, as the editors point out, disciplinary independence has been obtained at a high cost— the exclusion from ‘theory’s renovation of the wider discipline of English’. More recently, and along similar lines, Juliet Shields has pointed out how, compared to other area studies, ‘Scottish studies seems to have resisted the interdisciplinarity embraced by cultural studies in the 1990s,’ while Matthew Wickman, discussing the uneasy relationship between Scottish studies and cultural studies, has warned us of an almost mutually exclusive relation between the two fields, with ‘the latter mark[ing] the limit condition of the former’. ‘Scottish studies after cultural studies’ Wickman observes, ‘are no longer simply ‘Scottish’ – or rather, what the field itself means evolves beyond recognition.’

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9 Ibid.
11 Matt Wickman, ‘Have Scottish Studies Ever Involved Cultural Studies?’, The Bottle Imp,
All of the above statements remind us that Scottish studies have been largely at odds with the wider theoretical horizon of mainstream scholarship, and that they are still struggling to find their *raison d’être* in a fast-moving, theory-oriented, transnational academic world. The only possible choice seems indeed to be between isolation or dissolution. But is this really the case? Or does instead the post 1990s re-positioning of theory offer us an opportunity to re-think Scottish literature as an open and interconnected field of academic investigation? To answer these questions, I will first provide a reflection on the conceptual evolution of the notion of ‘cosmopolitanism’ as well as of its antonymically related term, ‘nationalism.’ I will then focus on the (ethical) imagination of the stranger as a tool for putting into dialogue ‘home’ with ‘away’, and I will assess how different degrees/types of ‘strangeness’ can help us redefine ‘Scottish literature’.

1 After cosmopolitanism

The perception of nationalism and cosmopolitanism as notional opposites is very much at the heart of twentieth-century interconnected constructions of, respectively ‘EngLit’ and ‘ScotLit’ – the former conceived as ‘cosmopolitan’, the latter as ‘local’ or ‘provincial.’¹² Both nationalism and cosmopolitanism are in fact slippery terms, and have taken on different meanings in different times and contexts. It is worthwhile to remember here that, while they are today often regarded as mutually exclusive, they have in fact a deeply interrelated history. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries philosophers and ideologues who theorised, embraced and upheld nationalism often did so in the name of values such as freedom, equality and justice, thus simultaneously imagining and calling for a transnational ‘universal’ community, if only patriarchally- and eurocentrically-defined, as pointed out, among others, by Dipesh Chakrabarty¹³.

The idea of Europe, as it was shaped in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, provides a case in point, keeping as it did a focus on individual regions/nations while foregrounding a broader, super-national community. Montesquieu, for example, theorised Europe as divided into a northern and a southern region, and centred on France as its heart and model, but he nonetheless provided a unifying vision of the ‘old continent’ on historical, geographical and even cultural terms.¹⁴ Europe was ‘une grande République,’ he claimed, a nation

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composed of many nations.\textsuperscript{15} Most Enlightenment philosophers in fact, as Daniele Conversi observes, ‘not only espoused a deep appreciation of human diversity, but also, on occasions, seemed to conflate cosmopolitan and pro-nationalist attitudes.’\textsuperscript{16} In Scotland, David Hume declared ‘I am a Citizen of the World’,\textsuperscript{17} but in the same period patriotism was still regarded as a cardinal virtue. As Alexander Broadie reminds us, ‘to be unpatriotic was a vice that in many eyes would bespeak untrustworthiness, a preparedness even to betray one’s country.’\textsuperscript{18}

In the nineteenth century, in the age of European revolutions, conflation between the two concepts was equally common. Uprisings against foreign or domestic oppressors were carried out in the name of the ‘people,’ a key concept of Romantic nationalism – both a locally defined entity and a universal principle, unifying countries across borders. Also the ideals of democracy and self-determination went hand in hand, both tracing and transcending national borders. Giuseppe Mazzini’s Giovine Italia, for example, the movement that supported the establishment of a republican government in Italy between the 1830s and 1840s, claimed in its official programme that ‘all the members of a Nation are called by the law of God and Humanity to be free and equal and brothers, and only a republic can assure that this happens.’\textsuperscript{19} His vision was not limited to Italy, however, and in 1834 he started Giovine Europa to encourage the spreading of such ideals throughout the continent. In Scotland, Sir Walter Scott’s historical novels effectively dramatised the complex dialectic between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. In the post-script to 	extit{Waverley}, Scott alerted his readers to the ‘gradual influx of wealth and the extension of commerce [that] have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers, as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth’s time.’\textsuperscript{20} Commerce is a central theme in Scott’s novels, and commerce in the imperial age is a trans/national endeavour by definition. As Frank Osbaldistone explains in 	extit{Rob Roy}, echoing Adam Smith’s 	extit{The Wealth of Nations}, trade ‘connects nation with nation, relieves the wants, and contributes to the wealth of all; and is to the general commonwealth of the civilised world what the daily intercourse of ordinary life is to private society, or rather, what air and food are to our bodies.’\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Daniele Conversi, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism’, in Athena S. Leouissi (ed.) \textit{The Encyclopedia of Nationalism} (Oxford, 2000), 37.
\item \textsuperscript{17} J Y. T. Greig (ed.), David Hume, \textit{The Letters of David Hume} (Oxford, 2011), 470.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Alexander Broadie, \textit{The Scottish Enlightenment. The Historical Age of the Historical Nation} (Edinburgh, 2000), 95.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Giuseppe Mazzini, ‘Il programma della Giovine Italia’, Rosario Romeo and Giuseppe Talamo (eds), \textit{Documenti Storici}, Vol 3 (Torino, 1971), 27. [My translation].
\item \textsuperscript{20} Claire Lamont (ed.), Walter Scott, \textit{Waverley, Or, Tis Sixty Years Since} (Oxford, 1998), 340.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ian Duncan (ed.), Walter Scott, \textit{Rob Roy} (Oxford, 1998). 75. See, in the same volume, Ian
Nationalism is never wholly disconnected from the sense of being a citizen of the world, if only, as in this case, of being a privileged citizen, pursuing that form of ‘hegemonic cosmopolitanism’ which was common in the imperial age. Ian Duncan’s emphasis on the ‘complicated relations’ existing in Scott’s works between ‘regional representation and a series of metropolitan and imperial horizons,’\(^{22}\) can indeed be seen as further evidence of the continuum linking the two concepts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Such complex dialectic comes to an end in the twentieth century, arguably as a consequence of the growing impact of Marxism and of its critique of the nation-state, seen as a function and expression of bourgeois interests—a critique that most post-Marxists theoretical frameworks inherit and apply dogmatically. More generally, however, it is the widespread perception that the ethnic violence unleashed in the two world wars is evidence of nationalisms’ potential destructiveness\(^{23}\) that leads to the reconceptualization of nationalism as a dark and regressive force, and of cosmopolitanism as its ‘antidote’—a progressive and universal expression of modernity. Theory (with a capital ‘t’) on the whole embraces this polarised vision, and either ignores nationalism as a thing of the past, or stigmatises it as a threat to the present. Raymond Williams’s entry on ‘nationalist’ in his *Keywords* (1983) effectively testifies to this deeply-ingrained prejudice by laconically describing nationalism as focused on ‘race’ or ‘language’, and by presenting it as a ‘selfish pursuit of a nation’s interests as against others,’ as opposed to internationalism’s aspiration to ‘co-operation between nations.’\(^{24}\)

Williams’s orientation largely fits in the wider wave of theoretical interest in the nation and nationalism that characterises the 1980s and 1990s. Anthony D. Smith, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Michael Billig and Benedict Anderson, among others, helped us understand the complexities of nationalism as an ideology, but mainly to alert us to its potential dangers—closure, exclusion, racial/ethnic discrimination. And while in the same decades ‘nationalism’ was scrutinised and brought into question, its ‘antonym’—cosmopolitanism—did not receive the same, and no doubt much needed, critical attention. It may be regarded as meaningful, in this respect, that Williams’s *Keywords* did not include an explicative entry for it (or for ‘internationalism’), as its meaning was on the whole taken for granted. Thus, in Craig Calhoun’s words, the notion of cosmopolitanism becomes ‘an enormously popular rhetorical vehicle for claiming at once to be global and to have the highest


ethical aspirations for what globalisation can offer. Cosmopolitanism, vaguely and inadequately understood as a negation of the value of the local, becomes then a mere ‘fashion’, misleading us ‘about the qualities built into ostensibly universalist projects,’ or a hegemonic discourse, as in current European debates about immigration, where ‘cosmopolitanism becomes, ironically, the language of rejection of immigrants who are inadequately cosmopolitan.

In the past decade or so, both terms have undergone a gradual reappraisal and their historical interconnectedness has once more been brought to the fore. Chakrabarty, for example, has used the lens of Tagore’s philosophy as well as the perspective of cultural life in colonial Calcutta to highlight their inextricable nexus between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan Bengali literary modernism, Chakrabarty observes, were ‘given a self-consciously nationalist home’ in twentieth-century Calcutta. Recent re-conceptualisations seem to suggest that moral virtues can be claimed for both sides, but only if both sides build on each other’s strengths and mitigate each other’s weaknesses. These include Homi Bhabha’s ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’, Anthony Appiah’s ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’, James Clifford’s ‘disreputant cosmopolitanism’, Paul Gilroy’s ‘cosmopolitanism from below’, Lilie Chouliaraki’s ‘affective cosmopolitanism’ and Patrick Hanafin’s ‘cosmopolitanism of singularities’. All these ‘hybrid’ concepts go in the direction of rescuing cosmopolitanism from its elitist (in geo-political or class terms) universalism by linking it to specific locations and spaces, and to the rooted subjects that experience it.

We live therefore in a post-national as much as in a post-cosmopolitan age – one characterised by a ‘yearning for or longing after a cosmopolitan ideal’ but also ‘one that takes into account the political and social reality of our world.’ It is within this paradigmatic shift that the study of Scottish literature can be reconsidered under a more fruitful angle – as nationally/locally grounded and yet open to planetary dialogue.

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26 Ibid., 210.
27 Ibid., 225.
30 Braidotti, Rosi, Patrick Hanafin, and Bolette Blaagaard, ‘Introduction’, *After Cosmopolitanism*, 2
For an ‘ethics of strangers’: re-thinking Scottish Literature

A strained dialectic between polarised concepts of nationalism and cosmopolitanism is still visibly at work in the UK literary debate, both at an academic and at a popular level. It is reflected, for example, in a controversial article, which appeared in the *Spectator* while I was writing the present essay, where Scottish composer James MacMillan laments, among other things, that in present-day Scotland ‘Alasdair Gray is greater than James Joyce’, and supports his statement by quoting Scottish writer Alan Bisset, whose declared preference for Gray over Joyce is based on the former’s ability to represent ‘the political realities and aspirations of “the new Scotland”’, versus Joyce’s ‘“baffling, unreadable prose”’. Clearly, both commentators respond to the same binary opposition, within which cosmopolitanism represents the hegemonic model. MacMillan relies on such binarism, while Bisset angrily overturns it, but ultimately neither seems able to move beyond it. Neither seems aware of the fluid continuum that links the two terms, and of how, ironically, both Joyce and Gray, in their different times and contexts, interestingly share a very similar ‘provincial cosmopolitan’ language, speaking, as they do, from a rooted position and yet working out their respective visions through routes of transnational and transcultural experience.

Not dissimilar, even though gentler in tones and on the whole more thoughtful, is Sarah Crown’s review in the *TLS* of James Kelman’s latest novel, *Dirt Road* (2016). After summarising Kelman’s ongoing conflict with British cultural institutions (with special reference to the notorious attack on his use of demotic Scots in *How Late it Was, How Late*, awarded the Booker Prize in 1994) she goes on to remark that it is an ‘irony’ that a novel set in America’s deep south should ‘hotfoot it out in Scotland in the opening pages’, and that ‘as the pages turn … Scotland continues to make its presence felt.’ She concludes by stating: ‘this is a brilliant book, and like all great works of art, it is universal — whether you’re reading it in Scotland, Hampstead, or Alabama.’ What Crown expresses here is an endemic truism: a text’s greatness is not evaluated on the grounds of its rootedness, but of its ability to transcend those roots. And yet, arguably, Kelman’s work, like that of many other writers, is deeply defined by its rootedness – its greatness, one
would contend, is determined by its ability to make that rootedness speak across borders, to speak from a particular place, out of a particular history/experience, and to engage with and welcome ‘outsiders’. As for the myth of the universality of great works of art, as Margaret Atwood put it, ‘there is no such thing as a truly universal literature, partly because there are no truly universal readers.’ Rather, literary works engage with and construct the everyday world (local and global) in multiple ways, they may be outreaching and opening towards the world, but like all human things they are finite.

In order to make sense of ‘Scottish literature’ as a field of studies, we must then conceive of a new set of questions with which to interrogate texts – questions that transcend the strictures of the binary nationalism-cosmopolitanism, and move instead freely along a continuum from local, to national/regional, to global. Within this attempt, the concept/figure of the ‘stranger’, which I have borrowed and adapted from Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), represents a particularly useful tool. Appiah’s contemporary revision of cosmopolitanism is relevant here as it does not coincide with a quest for a ‘universal’ standard or vision, but with a pluralist perspective which acknowledges the existence of differences, and focuses on the need for developing ‘habits of coexistence.’ Appiah’s ethical cosmopolitanism is concerned with the obligations we have to others, ‘obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship.’ We must, he warns us, ‘take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance.’ Appiah upholds ‘conversation’, ‘in its older meaning of living together, association,’ as the means that allows the development of cosmopolitan habits of coexistence ‘in the human community, as in the national communities.’

Appiah’s call for a thoughtful conversation within and across cultures and nations, and his centring on an ‘ethics of strangers’ also encourage us to look at literary texts or artistic expressions as a privileged site for cosmopolitan negotiation, and thus represent an essential methodological motivation behind this essay. That literary texts foster empathy and strengthen the values of diversity has been foregrounded by a number of philosophers in recent times. ‘Hospitality

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35 Margaret Atwood, ‘An End to Audience?’, *Dalhousie Review*, 60.3 (1980), 427.
36 Of the many terms that could be used here – outsider, alien, foreigner, Other – I have privileged the broadest and most comprehensive one, that stretches to encompass the ‘strangeness’ of ‘outsiders within’. This is also the term privileged by Kwame Anthony Appiah in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London, 2006), who has partly inspired this section of my discussion.
37 Kwame Anthony Appiah, op. cit., xv.
is culture itself,” claims Jacques Derrida, thereby implying that one cannot think of culture without the ability to welcome the stranger. Along similar lines, Martha Nussbaum believes that literary culture can produce ‘citizens who can take charge of their own reasoning, who can see the different and the foreign not as a threat to be resisted, but as an invitation to explore and understand, expanding their own minds and their capacity for citizenship.’ And yet, literary texts can stage very different degrees of hospitality – or indeed rejection – in relation to those who are perceived as different from, and alien to the ‘identity’ of a group or a nation. Texts may represent the Other by reducing the Other to the Same, or, in an opposite but converging approach, allow us ‘to face that which we have already designated as the beyond – by assimilating or rejecting the stranger they draw fixed borders meant to define and protect a ‘threatened’ identity. On the opposite, they may welcome the stranger in a conversation in which the host respectfully acknowledges that the guest ‘must come precisely from without, from some place other than home,’ and makes an attempt at listening to/engaging with his voice. It is then possible to claim that ‘literary strangers’ may provide a measure and a model for cosmopolitan hospitality. By focusing on strangers, and on the type of ‘conversation’ that literary texts stage through them, rather than on distinctive/unique features or characters, may therefore help us re-define national literatures in a cosmopolitan perspective.

‘Strangers’ have had a very central role in devolutionary and post-devolutionary Scottish literature, which has accounted for a wide variety of attitudes and relations between them and the national community: from outsiders whose irreconcilable alien-ness is beyond what is knowable and assimilable, and represents a downright threat, to strangers, or ‘outsiders inside,’ that closely border on ‘Scotland’ and slowly alter its definition. The next three sections will focus on different expressions of cosmopolitan hospitality in Scottish literary texts, and will attempt to map out their subtle re-definition of the terms ‘home’ and ‘away,’ as well as of the borders between ‘us’ and ‘them.’

3 The stranger as outsider
The notion and theme of ‘community’, along with a strong egalitarian ideal, have been seen as one of the distinctive features of modern and contemporary Scottish culture and literature. As Scott Lyall remarks, ‘community has not only been a

key thematic concern in Scottish literary representations … it has also been a bulwark of the Scottish tradition, helping to form Scottish literature as a subject-area.’ Community, however, has also been understood and represented as an exclusive unity, at least until the 1980s, traditionally standing as ‘a mythic signifier of commonality and communal resistance to Anglophone capital and perceived affectation, as well as white, normative, often working-class, traditionalism.’\(^{43}\) And yet, as Lyall’s edited volume goes a long way to demonstrate, both Scottish society and its literary representations have deeply changed in the past forty years or so. This is more evident than ever today. The 2011 census has recorded a doubling of Scotland’s minority ethnic population since the previous census (2001), also revealing that only 62% of adult residents describe themselves as exclusively Scottish — in particular, ‘in Edinburgh less than half of adults (49%) and 55% of adults in Aberdeen say they are ‘only Scottish.”\(^{44}\) Scotland’s response to globalisation and immigration, however, seems to be quite different, at least for the time being, from that of most European countries: according to the 2015 survey of attitudes to discrimination, commissioned by the Scottish Government, ‘seven out of ten Scots want to banish prejudice […] based on people’s age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity or religion.’\(^{45}\) The 2015 poll is very much in line with the Scottish government approach to immigration between 2015 and 2019, firmly opposing Westminster’s political response both in humanitarian terms (with the UNHRC praising Scotland’s welcoming of Syrian refugees in 2017\(^{46}\)) and from an economic perspective, especially in relation to post-Brexit planned anti-immigration measures\(^{47}\).

The idea of national community has then been gradually shifting away from conventional categories, to focus slightly less on ‘tradition’ and more on shared civic values. Devolutionary and post-devolutionary literature has both foregrounded

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\(^{44}\)‘Scotland more diverse with doubling of non-white residents, census shows’, *The Guardian*, 26 September 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/sep/26/scotland-diverse-non-white-2011-census


and illuminated the shifting borders and attitudes of the national community by imagining Scotland’s (new) Others. Two main clusters of such literary strangers will be considered in this section, both widely represented and distinctive of the literature of this period: historical strangers – fictional renderings of real people – whose stories investigate past or present encounters with (post-)colonial Others or minority residents; and speculative aliens – non-human, extra-worldly strangers – engaging with strangeness in an ontological and ‘cosmic’ perspective.

Historical strangers have indeed been common encounters in Scottish literature since at least the nineteenth century, when Walter Scott’s narratives often gave them a prominent role, from the eponymous hero of *Waverley*, an Englishman, to Meg Merrillies, the Gypsy in *Guy Mannering*. Their presence, however, has arguably grown considerably since the 1980s, and can be understood in the context of Scotland’s intensifying awareness of nationhood, and in the consequent increasing interest in its largely forgotten imperial past. Such extensive re-vision of the nation’s removed, and often deeply troubling, past has both stemmed from and led to a gradual re-drawing of Scotland’s identity narratives. It is in fact historical fiction, rather than professional historical scholarship, that has arguably led the way in this process, with literary strangers often occupying an ontological status, and thus actively challenging current identity narratives, and embodying and promoting an ethical engagement with transcultural conversation. Two anti-imperial historical novels, both investigating Scotland’s colonial past in the Caribbean, may illustrate this effectively: Douglas Galbraith’s *The Rising Sun* (2000), reconstructing Scotland’s failed attempt at founding a colony at Darien, in Panama, between 1688 and 1689, and James Robertson’s *Joseph Knight* (2003) disclosing Scotland’s cryptic involvement, within the British Empire, in the practice of slave trade and the exploitation of slaves in the Caribbean.

Galbraith’s fictional chronicle of the Darien enterprise stages a dark and relentless indictment, even a ridiculing of, Scottish colonial ambitions and unattainable plans. Over half of the novel centres on the encounter with the indigenous populations, presented here as (potentially) transformative: ‘one thing I have learned is that everything strong in Nature comes from mixture. Purity is a perversion to her and she always destroys it in the end,’ claims one of the Scottish colonials of Caledonia. And this is indeed a novel of swift and unpredictable transformations, the most striking of which is possibly that undergone by the Minister, Reverend Mackay, whose corpse is ceremoniously escorted back to the colonial settlement by an indigenous tribe, among whom he had eventually chosen to live. His painted, naked body stands as a metamorphic metaphor of the collapse of borders separating self from Other:

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A bird flew across the chest towards its young, which looked out from the pit of an arm. At the centre of it all a monkey balanced on a branch. A navel for an eye, its tail hung down straight extending wittily along the length of the carnal member.49

On his return to Scotland, the protagonist-narrator – Roderick Mackenzie, a young Scot of ambition – feels radically displaced, not just because the approaching Union with England is deeply changing his native country, but because his perspective and identity have been transformed through the colonial encounter. Again, the sense that identity borders have shifted, or indeed collapsed is evident: ‘the existence of Edinburgh’ he explains, ‘became partial to me, a half-way reality towards which I struggled against Darien’s mad pull.’50

Robertson’s novel moves along similar lines: focusing on an historical character, one of the many voiceless subalterns of the imperial age, this is a work that sets itself the formidable task of retrieving a story that can only be partly reclaimed from archives or libraries or books. Joseph Knight’s voice and largely imagined story, that of a black slave taken from Jamaica to Scotland by his master, eventually winning his freedom in a Scottish civil court in 1778, are evoked by the author in what can be described as an anachronistic ‘conversation’ across time and space. While recent historical investigations51 have shed light on the national/istic agenda of Scottish-Caribbean imperial networks, Robertson’s work has highlighted that the act of telling the truth requires a dialogue in order to happen – it cannot be structured as a unilateral act. Knight remains a ghost figure throughout the novel, evoked and remembered by those he has met in his life. He materialises only at the very end of the novel, where his voice is ventriloquised by the narrator, who records his fictional encounter with Archie Jamieson, a private detective recruited by Sir John Wedderburn, Knight’s by now deceased master. Knight is imagined as reluctant to engage in a conversation he has not sought or desired, and his words are bitter: the wrongs he has suffered at the hands of Scottish slave traders and his Scottish masters outweigh the goodness of his Scottish wife, Anne, and of the Scottish miners who supported him in his legal battle. He is depicted as both part of the miners’ community he now lives in, and as irreconcilably alien. For example, Knight never reveals his African name to anyone: ‘it was about himself. He had to keep his name whole, away from others, away, especially, from white people.’52

49 Ibid., 367.
50 Ibid., 466.
51 See Douglas Hamilton, Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750–1820 (Manchester, 2005), and, more recently, Thomas Martin Devine (ed.), Recovering Scotland’s Slavery Past: The Caribbean Connection (Edinburgh, 2015).
52 James Robertson, Joseph Knight, 352.
If the novel’s ‘ventriloquism’ may be questioned as not ‘politically correct’, this is no doubt a work that powerfully and valuably articulates the desire and need for dialogue, and for a national identity that is negotiated with strangers, and not simply passed over from generation to generation. Like Galbraith’s novel, *Joseph Knight* signals a gradually changing ontological status of Scotland’s colonial Others, a change which goes hand in hand with the radical re-shaping of the idea of national community that takes place in the devolutionary and post-devolutionary period.

The imperial theme also underlies contemporary Scottish science fiction, often dealing with acts of colonisation or clashes with ‘exotic’ and irreconcilably alien Others, from Edwin Morgan’s science fiction poems (*From Glasgow to Saturn*, 1973), to Alasdair Gray’s iconic *Lanark* (1981) with its hybrid and disquieting creations, or Iain M. Banks’s and Ken MacLeod’s fictions and their kaleidoscopic range of human and post-human aliens. Scottish speculative fictions may or may not refer directly to Scotland’s predicament but, as John Garrison observes in relation to Banks’s work, we may still trace a Scottish connection here, if only disguised and standing ‘conceptually within a much larger context.’

Morgan’s ‘The First Men on Mercury’ represents a most formidable example of cosmopolitan hospitality – effectively conveyed by the vivid and concise quality of the poem. Opening with the cacophonous clash of the languages spoken respectively by humans and aliens ('We come in peace from the third planet./ Would you take us to your leader?/ – Bawr streter! Bawr. Bawr. Stretterhawl?'), it closes on a Morgan-esque note of exchange and hybridisation, with the humans speaking the alien language and the aliens speaking English: ‘– Stretterworra gawl, gawl…/ – Of course, but nothing is ever the same,/ now is it? You’ll remember Mercury.’ There could hardly be a more effective illustration of the effectiveness of cosmopolitan conversation, leading to see things from the Other’s perspective – to (literally) ‘becoming’ the stranger.

A more complex and problematic approach to alien-ness is that articulated in Banks’ Culture series. The Culture, a democratic civilization that has banned notions of property and fear of death, honours diversity in all its expressions, upholds a political philosophy that rejects all relationships of power, and thus stands for a quasi-anarchic form of anti-imperialism. And yet, the Culture also acts as a ‘benevolent’ Empire, eager to expand its positive influence across the universe, and resorting, if required, to violence and military force. Banks does not pursue a

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consistent representation of the Culture, but rather sets it in a complex network of tensions by choosing narrators or central characters who are outsiders. In the first novel of the series, for example, Consider Phlebas (1987), the main perspective is that of Bora Horza Gobuchul, a Changer recruited by the Idiran Empire (the Culture’s irreconcilable enemy), who despises the Culture for its dependence on machines and what he sees as a lack of spirituality. No matter how close to Utopia the Culture is, Banks on the whole steers clear from the risk of over-idealising it or turning it into a hegemonic perspective. This is achieved through what has been described as ‘a systematic examination of the ‘problem of the Other’ in liberal societies,’ and a constant investigation of a kaleidoscopic continuum of possible encounters – from real or ludic conflict, to gradual convergence or hybridisation. Encounters are usually not marked by hospitality (as the Culture attempts to ‘culturise’ other civilisations), but Banks’s constant focus and reflection on them does represent in itself a valuable workshop of cosmopolitan conversation.

4 The ‘familiar’ stranger
The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been a time of swiftly changing socio-political scenarios, and of shifting (internal) borders for the Scottish national community. It is possibly not so surprising that writers have often imagined and mapped out – and growingly so in the devolutionary and post-devolutionary period – a new idea of national identity by turning their attention to the stranger inside. A ‘familiar’ stranger borders closely with the national community, or is born/resides within it and yet s/he is not regarded as a member with full rights – not technically a stranger, s/he is nonetheless interpellated as one. The radical potential of such ‘soft’ strangeness is highlighted, for example, in Christopher Whyte’s poem ‘An Daolag Shonach’ (‘The Chinese Beetle’) (2004), where the ability of the beetles to impress a wonderful aroma in each fruit they briefly nest in as larvae, leaves the scholars and gardeners of the court at a loss, unable to provide an explanation. ‘S e sin a ni mi leis a’ chàinle seo’ (‘That is what I do with this language’)\(^{57}\), the lyrical voice concludes, evoking Whyte’s own experience and role as a Glasgow-born, non-native speaker of Gaelic, who has established...
himself as one of the contemporary leading poets in that language – a language and a tradition he has subtly changed by impressing on it his outsider’s ‘accent’ Presenting himself as the stranger within, Whyte refers here to the difficulty of being fully accepted, at the time of writing, as a non-native voice, in an historically threatened and marginalised culture. He also conveys, however, the transformative and empowering experience of his borderline stance, as well as the important contribution that his work represents in this context.

The largest and most distinctive category of ‘familiar’ strangers is no doubt that represented by the many abjected subjects who take centre-stage in devolutionary and post-devolutionary fiction, and represent indeed a well-known, if only controversial, distinguishing feature of contemporary Scottish literature. A remarkable gallery of ‘damaged’ characters, living beyond the margins of society, appear in some of Scotland’s most canonical texts of this period: from anorexic and alcoholic Joy in Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), to the iconic junkies in Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993). These characters are ‘strangers’ insofar as they inhabit a space of ambivalence – they are ‘Scottish,’ by official standards, and yet society confines them to a space of negation, a space of non-presence. Their gained centrality in contemporary Scottish fiction both articulates a powerful indictment of society’s epistemic violence and a desire to enter into dialogue with them – the silenced and the marginal. Jenni Fagan’s *The Panopticon* (2012), for example, describes the world as seen through the eyes of Anais and a group of fellow ‘socially impaired’ teen-agers, all forced ‘guests’ of the Panopticon, an institution for dysfunctional minors, reclaimed from a Victorian jail, and built so as to give the guards a simultaneous view into each inmate’s room. If the Panopticon stands as a powerful metaphor of society’s ‘Othering’ gaze on a most vulnerable group of underprivileged citizens, Fagan’s extraordinary fantastic-realistic language powerfully challenges the normalising discourse of surveillance. Anais both lucidly identifies the Panopticon’s intrusive and de-humanizing gaze as the source, rather than the effect, of her and her friends’ marginalisation, and angrily asserts her humanity against it and beyond the barriers of social norm, as when she responds to a faceless and nameless bureaucrat who reprimands her for her misdemeanours:

> Sometimes I deal, or I trash things, or I get in fights, but I am honest as fuck and you’ll never understand that. I’ve read books you’ll never look at, danced to music you couldnae appreciate, and I’ve more class, guts and soul in my wee finger than you will ever, ever have in your entire, miserable fucking life.58

That our inability to see the humanity in the stranger inside is often the outcome of our expectations and beliefs is also the underlying theme of *Under the Skin* (2000) by Michel Faber, a science fiction novel set in the Scottish Highlands and featuring a deeply alien and yet very familiar stranger. Isserley, a female alien from an unnamed planet, has undergone invasive and painful surgery in order to look like a seductive woman. Her task is to drive around and pick up solitary hitchhikers, anesthetize them and consign them to her ‘colleagues’, who then process them into coveted alien delicacies. In Faber’s subtly constructed novel, strangeness becomes a trick of mirrors. All characters are in fact strangers, as all the action takes place on country roads or at the aliens’ underground ‘farm,’ where neither humans nor aliens are at home. Furthermore, aliens are referred to as ‘human’ throughout the narrative, while human males are largely presented (in line with the aliens’ perspective) as ‘animals’ – a source of food or heartless sexual predators. It is Isserley, however, who embodies simultaneously all forms of strangeness: an alien from outer space, she looks strangely human to the men she lures into her car, and who often look at her as a mere sexual object, while her transformed body, carved by surgery, distances her from her fellow creatures. She is the ultimate outcast, and doubly so.* Under the Skin* – whose title implies an investigation of (post-)human identity – can be described as her tragic and complex home-coming. Isserley chooses, at the end of the novel, to move out of the farm and live in the hauntingly beautiful landscape of northern Scotland. But she has a car accident and, aware that her alien-ness is about to be disclosed, opts for suicide. In her final moments she is relieved by the thought of merging, through her death, with the landscape she loves, and that ‘her invisible remains would combine, over time, with all the wonders under the sun.’ She is also able, for the first time, and in the short time that precedes her death, to relate to human beings and to care for them, and in turn she is taken care of: while she tries to save the life of her wounded passenger, a passer-by offers her help while the ambulance is approaching. Alien-ness is thus replaced by a precarious sense of belonging, a ‘convergence’ that can only become permanent through Isserley’s physical dissolution.

5 Caught between homes

Since the publication of the first ‘Scottish multicultural anthology’ – *Wish I Was Here* (2000) – accounting for the different Scotlands ‘imagined’ by the nation’s diasporic communities, the Scottish literary scene has gone a long way to engaging with, and indeed giving canonical status to texts that celebrate complex identities, or denounce their rejection and abuse in Scottish contemporary society. This

59 Michel Faber, *Under the Skin* (Edinburgh, 2010), 296.
section will focus on a category that straddles across the two investigated above, that of ‘diasporic’ subjects divided between a sense of belonging to Scotland and a loyalty to their ‘ancestral’ home(s) — insiders, who have lived all their lives in Scotland, are second or third generation, or are of a mixed descent, but are nonetheless perceived and constructed as outsiders. Scottish writers with a diasporic background have often accounted for their own encounters with racism and an exclusively conceived national identity: from Jackie Kay’s recording of the almost casual offensiveness of the question ‘where are you from?’ implying that her black skin does not fit in her interlocutor’s idea of Scottishness, to Luke Sutherland’s fictional account, in *Venus as a Boy* (2004), of his deeply traumatic Orkney childhood and teen years as a black boy faced by vicious racist attacks; from Suhayl Saadi’s representations of racist prejudice surrounding the Asian-Scottish community in Glasgow in *The Burning Mirror* (2001) or in *Psychoraag* (2004), to Leila Aboulela’s personal memory of fearfully threateningly abuses — as that ‘Black Bastards’ penned over the Glasgow mosque’s door — levelling all ‘non-white immigrants’ into the same category of irreconcilable outcasts. By recording and denouncing society’s ostracism, however, these writers have also implied and promoted a positive vision of inclusiveness — their shared agenda being to learn and teach ‘how to be both,’ to borrow and adapt the title of Ali Smith’s 2014 novel. They have in fact often upheld an idea of identity that is fluid and complex, but also firmly place-bound. In Saadi’s *Psychoraag*, for example, Zaf, a young Pakistani-Glaswegian DJ, leads the reader through his daily life and early-morning shifts at a local Asian radio. Zaf’s syncretic playlists, ranging from ‘Allahabadi, Janki Bai’ to the ‘Yardbirds,’ and combining selections of Irish folk, pop-rock and traditional Pakistani songs, create a fluid continuum of collective and individual cultural associations. So does his language, incorporating Urdu, English, Gaelic and Glaswegian-Scots, as when addressing the listeners of his radio programme (‘*Salaam alaikum, namaste ji*, good evenin on this hoat, hoat summer’s night! Fae the peaks ae Kirkintilloch tae the dips ae Cambuslang […]’), and as mirrored in the kaleidoscopic ‘Glossary’ at the end of the book. Zaf’s non-hierarchical incorporation of transcultural elements, very much like Saadi’s writing, no doubt foregrounds a cosmopolitan identity: ‘we’re playin a real mix ae auld an new, of Eastern an Western an aw points in between. An beyond. Or, tae be more accurate, the soangs that let us hear the truth ae the fact that the

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62 Leila Aboulela, “‘When I First Came to Scotland…’,” in Kevin MacNeil, Alec Finlay (eds), *Wish I Was Here*, 27.
64 Ibid., 1.
65 Ibid., 421–30.
waruld is aw wan. This is not a freely chosen and freely mixed set of features, an abstracted globalised cosmopolitanism, but rather a rooted one. Zaf’s connecting of his worlds poses questions of self-definition, gesturing towards a transcultural re-definition of Scottishness, through a process of indigenization of the ‘alien,’ as subtly suggested by Zaf’s trans-linguistic game: ‘Scoatland in Urdu, is a wee man in a coracle, croassin the ocean.

A similar journey into questions of (self-)definition characterises Jackie Kay’s more explicitly autobiographical engagement with both her Scottish and African heritage. In Trumpet (1998), her first (semi-biographical) novel, Joss Moody, a Scottish transgender jazz musician and, like Kay, the child of a Scottish mother and an African father, nurtures a ‘fantasy Africa,’ shared by all ‘Black British people, Black Americans, Black Caribbeans,’ but has never travelled to ‘real’ Africa. In her first memoir, Red Dust Road (2010), Kay fills in the distance between ‘fantasy’ and reality, by accounting her tracing of her birth parents — her Scottish mother and her Nigerian father. It is thus in Red Dust Road that Kay’s autobiographical project arguably achieves its ultimate meaning. The title of the novel takes the road, an image of movement and fluidity, centre-stage, but also attracts our attention to a cliché image of the African landscape – the correlative objective for Kay’s ‘fantasy Africa, and for her desire to explore her African connections. Her memoir, however, rather strives to achieve a precarious balance between the two sides of her complex background – between biological and cultural roots, between her birth parents and her foster ones. Such symmetry is captured, at the end of the book, in the powerful image of a new identity shaped through ‘convergence’ – Kay’s actual project of planting an African tree, the Moringa oleifera, a plant renowned in Africa for its healing properties, in her Manchester garden: ‘I imagine a magical moringa, years and years away from now; its roots have happily absorbed and transported water and minerals from the dark, moist soil to the rest of the splendid tree.’

That Dust Red Road was 2014 Scottish Book of the Year, and that Kay was named Makar – National Poet for Scotland – in 2016, tells something not only of her history of institutional success, but of how her journey into a rootedly cosmopolitan vision has reached out to the wider public.

Conclusion
The academic debate on the allegedly difficult and belated engagement of Scottish literature with Theory has often stressed the limitations of current constructions of this field of studies, and implied that it was because of its intrinsic faults

66 Ibid., 132.
67 Ibid., 189.
68 Jackie Kay, Trumpet (London, 1998), 34.
69 Jackie Kay, Red Dust Road (London, 2010), 289.
– backwardness and self-referentiality – that it stubbornly failed or refused to engage with mainstream disciplinary concerns. Much of the critique of modern and contemporary descriptions of Scottish literature is no doubt justified, and it is certainly fair to investigate the reasons why criticism of Scottish literature has largely ‘ignored theory’, as the editors of the first issue of *The International Journal of Scottish Literature* point out. It would be equally necessary, and timely, however, to analyse why Theory has not engaged with Scottish literature – both as a category, and (quite often) as the individual voice of individual writers – and why, more generally, it has failed to engage with the complexities and dynamics of nationalism, flattening it to an unredeemably negative and destructive ideology. If ‘Theory’ was an unwelcoming epistemological environment for Scottish literature and other nation- or local-related disciplinary pursuits, the pluralistic, shifting post-Theory world is decidedly more hospitable. More focused on a dialogue across disciplinary borders, more attentive to ‘affects’ and emotions, and on the whole (in line with the shifting realities of the Digital and Virtual Age) more open to radical change and ‘contradiction’, less prone to ideological orthodoxy, ‘theory’ has opened up new interpretative paths and the possibility of new connections. Tracing the centrality of the ‘stranger’ and cosmopolitan conversations in contemporary Scottish literature is not only a way of redefining a specific field of studies, but of reclaiming a complex and more useful idea of nation, as ‘the host’, in Cairns Craig’s words, ‘to multiple nationalisms, to marginal and antagonistic communities,’ and of revealing the tangled coexistence of cosmopolitan and national discourses.

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Colin Kidd claims, in his introduction to *Literature & Union: Scottish Texts, British Contexts* (2018),¹ that his aim is to ‘is to effect a rapprochement between a new British-orientated Scottish historiography and an essentialist-nationalist tradition of Scottish literary criticism’ (*L&U*, 13). It is a ‘rapprochement’ in which, however, only one party has to give ground, since Scottish history is cordially lauded for its ability to engage sympathetically with the past –

Historians try to attune themselves to the alien otherness of the past, and aim to recover the values of our ancestors on their own terms. To assume that Scots of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries thought about the Union or nationhood like Scots of the late twentieth or early twenty-first centuries is to be imprisoned in the mental categories of the latter. (*L&U*, 16)

– while Scottish literary critics, on the other hand, are accused not only of being ‘imprisoned’ in the categories of a present which they impose on the past but in a set of present categories that are themselves the leftovers of an earlier phase of cultural ‘navel gazing’ (*L&U*, 18). That earlier phase is dated to the generation of nationalist *littérateurs* led by Hugh MacDiarmid to which Kidd believes contemporary Scottish literary culture to be umbilically tied:

Since the inter-war era, generations of Scottish literary intellectuals have, under the inspiration of the poet and critic Christopher Murray Grieve (1892–1978), better known by his pen name Hugh MacDiarmid, rejoiced in essentialism, a rigidly binary set of values and a zero-sum approach to questions of union, Anglicization, assimilation, cultural integrity, and Anglo-Scottish hybridity. (*L&U*, 3)

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The openness of Scottish historians to multiple narratives within the frame of the British Isles and to the consequent awareness of interacting and, indeed, interbreeding cultures, is to be contrasted with the closed and myopic nature of the world of Scottish literary intellectuals. MacDiarmid is not only ‘the principal authority in Scottish criticism’ but one whose ‘influence also persists in the political sphere’ (L&U, 4). As a consequence, the analyses of contemporary Scottish literary critics continue to replicate MacDiarmid’s ‘literary essentialism’, which assumes that there ‘is a direct one-to-one correspondence between a nation and its literature, each understood as a singular entity’ (L&U, 3).

Kidd may have found support for such views in the writings of some recent Scottish literary critics who have attacked what they see as the ‘essentialism’ of their predecessors. It is argued that ‘essentialism’ shackles Scottish literary studies by applying to it a ‘national paradigm’, or situating it in a purely national context, in which (as Gavin Miller and Eleanor Bell put it) a work is read in terms of its ‘Scottishness, rather than in terms of its literary and aesthetic qualities’. But challenges to ‘essentialism’ have been fundamental to Scottish literary studies since long before any of the critics of recent times identified it as a problem. Indeed, ‘essentialism’ was precisely the flaw attributed to early accounts of the Scottish literary tradition, such as John Speirs’s The Scots Literary Tradition: An Essay in Criticism (1940) or Kurt Wittig’s The Scottish Tradition in Literature (1958), against which almost all later critics of Scottish literature rebelled. If essentialism has been the presiding problem of Scottish literary studies, it is a problem that almost every literary critic in Scotland in the second half of the twentieth century has sought to unmask and oppose. Of course, they may have failed, both individually and collectively, but no one can possibly imagine that ‘essentialism’ is the preferred view of most modern Scottish literary critics. Resistance to ‘essentialism’ has been the opening move of almost all literary criticism in Scotland since the 1960s.

Indeed, Kidd’s co-editor, Gerard Carruthers was one of the authors of the introduction to a collection of essays entitled Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature, which suggested that Scottish Literature ‘as a discrete area for academic study’ could be traced to G. Gregory Smith’s Scottish Literature: Character and Influence of 1919, but that Smith’s work deformed the discipline he was founding by its ‘essentialist’ effort to present Scottish literature as

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3 See, for instance, Edwin Morgan’s review of Wittig in The Scottish Historical Review, Vol. 8, No. 126 (Oct. 1959), 159: ‘The search for such intangibles as national literary characteristics is always very tempting, especially as regards a country that feels itself insecure or unfulfilled, but however carefully done it results in a slight measure of falsification, since some of the evidence is rejected, some of it is over- emphasised, and things tend to be looked at for the sake of some selected abstract qualities rather than in their own individuality’.
determined by its own internal contradictions rather than by its external relations. Smith characterised Scottish literature as an unpredictable zig-zagging between cumulative realism – ‘It is the Dutch style – interiors, country folk and town “bodies”, farmyard and alehouse; everywhere a direct and convincing familiarity’ – and an entirely antithetical ‘mood’ which he described as ‘the airier pleasures to be found in the confusion of the senses, in the fun of things thrown topsyturvy, in the horns of elfland and the voices of the mountains’. This focus on Scottish literature’s ‘internal oppositions’ has, according to the editors of Beyond Scotland, occluded the extent to which these are issues not of Scottish provenance but offshoots of British developments – in particular, Matthew Arnold’s efforts to ‘carve out an “English” literary and racial identity from “Celtic” and “Roman” elements’. What this British context of key elements in the debate about the nature of Scottish literature reveals is, according to Carruthers, that the notion of Scottish literature, as inherited from Smith and MacDiarmid, has been shaped by a series of false oppositions – ‘indigenous versus imported, nationalism versus internationalism, essentialism versus cosmopolitanism’ – which have profoundly warped our understanding of Scottish literature. The ‘real’ nature of Scottish literature will only come into view when it is placed in a different context:

Throughout Scotland’s long experience of the vagaries of European and global religious contention, war, trade, emigration and immigration, Scots themselves have shown a greater gift for interdependence than independence – a value that eludes and obviates the kinds of false opposition created out of a yearning for wholeness that we located at the heart of Scotland’s critical self-consciousness. Interdependence is not the opposite of independence, but in fact reveals the folly of recourse to the latter term in the cultural domain. Independence is little more than an illusion or an aspiration that has been projected onto the cultural sphere through its persistent lack in the political sphere.

Kidd and Caruthers’ ‘British contexts’ for ‘Scottish texts’ is intended to fulfil this reorientation of Scottish literary studies in terms of ‘interdependence’ rather than ‘independence’.

Being no supporter of what I dubbed, in the 1980s, as ‘MacDiarmidism’ –

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5 Ibid., 19.
7 Ibid., 13.
8 Ibid., 14–15.
the assumption that MacDiarmid had somehow defined, once and for all, how we should understand Scottish culture – I am, nonetheless, unconvinced by this argument. It only works by ignoring the fact that MacDiarmid was not only a Scottish nationalist – as Kidd notes, one of the founders, in 1927, of the National Party of Scotland – but an internationally-oriented Marxist. As a Marxist, MacDiarmid set Scotland in the context of a global capitalism in which the British Empire had been the dominant force and, against that, the vision of a different kind of world economy which could be brought about by the international solidarity of the proletariat. A Scottish essentialist is, in Kidd’s sense, one for whom, ‘If a unitary Scottish culture is adulterated with draughts of Englishness or some other foreign tincture, then it is at best a diluted version of what it might be, or worse a poisonous brew dangerous for Scots to consume’ (Le&U, 3). Nothing could be further from MacDiarmid’s view of Scotland: ‘Some other foreign tincture’ is precisely what MacDiarmid was in search of. For the editors of Beyond Scotland, Hugh MacDiarmid ‘not only embraced the self-contradiction of the “Caledonian antiszyzygy”, but sought to make it the basis of a revived national art’:

a revived national art was, however, for MacDiarmid, very far from bounded by Scottish ‘essentialism’. MacDiarmid’s masterpiece of the 1920s, A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle (1926), includes translations from Russian, Belgian, German and French poets as well as a long quotation in the original Italian from Dante. It is through a gesture to the then recent work of T.S.Eliot that the poem berates the ways in which Burns has been misappropriated by Burns Clubs –

I’m haverin’, Rabbie, but ye understaun’
It gets my dander up to see your star
A bauble in Babel, banged like a sixpence
’Twixt Burbank’s Baedeker and Bleistein’s cigar.

The reference is to Eliot’s ‘Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar’ from Poems (1920), a volume which confirmed Eliot as the most radically innovative of contemporary poets. This – along with London-based journals such as A.R.Orage’s The New Age – is the context of MacDiarmid’s development of the ‘Scottish Renaissance’ of the 1920s. If it is true (and I doubt if it is) that there has been ‘an assumption – at least among literary scholars – that identity is indivisible’ (Le&U, 15), it is not a view that can be traced to MacDiarmid. The Drunk Man’s ‘identity’ is precisely the refusal of traditional and stereotypical – perhaps even ‘essentialist’ – versions of Scottishness in favour of a Scotland open to European modernism and in dialogue with the arts in other parts of the continent:

* Ibid., 11.
(I kent a Terrier in a sham fecht aince, 
Wha louped a dyke and landed on a thistle. 
He’d naething on ava aneth his kilt 
Schönberg has nae notation for his whistle.) . . .

(Gin you’re surprised a village drunk 
Foreign references s’uld fool in, 
You ha’ena the respect you s’ud 
For oor guid Scottish schoolin’).  

Scottish drunks, Scottish ‘Terriers’ – ‘territorial solders’ – and Scottish poets speak the language of European innovation, not the language of Scottish essentialism, and in a key passage the Drunk Man tries to synthesise the literary genius of the emergent literatures of West and East, American and Russian, in the figures of Melville and Dostoevsky:

‘Melville, sea-compelling man, 
Before whose wand Leviathan 
Rose hoary-white upon the Deep,’

What thou hast sown I fain ’ud reap 
O’ knowledge ’yont the human mind 
In keepin’ wi’ oor Scottish kind, 
And, thanks to thee, may aiblins reach 
To what this Russian has to teach, 
Closer than only ither Scot, 
Closer to me than my ain thoacht, 
Closer than my ain braith to me . . .”

If a Russian – ‘This Christ o’ the neist thoosand years’ – is closer to MacDiarmid than any Scottish writer, in what sense can he be seen as resistant to anything but past elements of an essential Scottish tradition? Scotland has to be remade not out of Scottish ‘essentialism’ but out of an international engagement with many modern literatures. If, sometimes, these are invoked to counteract the ‘draughts of Englishness’ which Scottish culture has had to imbibe in such large measures, MacDiarmid is nonetheless prepared to invoke the major figures of English

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literature – such as Coleridge or Blake – when they give voice to a sufficiently appropriate insight. Thus ‘The Seamless Garment’, which appeared in *First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* in 1931, starts with an epigraph from Samuel Taylor Coleridge –

\[
\text{Whene’er the mist which stands ’twixt God and thee}
\text{Defecates to a pure transparency.}\]

As Christopher Ricks notes in his edition of Eliot’s early poems, ‘defecate’ is a word used by Eliot several times and in Coleridge’s use is equivalent to ‘purification of the mind from whatever is gross or low’ (*OED*, 2).\(^{13}\) The lines were quoted by Arnold in his essay ‘On Translating Homer’\(^{14}\) and its use by MacDiarmid reveals how little of ‘essential Scottishness’ defines the context of a poem which invokes both Lenin and Rilke as equivalent figures in the development of modern European culture:

\[
\text{Lenin was like that wi’ working’ class life,}
\text{At hame wi’t a’}.
\text{Hi fause movements couldna been fewer,}
\text{The best weaver Earth ever saw.}
\text{A’ he’d to dae wi’ moved intact,}
\text{Clean, clear, and exact.}
\text{A poet like Rilke did the same}
\text{In a different sphere,}
\text{Made a single reality – a’ a’e oo’ –}
\text{O’ his love and pity and fear;}
\text{A seamless garment o’ music and thought}
\text{But you’re ower thrang wi’ puirer to tak’ tent o’t.}\]

The poem is addressed to the workers of Scotland but its range of reference is not defined by Scottish boundaries. If there is an ‘essential’ Scottishness it is one which can only be grasped by a journey through European and, indeed, world literature. MacDiarmid’s vast poem dedicated to James Joyce – *In Memoriam James Joyce* (1955), subtitled ‘A Vision of World Language’ (1955) – underlines that his poetry is not to be bounded by Scotland: what MacDiarmid rejects is a Eurocentric – and,

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\(^{15}\) MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, I, 312.
therefore, and even more determinedly, an Anglocentric – conception of what counts as valuable in world culture:

(For unlike you, Joyce, I am more concerned
With the East than the West and the poetry I seek
Must be the work of one who has always known
That the Tarim valley is of more importance
Than Jordan or the Rhine in world history).\(^\text{16}\)

II

For Kidd, the difference between Scottish literary criticism and modern Scottish historiography is that there ‘has been no serious attempt to introduce the insights of the new British history into Scottish literary scholarship’ (Le\&U, 21). The ‘new British history’ to which he refers is the ‘four nations’ version of the history of ‘these islands’ and their imperial territories originally proposed by J. G. A. Pocock in 1975,\(^\text{17}\) and at least partially fulfilled in 1989 by Hugh Kearney’s *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations*.\(^\text{18}\) Pocock takes his beginning from a comment of A. J. P. Taylor’s in his volume of the *Oxford History of England* that the term ‘Britain’ has no meaning:

It is, he says, the name of a Roman province, which never included the whole of modern Scotland, and was foisted upon the English by the inhabitants of the northern kingdom [Scotland] as part of the parliamentary union of 1707. Moreover, he continues, the term ‘Great Britain’ – which properly denotes not more than the Anglo-Scottish Union – is nonidentical with the term ‘United Kingdom’, since the latter’s scope included the whole of Ireland from 1801 and the dark and bloody rump of that island from 1922.\(^\text{19}\)

Pocock, however, wants to resist such Anglocentric starting points in order to give new meaning to ‘British’ history in the context of Britain’s then recent entry into the European Economic Community – enacted by Ted Heath’s Conservative government in 1973 and cemented by a referendum held under Harold Wilson’s Labour government in 1975 – and the possible ‘Europeanisation’ of British history that this reorientation might involve. Such a Europeanisation, Pocock suggests,

\(^{16}\) Hugh MacDiarmid, *In Memoriam James Joyce* (Glasgow, 1955), 70.
\(^{19}\) Pocock, ‘The Limits and Divisions of British History’, 601.
would be a betrayal of the ‘new Britains’ of the Commonwealth – especially Canada, Australia and New Zealand, countries whose individual histories would make no sense except in the context of the expansion and application of British values in their new territories. A truly ‘British’ history would be a history of the Atlantic archipelago (a geographically neutral term for what once might have been described, to the offence of some in that territory, as the ‘British Isles’) but also of the oceanic expansion of the peoples of the archipelago to North America, Africa, significant parts of Asia and the South Pacific. Nonetheless, Pocock finds it impossible to avoid the judgment that ‘the pattern of “British history” is one of the steadily increasing dominance of England as a political and cultural entity’, as a result of which ‘there are extremely powerful and valid professional and historical reasons pressing us towards the continuation of the Anglocentric perspective.’ For Pocock, neither Ireland nor Scotland has the historiographic resources to resist their incorporation into this Anglocentric narrative, so if there is to be a ‘British’ history it must come from those at a greater distance from the English centre and, in particular, from the Australasia where he himself grew up as a New Zealander. ‘I would be suspicious of myself’, he writes, ‘if I thought I were sounding any kind of patriotic trumpet’, but he nevertheless thinks the ‘settler’ societies are best placed to develop ‘British’ history as one capable of acknowledging the diversity rather than the anglocentricity of British experience:

I have tried to present the projection of ‘British history’ – for lack of a better word, since it necessarily includes Irish – which treats our derivation by placing it in a context of inherent diversity, replacing the image of a monolithic ‘parent society’ with that of an expanding zone of cultural conflict and creation.

Pocock’s version of ‘four nations history’ hardly resounds with the optimism of Kidd’s insistence that, in recent years,

the subject of Britishness has come to the forefront of historical concerns. In particular, historians of political thought have drawn attention to the richness of early modern Scottish engagement with ideas of Britishness and union. The Union of 1707, it transpires, was a much more sophisticated affair – arguably much more principled indeed, a matter of preserving the Revolution principles of 1688–9 – than a simple transaction

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20 Ibid., 610.
21 Ibid., 613.
22 Ibid., 617.
23 Ibid., 620.
whereby its corrupt elite was bought and sold for English gold. Early modernists have also been alert to the phenomenon of concentric loyalties; a British political allegiance did not diminish an emotional identification with Scotland. (LeU, 17)

The notion of ‘concentric loyalties’ does not square (if I may be allowed that pun) with the asymmetry of the Union. Given England’s increasing preponderance in terms of population, its gravitational pull would produce anything but ‘concentric’ orbits to the ‘Britishness’ of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, something increasingly evident in the latter territory as its version of ‘Britishness’ has diverged radically from the values of mainland Britain. Indeed, a recent attempt to apply ‘four nations’ historiography to the modern period points out that the ‘four nations’ account of British history has only really worked for the seventeenth century, in the period of the building of the English constitutional framework. Thereafter Welsh, Irish and Scottish histories are necessarily subservient elements to the major narrative of that English political history. This would accord with Kidd’s own argument in his first book, Subverting Scotland’s Past, even though, in Literature and Union, he implies that a ‘British’ history can be uncomplicatedly discerned in the modern period. Many contemporary historians have not seen the emergence of ‘four nations’ history in this unifying perspective. As Naomi-Lloyd and Margaret Scull summarise the arguments,

It could be suggested that the field was ultimately tracing the origins of institutions, structures and concepts that would come to be understood as ‘English’, such as the state, parliament and constitution. Keith M. Brown, for instance, has warned that this ‘risks taking us back to a more sophisticated version of old-fashioned anglocentric constitutional history.’ Nicholas Canny, one of its foremost critics, has remarked that ‘much of what appears as “new British history” is nothing but “old English history” in “Three-Kingdoms” clothing.’ Ironically, with state formation its ‘unifying problematic’, the New British History could thereby stand accused of perpetuating the very practice Pocock denounced. If Ian McBride’s chapter . . . is correct and Pocock’s project comprised ‘a more subversive agenda’ that entailed ‘provincialising England’, then the New British History could

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24 Naomi Lloyd-Jones and Margaret M. Scull (eds), Four Nations Approaches to Modern ‘British’ History: A (Dis)United Kingdom? (Basingstoke, 2018).

be said to have done the opposite: recentralising England and further peripheralising its neighbours.26

‘Four nations’ history may allow Welsh, Scottish or Irish historians to place their own national history alongside English history but it does not mean that ‘British’ history has ceased to be English, just as the Scottish backgrounds of a Tony Blair or David Cameron did not prevent them presenting themselves as mainstream Anglo-British politicians. Kidd’s belief that ‘the subject of Britishness has come to the forefront of historical concerns’ may be true (at least of his own work),27 but it is a ‘Britishness’ which is not necessarily identical with the Britishness projected by ‘early modern Scottish engagement with ideas of Britishness and union’.

This is reflected in Kearney’s attempt at constructing a ‘four nations’ history of these Isles, in which he was – however reluctantly – driven towards the conclusion that Britishness was, in the end, indistinguishable from the hegemonic spread of Englishness. In his introduction, Kearney stresses that the discipline of history – at least in its professional development from the late nineteenth century – was rooted in the German critical method that emphasised ‘the role of “nations” in history’,28 and which saw historical development as the expression of the nation’s fundamental character. In Germany, only recently unified, such a method underlined the unity of purpose that the newly incorporated nation was intended to fulfil. In Britain, ‘national’ history based on these principles was achieved by prioritising English history, an identification that could be traced through the sleight-of-hand by which ‘English historians shifted between the use of “British” and “English” as if the two were somehow equivalent’.29 A ‘national’ Anglo-British history was the necessary outcome of the ‘incorporating Union’ of 1707: Welsh, Scottish and, after 1801, Irish histories were simply sub-plots to the narrative of English history. Kearney, however, wanted to undo this unifying account in two ways. Firstly, he wanted to emphasise that ‘episodes which are generally recognised as having been of decisive importance in the history of the various “nations” of the British Isles in fact transcended the national boundaries of a later date’.30 Whether we are looking at ancient events such as the Roman Conquest and the Barbarian invasions or more modern events such as the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution, none could be understood except through ‘something

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26 Lloyd-Jones and Scull (eds), Four Nations Approaches to Modern ‘British’ History, 7.
27 See his Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland 1500–2000 (Cambridge, 2008), which suggests the Union of 1707 was the outcome of Scottish debates about the virtues of union in the previous three centuries.
28 Ibid., 1.
29 Ibid., 2.
30 Kearney, The British Isles, 3.
wider than a national framework’, and in terms not only of ‘the relations between the various Britannic societies of the period concerned’ but of their relations to European developments.\textsuperscript{31} In effect, the new ‘four nations’ history had to stop being purely about the four nations and to set them in the context of broader European narratives. Secondly, however, Kearney wanted to emphasise the extent to which, although there were four ‘nations’ in the Britannic story, they had shared in many of the same experiences: ‘A Britannic approach . . . would emphasise how much these cultures have experiences in common’.\textsuperscript{32} ‘Four nations’ history thus disentangles the histories of Wales, Ireland and Scotland from the forced unifications of English history by invoking a wider European context while at the same time underscoring how much the four nations have, in fact, ‘in common’. The unity rather than the diversity of the four nations is the ultimate aim of this kind of ‘four nations history’, just as a shared and harmonious Britishness is the outcome of Kidd’s ‘four nations’ perspective.

But there is a darker side to Kearney’s account, for he sees the origins and the ongoing dynamics of ‘four nations history’ as shaped by a conflict for supremacy between ‘Celts’ and ‘Anglo-Saxons’. It should be made clear, however, that these terms do not refer to distinct ‘races’ but to broad linguistic and cultural differences. The Celtic and Germanic languages are both Indo-European . . . We should do better to see the British Isles from the fifth century onwards as an arena in which several Celtic cultures and several Germanic cultures competed with each other.\textsuperscript{33}

It was a competition, however, in which the Anglo-Saxons succeeded in imposing their culture increasingly widely across the British Isles. In an ironic sidestepping of the history of ‘nations’, Kearney focuses on what he calls ‘cultures’ and their ‘subcultures’, thus, for instance, separating Wales into two different communities: ‘the Welsh-speaking, Calvinist Methodist north-west and the more cosmopolitan, English-speaking south indicate the drawbacks of speaking in terms of a single Welsh nationality’.\textsuperscript{34} One of the four nations, it seems, has disappeared from history, and the effect is not to give validity to these various cultures and subcultures but simply to chart, at each stage of ‘British’ history, the extent to which they have succumbed to the power that was increasingly extending its control over the whole of the British Isles. So, ‘Calvinistic Methodism was particularly strong in Welsh-speaking north Wales’

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{33} Kearney, \textit{British Isles}, 4–5.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 8.
and it was ‘[p]erhaps only by being allied with a popular movement of this kind that the language survived’.\textsuperscript{35} In the course of the eighteenth century, however, ‘the situation was transformed, thanks largely to the zeal of churchmen’,\textsuperscript{36} with the result that ‘although the language of Calvinistic Methodism was Welsh . . . there was little that was distinctively Welsh in their Sabbatarianism and their dislike of secular amusements’. In sum, ‘when every allowance is made for the importance of the Welsh language in this period, the fact remains that Wales became subtly anglicised’.\textsuperscript{37} The experience of the gradual erosion of a Welsh-speaking subculture is noted, but the experience of loss, of how it felt to those undergoing the transformations of Anglicisation, has disappeared. A history of the British Isles as a series of interacting cultures and subcultures turns out to be the same in its consequences as Kidd’s four nations history – an ineluctable transition to an anglicised world which erased the culture of its Celtic contestants.

If four nations history is, as Kearney suggests, about what the four nations have in common, one of the things that three of those nations have in common, from MacDiarmid’s perspective, is the imposition on them of the English language, English history and English cultural priorities as the pattern to which they have to conform. MacDiarmid reads the literary and cultural history of ‘these islands’ as the product of the conflict between an Anglo-Saxon English that has pursued an ‘Ascendancy Policy’ designed to negate ‘all intercourse with Irish, Welsh, and Scottish Gaelic, the Scots vernacular, and even its own dialects’.\textsuperscript{38} MacDiarmid asserts the values of poetry in Scots and Gaelic – and, indeed, in Latin – as part of a ‘three nations’ struggle to defend the languages of Scotland, Ireland and Wales against the presumed dominance of Ascendancy English. At the same time, he is quick to point out that the English have been so unaware of their own history that they have failed to understand their own linguistic heritage and thus the values of England’s dialects: England ‘attempted to disown its own Anglo-Saxon sources in the same fashion, and only the gallant fight put up by the “Saxon Nymph”, Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756), succeeded against the most obstinate opposition in securing that place for Anglo-Saxon in English Studies without which, today, the latter would hardly be thinkable at all’.\textsuperscript{39} This is not a defence of an ‘essentialist’ conception of Scottish literature: it is, rather, what we might call a ‘four languages’ perspective – including a defence of English itself, in its various historical and dialectal forms – against the claims to linguistic dominance of a modern pan-British English. According to Kidd,

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 139.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 138.
\textsuperscript{38} MacDiarmid, \textit{Golden Treasury}, xxii.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
any such attempt at a defence of a distinctive and separate Scottish culture is a refusal of the Union and its consequences. He quotes from the *Claim of Right* (1988), produced by the Constitutional Steering Group of the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly, that,

Scottish nationhood does not rest on constitutional history alone. It is supported by a culture reaching back over centuries and bearing European comparison in depth and quality…Since the Union, the strength of that culture has fluctuated but there is no ground for any claim that, overall or even at any particular time, it has benefited from the Union. (*L&U*, 6)

Kidd’s response is to point out that most of what counts as Scottish literature has been produced within the ambit of the Union, and that the Union has, therefore, whether consciously or not, been supportive of Scottish cultural achievement. What this ignores, however, is the extent to which many Scottish writers actively sought to resist Anglicization, not simply because they wanted to assert some simple, essential Scottishness but because they thought, like Allan Ramsay, that a combination of the Scots and English linguistic traditions was much richer than that of ‘Ascendancy English’.

That I have exprest my Thought in my native Dialect, was not only Inclination, but the Desire of my best and wisest Friends: and most reasonable, since good Imagery, just Similes, and all Manner of ingenious Thoughts, in a well laid Design, disposed into Numbers, is Poetry. – Then good Poetry may be in any Language. – But some Nations speak rough, and their Words are confounded with a Multitude of hard Consonants, which makes the Numbers unharmonious. Besides, the Language is scanty, which makes a disagreeable Repetition of the same Words. – These are no Defects in our’s, the Pronunciation is liquid and sonorous, and much fuller than the English, of which we are Masters, by being taught it in our Schools, and daily reading it; which being added to all our own native Words, of eminent Significancy, makes our Tongue by far the completest . . .

Ramsay’s project is not one of ‘essential Scottishness’ but of a hybrid Scoto-English – a project which was, of course, to be consummated in the works of Robert Burns.

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Equally, Kidd ignores the modern development of English literature since its professionalization in the late nineteenth century and its extension across the higher education field in the 1950s. In that period, Scottish literature was effectively written out of what was to count as ‘English Literature’: Walter Scott disappeared – he is referred to only in a footnote in F.R. Leavis’s *The Great Tradition* (1948) – and Burns is not included as a major poet of the Romantic period, a period which comes to be one the hallmarks of the greatness of English literature. The invention of the academic study of Scottish Literature as a distinct discipline in the mid-twentieth century was undertaken in order to resist the erosion of Scottish literature from ‘British’ English literature, with its assumption that a fundamentally English version of a unitary Eng. Lit. should be the only mode of literary appreciation across the four nations. In that context, it was indeed difficult to see how Scotland and Scottish literature had benefitted from the Union, no matter how many Scottish writers had managed to make successful careers for themselves in London.

As support for his argument, Kidd cites the case of Scottish novelist A.J. Cronin, whose books sold in huge numbers – he was possibly the best-selling British novelist of the 1930s – as compared with the meagre sales of MacDiarmid’s works. But who now in Eng. Lit. would give any attention to Cronin’s novels? The articles that have been written on his work have almost all been in medical journals, exploring the ways in which his novel of 1937, *The Citadel*, might have influenced the public into a positive response to proposals for a National Health Service.\(^4\) Otherwise, Cronin is remembered among Scottish Literature scholars primarily for the fact that his first success, *Hatter’s Castle* (1930), was clearly based on – if not a direct imitation of – George Douglas Brown’s *House with the Green Shutters* (1901). Kidd opposes Cronin to MacDiarmid and asks,

Should questions of literary value entirely obscure issues of wider social influence and representativeness? The historian notes that the high literature of Scottish Renaissance was a minority pursuit, which had minimal political impact, as the SNP would win its first seat in a wartime by-election only in 1945 and its first seat in a general election in 1970. Quite apart from these inherent differences of disciplinary perspective, there is also the possibility that literary critics have quite simply got things wrong, and have failed to contextualize Scottish writers with appropriate sensitivity and discrimination. (*L&U*, 16)

Literary criticism, however, is about texts which survive their original context of publication, and which therefore retain value over time, and in the era of ‘modernism’ many of those who are now recognised as its most important contributors had, initially, tiny audiences as compared with successful ‘middlebrow’ writers like Cronin. The changing nature of the audiences for literature is one of the standard explanations for the rise of experimental modernism. Kidd assumes his contrast is between Scottish insularity and an openness to a much wider British audience, but the contrast actually puts MacDiarmid on the side of Joyce, Eliot, Pound and Woolf in terms of his literary importance, and reveals how similar was the relationship of that international cohort of writers to mainstream literary production.

Nor are literary critics in Scotland as myopic as Kidd suggests, since many of them have been engaged in the development of the new sub-discipline of the ‘history of the book’ that links literary study with history, sociology and the relations between authors, agents, publishers and audiences. The aim of this sub-discipline is not to promote individual texts into the literary canon (though occasionally this might happen) but to understand the dynamics which have shaped the literary worlds of the past and which produce such phenomena as the ‘soon-to-be-forgotten bestseller’. The idea that ‘literary critics have quite simply got things wrong’ by having failed to take proper account of the difference in the size of audiences for conventional best sellers as compared with works of innovative modernism fails to recognise the fundamental shift in the relation between author and audience that produced the literary modernism the 1920s. In this context, Cronin’s ‘success’ was precisely a consequence of his literary failure: he failed to produce works which could interestingly survive his immediate context. Of course, literary critics will sometimes get things wrong, since there can be no certainty in arts disciplines: our judgments have to be tested and retested as our contexts change. But that goes too for Scottish historians, who ‘might simply have got things wrong, and have failed to contextualize Scottish writers with appropriate sensitivity and discrimination’. From a literary critical perspective this is all too evident in Kidd’s account of MacDiarmid as the source of Scottish ‘essentialism’.

III

One of the consequences of Scottish literary criticism’s ‘essentialism’ is, according to Kidd, that it has given inadequate attention and inappropriate valorisation to

\[42\] See, for instance, the four volume *Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2004–12)
‘Anglicization, assimilation, cultural integrity, and Anglo-Scottish hybridity’ (LeU, 3). A glance at the standard histories of Scottish literature would put such an assertion seriously in doubt. The second volume of the four-volume Aberdeen University Press History of Scottish Literature (1987–8), covers the period 1660–1800 and was edited by Andrew Hook whose primary field of study is American literature: his book on Scotland and America: A Study of Cultural Relations 1750–1835, remains the foundational work in the field, and by no stretch of the imagination could it be described as a product of Scottish ‘essentialism’. His volume of The History of Scottish Literature contains substantial chapters on ‘James Thomson and the Anglo-Scots’ (by Mary Jane Scott) and on ‘James Boswell: Biography and the Union’ (by Gordon Turnbull), both Thomson and Boswell being authors whom Kidd regards as neglected by Scottish literary criticism. Indeed, Mary Jane Scott’s chapter on Thomson might have been designed to pre-empt Kidd’s belief that Scottish literary critics ignore ‘Anglo-Scottish hybridity’. Of Thomson’s style, she writes:

English as a written medium thus came more readily to Thomson than did Scots – and Latinate English particularly so. Thomson’s Latinate language has always come in for harsh criticism; insensitive readers even today find it distasteful, even comical. What they rarely acknowledge is that both written and spoken Latin, as well as Latinate English, were comfortable natural idioms for the educated Scot in Thomson’s day – more natural even than written Scots.43

She also declares that Thomson’s late poem, The Castle of Indolence (1748), is a poem ‘in the manner of Spenser’ and ‘an Anglo-Scottish masterpiece’.44 Equally, The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, published in 2007, has a chapter by one of its editors, Susan Manning, which explores ‘Post-Union Scotland and the Scottish Idiom of Britishness’.45 Manning begins with James Craig’s plan of Edinburgh’s New Town in which ‘Scottish Britishness proudly announced a public, civic identity, fostered but not circumscribed by the post-Union political state’,46 and ends with John Buchan, whose ‘heroes embody the compound North British

44 Ibid., 95.
46 Ibid., 46.
identity that escapes racial typing, narrow nationalism and single voices. Such articles underline the extent to which there is a substantial body of Scottish literary criticism that has been thoroughly engaged with the kinds of issues Kidd believes it to have ignored or rejected.

Kidd may again have been encouraged in his belief that Scottish literary criticism is defined only by a myopic essentialism by some Scottish literary critics who have argued that Scottish literary criticism has been so transfixed by ‘tradition’ and ‘continuity over time’ that it has failed to engage with new developments in the discipline of English literature: in particular, it has failed to engage with ‘theory’, in the period when ‘theory’ took on a determining role in the emergence of new forms of literary analysis. Eleanor Bell, for instance, contrasts Scottish literary studies with Irish literary studies and the latter’s engagement with ‘postmodernism and post-nationalism’ as compared with the ‘insular focus on tradition-inspired’ approaches in Scotland. Such views give credence to the notion that Scottish literary studies are anti-theoretical, and may therefore appear to support Kidd’s view that Scottish historians, because of their ‘four nations’ perspective, have a more theoretically sophisticated approach to the Scottish past than the country’s literary critics. However, there are in Scotland a number of major contributors to the ‘four nations’ account of seventeenth-century Britain, such as Willy Maley, whose Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature: Shakespeare to Milton (2003) precisely addresses many of the issues raised by a ‘four nations’ perspective on British history. Equally, Murray Pittock took a ‘four nations’ perspective in his British Academy Chatterton Lecture on ‘Burns and British Poetry’. And while theoretical debates may not have been as pronounced in Scotland as they have been Ireland – in part, of course, because Irish literature is far more marketable in North America than is Scottish literature – the issue of Scotland’s relation to ‘postmodernity’ has been given significant attention in North America, by critics such as Jerome McGann, with his proposal that Walter Scott is the first postmodernist, and, in Scotland, by scholars such as Alison Lumsden, whose book on Walter Scott and the Limits of Language (2010) examines Scott in the light of ‘poststructuralist’ theories of language. She suggests, for instance, that even the ‘opening paragraph of Scott’s first novel’,

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47 Ibid., 56.
48 Eleanor Bell, ‘The Question of Tradition’ in Miller and Bell (eds), Scotland in Theory, 84.
signals an awareness of the problematic nature of language, the fact that words carry with them, as Derrida would put it, traces of an earlier meaning which consequently resist any purely referential function, positing, instead, clusters of pre-existing connotations that pull against any form of ‘uncontaminated’ discourse.\(^{51}\)

None of this suggests that Scottish literary studies is a theoretical waste land, and many of the major contributions to Scottish literary criticism over the past thirty years have been seriously ‘theoretical’, from Penny Fielding’s *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (1996) with its deployment of Walter Ong and Jacques Derrida to explain how the written and the oral are mutually deconstructing in Scottish writing, to Matthew Wickman’s *Literature After Euclid: The Geometric Imagination in the Long Scottish Enlightenment* (2016), which demonstrates that key elements of modern theoretical discourse ‘were hardwired into the Enlightenment and its legacy’.\(^{52}\) Equally there have been ‘new historicist’ or ‘new materialist’ accounts of Scottish writing, such as Richard B. Sher’s *The Enlightenment and the Book* (Chicago, 2007), Ian Duncan’s *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton, 2007) and Nigel Leask’s *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford, 2010). And there have also been a substantial number of theoretically informed feminist interventions ranging from Douglas Gifford’s and Dorothy McMillan’s *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing* (Edinburgh, 1997), Robert Irvine’s *Enlightenment and Romance: Gender and Agency in Smollett and Scott* (Oxford, 2000) through Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson’s *Scottish Women’s Writing: 1920s to 1960s* (East Linton, 2000) to Glenda Norquay’s *Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women’s Writing* (Edinburgh, 2012). Similarly, Scottish critics have adopted the language developed by postcolonial theorists and applied them to the Scottish situation. While Scotland could not, like Ireland, claim to have been the first postcolonial territory in the English-speaking Empire, the issue of whether it was or was not a cultural, if not a political, colony has resonated with many Scottish critics, most notably, perhaps, in Douglas Mack’s *Scottish Fiction and the British Empire* (Edinburgh, 2006), which applies postcolonial ‘subaltern’ theory to Scottish writing. As Graeme MacDonald asserted as long ago as 2006, ‘Any argument that Scottish culture, like that of other members of the “Celtic Fringe”, is in some sense disqualified from serious consideration as a postcolonial subject has now been rendered obsolete by the

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\(^{51}\) Alison Lunsden, *Walter Scott and the Limits of Language* (Edinburgh, 2010), 84.

emergence of a body of cross-disciplinary studies building on foundational texts of the 70s, 80s and 90s.\textsuperscript{53}

IV

The irony of Kidd’s insistence on Scottish literary criticism’s ‘essentialism’ and its consequent lack of theoretical sophistication is that Scottish literature has itself become, for many around the world, the exemplar of a literature which is particularly responsive to the issues raised by the various iterations of ‘theory’, and particularly the ‘strong’ versions of theory that stem from poststructuralism and deconstruction. Randall Stevenson, in ‘A Postmodern Scotland?’, notes that ‘critics working outside Scotland’ and seeking to elaborate the relevance of concepts of the postmodern ‘have regularly applied them to Scottish writing’.\textsuperscript{54} And it is on that basis that Evan Gottlieb uses Walter Scott’s works in Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory (London, 2013) to trace the lineaments of theory as it has emerged from the apparent ‘death of theory’ in the early twenty-first century. Gottlieb juxtaposes Scott novels with the theoretical frameworks of Žižek, DeLanda, Bhabha, Butler, Foucault, Agamben, Habermas and Derrida precisely because Scott’s works are so presciently theoretical – they anticipate the theories by which they can be productively interpreted by a contemporary critic. The same is true of the ways in which Byron has come to be read as a prescient deconstructionist\textsuperscript{55} and Robert Louis Stevenson as a prescient post-colonialist.\textsuperscript{56}

Scottish literature and its criticism is more visible now to a huge array of international scholars than it is has ever been, and is used more regularly for the testing of new, theoretically-inspired criticism than has been the case at any point in the past. In part this is the result of institutional developments – as, for instance, in the establishment of a specific Scottish section of the Modern


\textsuperscript{54} Randall Stevenson, ‘A Postmodern Scotland?’, in Carruthers, Goldie and Renfrew (eds), Beyond Scotland, 209–28, at 209.


Language Association (MLA) in the United States, or of specific Scottish panels at the conferences of the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE), as well as the success of innovations such as the International Congress of Scottish Literature, first held in Glasgow in 2014. In part, it is also because of the increasing visibility of contemporary Scottish writing in an international marketplace, a visibility which depends on its identifiable ‘Scottishness’, that is, its difference from rather than its implication in Englishness/Britishness. And yet, despite providing the modern world with some of its key myths – one need look no further than Jekyll and Hyde, or Peter Pan – as well as some its most enduring characters – Sherlock Holmes, for instance – Scottish literature and Scottish writers can continue to be invisible from the perspective of the discipline of English Literature. The case of Burns, as Murray Pittock has highlighted, is instructive: after 1945, Burns gradually disappears from consideration not only in the number of articles published on his works in literary journals but also from the histories of the Romantic period in English literature. Despite the fact that so many of the major Romantic poets were deeply influenced by him, Burns becomes the ‘invisible’ poet of British Romanticism.\(^{57}\) Even the more recent developments of ‘ecocriticism’, in which, as James C. McKusick, emphasises, ‘the poets with the deepest “roots” are often those of working-class origin,\(^{58}\) manage to overlook Burns. Priority goes instead to John Clare because he provides the continuity of an English tradition, whose ‘ecological vision emerges from this commitment to his local environment, a “native place” where the “rhyming peasant” can gain an intimate knowledge of the interrelationship of all life-forms.’\(^{59}\) Equally, McKusick emphasizes the ecological importance of the work of Scottish-born John Muir, whose defence of wilderness became the foundation of much preservationist activism in the United States. McKusick, however, suggests the sources of Muir’s ecological vision in terms of a specifically English romanticism:

Muir’s personal library (which is now located in the Huntington Library collection) includes copies of the poetical works of Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley and Byron; it also includes five volumes of poetry and prose by Coleridge. Muir’s annotations to Coleridge’s *Poetical Works*, *Biographia Literaria*, *Lectures on Shakespear*, *Table Talk*, and *Theory of Life* reveal a

\(^{57}\) Murray Pittock, ‘Robert Burns and British Poetry’, 194: ‘In the late 1930s, more articles were published on Burns (57) than on Coleridge or Blake, and he was on a par with Byron; by the 1960s, he had sunk to a quarter of Coleridge’s total and half Blake’s, lying altogether well adrift of the canon he had helped to define’.


remarkable degree of intellectual engagement with Coleridge’s holistic conception of the natural world.\textsuperscript{60}

What this fails to acknowledge, however, is that as important Muir’s library was to him, it was not as important as the travels which provided the materials for his own writing, and that he always travelled with his copy of Burns, that most ‘deep-rooted’ of ‘peasant poets’.

The ‘writing out’ of Burns and Scott from English-British literature is symptomatic of why a ‘four-nations’ account of British culture always, in the end, runs up against an Anglocentric version of ‘British’ history and ‘British’ literature as simply the expansion and imposition of English culture on its neighbours and peripheries. The choice is whether – like Kidd – to submit to what is presented as the inevitability of that process or whether, despite the overwhelming odds, to oppose it: MacDiarmid opposed it and so has much of Scottish literary criticism. To denigrate that opposition by suggesting that it is inward looking (‘navel gazing’), or is in denial about Scotland’s necessary involvement with an institutional and economic system dominated by London, is to refuse to recognise that a true ‘four nations’ history would assign as much validity to those who opposed the harmonisation of the cultures of the four nations as to those who accepted it.

V

According to Kidd, ‘four nations’ history is built on the recognition that national identities, as argued by Benedict Anderson in \textit{Imagined Communities} (1983), are complex fabrications, and that national consciousnesses are artificial constructs that depend upon ‘processes of imagination’ (\textit{L&U}, 16). Anderson’s account of those ‘imagined communities’ is, however, riddled with contradictions and evasions. For instance, he begins by defining the nation as an ‘imagined \textit{political} community’ but the ‘political’ subsequently disappears, leaving only an ‘imagined community’. The transition is crucial because ‘political’ implies debate and opposition, whereas the nation, for Anderson, is the essential site of a sense of a communality which knows and recognises no internal opposition: the ‘nation-as-imagined-community’ is simply the ‘nation-as-imagined-unity’:

\footnotesize{\ldots there is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests – above all in the form of poetry and song. Take national anthems, for example, sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 189.
other utter the same verse to the same melody. The image: unisonance... How selfless this unisonance feels! If we are aware that others are singing these songs precisely when and as we are, we have no idea who they may be, or even where, out of earshot, they are singing. Nothing connects us but imagined sound.61

But this is precisely not what national anthems do: it is not the ‘unisonance’ of our relation to all our fellow travellers in this moment in time that they celebrate but the continuity that connects the present to the past, that re-connects this present moment to those past moments in which the anthem was previously sung or to which its lyrics gesture. It is not a shared present that is being celebrated but a shared past – a shared past whose ructions, conflicts and divisions can now be accepted as parts of a common narrative. That past, of course, can only be present in the present by virtue of imagination, which is why Anderson’s predecessor in the analysis of the nation, Ernest Gellner, so distrusted nationalisms, whose imaginings of the past were fabrications of a supposed unity of experience and purposiveness that belied the reality of territorial exploitation and class conflict. Anderson wants to distinguish his version of the nation-as-imaginary-construct from Gellner’s on the basis that ‘Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences’ that he assimilates “invention” to “fabrication” and “falsity”, rather than to “imagining” and “creation.” But Anderson’s own language heads rapidly in the same direction, for he insists that ‘all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined’,62 a statement whose consequence is that the word ‘imagined’ (like the world ‘political’ in his original definition) becomes redundant: ‘community’ is always imagined; the word community necessarily means something imagined. To stress the ‘imagined’ in ‘imagined communities’ is to imply that there are kinds of communities which are not imagined, or that there are some communities which are more imaginary than others: ‘in world-historical terms’, Anderson writes, ‘bourgeoisies were the first classes to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis.’63 How is ‘essentially imagined’ different from just ‘imagined’? The answer, it appears, was that bourgeoisies were literate enough to read novels and newspapers, for it is novels and newspapers which reinforce the ‘imaginary’ in our sense of our communities. The novelistic or journalistic representation of our social reality corrupts the reality it (re-)presents: ‘fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which

62 Ibid., 6.
63 Ibid., 77.
is the hallmark of modern nations’. The novel or newspaper as an imagined representation of the real is transformed into the representation of an *imaginary* reality, and it is this imaginary object which constitutes the true nature both of the modern nation and of the nationalism to which it gives rise. All nationalisms are fictions that conceal from us the truth of the reality in which we live – except, of course, that all modern communities are in this sense fictions, and such fictions, from Anderson’s perspective, are inescapable. Reality has disappeared and we are left only with the fictions which, even when we know them to be fictions, cannot be wiped away to allow us to see, if not the world as it really is, then at least a less imaginary one.

Kidd seems to believe that few Scottish historians or literary critics ‘have contemplated the implications of Anderson’s work for Scotland and Britain’ since ‘Scottishness, so the logic of the Anderson thesis runs, is no more natural or authentic than Britishness’ because ‘all forms of nationhood . . . are imaginative confections’ (L&U, 16). Kidd himself, however, does not seem to have considered the full implications of Anderson’s thesis, since if ‘Britishness’ is simply an illusion of the imagination, then the defence of ‘British Contexts’ for ‘Scottish Texts’ is simply the piling of one illusion on another. Why waste our time on disputing whether Scottish or British versions of an ‘imaginative confection’ that we all know to be illusory should have precedence over the other? If Scottishness and Britishness are both equally fictional there can be no basis for judging between them as the appropriate context for the interpretation and understanding of (supposedly) Scottish or, indeed, British texts.

This self-defeating outcome is, in fact, the necessary consequence of the profound contradictions in Anderson’s thesis, but what it points toward – though without engaging with it – are those contradictions that Jacques Derrida unveiled as the inevitable impossibility of bounding or restraining the ‘context’ in which any text might be read. All texts are capable of generating multiple meanings depending on the ‘context’ in which they are set and those contexts are beyond the control of their author or, indeed, of their historical epoch. This is why Derrida’s and other versions of poststructuralist ‘theory’ are particularly disruptive of the discipline of history when that discipline asserts itself to be capable of discovering, uncovering or recovering the realities of the past – as, for instance, when ‘four nations’ historians assert their account of the seventeenth century in these isles to be more accurate than previous accounts. From a ‘theoretical’ perspective, such claims for the truth-value of the discipline of history are simply *rhetoric*: as Pierre

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64 Ibid., 36.
65 For a detailed discussion of Anderson’s struggle to make sense of his own theory, see my essay ‘Benedict Anderson’s Fictional Communities’ in Alisatair McCleery and Benjamin A. Brabon, *The Influence of Benedict Anderson* (Edinburgh, 2007), 21–40.
Kolossowski puts it, in considering Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols*, ‘the world as such is only a fable. A fable is something which is told, having no existence outside of the tale… Religion, art, science, history, are so many diverse interpretations of the world, or rather, so many variants of the fable.’ Whatever the difference in its research contexts or in the questions it poses, ‘four nations history’ is not a different kind of history: it may present events from a different distance, or from a different angle, as compared with other kinds of history, but it cannot overleap the problems of representation posed by Derrida to anything that is textual. Equally, it remains subject to the kind of doubts raised by works such as Hayden White’s *Metahistory*, which begins from what White describes as the modern ‘revolt against historical consciousness’:

the historical consciousness on which Western man has prided himself since the beginning of the nineteenth century may be little more than a theoretical basis for the ideological position from which Western civilization views its relationship not only to cultures and civilizations preceding it but also to those contemporary with it in time and contiguous with it in space. In short, it is possible to view historical consciousness as a specifically Western prejudice by which the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society can be retroactively substantiated.

Kidd’s ‘four nations’ history is still history, and is as linguistically underpinned and as ideologically motivated as any other kind of history. As John Kerrigan notes in a book which Kidd takes to be one of the few literary analyses to take ‘four nations’ history seriously, such history can never be ‘free from the risk of falling into Anglocentrism’ because dealing with texts that have ‘been written in English/Inglis may in fact pull discussion more strongly toward the heartland of Anglophone literary production’. ‘Four nations’ history is neither more ‘objective’ than other forms of history, nor value-neutral: in 1999, reflecting back on his original proposal for a new British history, Pocock noted the ‘difficulty historians sometimes have in counting higher than two, so that they think that, of any two histories, one must be truer or more important than the other’.

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Counting to four may be a significant achievement for some historians, but it does
not produce history that is four times more true: it is still ‘writing’, and subject
to all the dubieties from which writing cannot escape, one of the most important
being ‘context’. As Derrida queries, ‘Is there a rigorous and scientific concept of
the context? Does not the notion of context harbour, behind a certain confusion,
very determined philosophical presuppositions? . . . [because] a context is never
absolutely determinable.’70 All language can be taken out of context – inserted
(or, in Derrida’s terms, grafted) into a new context in which its original meaning
is displaced. Ironically, Kidd’s introduction is titled ‘Union and the Ironies of
Displacement in Scottish Literature’, though the irony of the indeterminacy of
all contexts, their inevitable emplacements and displacements, seems not to have
entered the discussion.

On the other hand, acknowledgment of the problems of the spoken and the
written sign, and of the indeterminacy of meaning, is one of the reasons that
Scottish literature has proved so amenable to theory. From the mock epistolary
style of Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) – which Kidd takes
to be one of the few novels that directly address the issue of the Union – to
Walter Scott’s creation of surrogate narrators who offer themselves as the ‘real’
source of Scott’s fictions, the certainty of the origin of, or the point of reception
of, any linguistic communication is continually set in doubt by Scottish authors.
Scott’s narrators claim partiality to neither of the sides in the historical conflicts
whose events they narrate, for, as Jedediah Cleishbotham asserts in *The Heart of
Midlothian* (1818), ‘when the prelatists and presbyterians of old time went together
by the ears in this unlucky country, my ancestor (venerated be his memory) was
one of the people called Quakers, and suffered severe handling from either side’.71
By displacing his own authorial decisions to Cleishbotham, ‘schoolmaster and
parish-clerk of Gandercleugh’, Scott evades responsibility for how he represents
the conflicts of the past but thereby doubles the fictionality of his narrative: it is
a historical tale told by a fictional author who has heard the story from another
(fictional) character in a novel which goes out of its way to advertise rather than
conceal its fictionality. Each level of the novel’s narrative sets in doubt how it is
to be interpreted, how it is to be contextualised and it was on the basis of such
self-deconstructing narrative strategies that Jerome McGann was able to claim
Walter Scott as a postmodernist. In his novels and poems, Scott is continually
pointing out his own relationship to his texts, and pointing out, despite their piling
up of historical detail, the ways in which they are self-consciously fictional. This

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‘postmodern’ approach produces a meta-level commentary on the text from within the body of the text itself, thus disrupting the fictional frame, with its assumption that we can be given access to the reality of the past. The novel treats of historical events but does so with a self-conscious awareness that history has to be narrated and that narrative is never innocent. It is a novelistic methodology which can be read as prefiguring White’s *Metahistory*, with its insistence that all history-writing is governed by generic conventions – history as tragedy, comedy, irony or satire – and as such is much closer to literature and to the fictional than ‘professional’ historians in search of the historical ‘truth’ of the past would have us believe. The ‘reality’ offered by history is, as in Scott’s novels, an illusion rhetorically constructed by ‘acts of emplotment’ that turn the multitudinous events of the past into a particular kind of narrative, governed not by ‘truth’ but by generic conventions. Such challenges by theory to the foundations of the discipline of history have, as far as one can tell, left no mark on Scottish historiography, whereas theory has left a profound imprint on Scottish literature and its criticism. The problem of the written and its relationship to contexts which may profoundly alter its possible meanings have been absolutely crucial to literary criticism in Scotland since the 1970s, but ‘contexts’ pose no such problems to Kidd and (most of) his contributors. For them, the British ‘context’ of Scottish writing is a historical reality which Scottish literary critics have ignored in order to obscure the (true and real) Britishness of Scottish writing since long before 1707. No further context – and no further question about context – is required.

VI

Why, then, has the ‘reality’ of this British context had such little acknowledgment by Scotland’s literary critics, or, indeed, in Scottish writing? According to Kidd, it is because unionism represents the ‘banal’ and therefore unnoticed reality of modern Scotland:

If we accept, as some historians do, that the Union was so taken for granted that it became an unnoticed part of the background to Scottish public life, then this might help to explain its invisibility. Something so normal, so uncontroversial, was unlikely to set pulses racing. This is what has come to be known as ‘banal unionism’, a union so well established as to need no defence or justification, with the result that unionism was mute and inarticulate, part of the ‘wallpaper’ of Scottish life. ‘Banal unionism’ has yet to become a term of art in Scottish literature. But was ‘banal unionism’ a literary as well as a political phenomenon? Is the relative marginality of the
Union in Scottish literature between the mid-eighteenth century and the mid-twentieth century a literary manifestation of ‘banal unionism’?

Unionism, Kidd wants us to believe, fails to make a regular appearance in Scottish writing because it is so ‘normal’ as to require no explanation or dramatization: it does not appeal to the desire for ‘difference’ on which Scottish literature has depended:

The study of union and its curious displacement in Scottish literature brings us close to the invisible core of Scottish culture, mundane workaday quotidian Scottishness, of the sort that lacks exoticism or the romance of difference. Behind the overt trappings of an assumed Highland identity lies an invisible and rarely trumpeted Lowland consciousness; behind Celticism, a Teutonic identity, which was the dominant form of Scottish self-consciousness throughout the nineteenth century; behind nationalist posturing, unionist realism; behind industrial working-class machismo, bourgeois norms little different from those in Middle England.

Scotland is a normal part of an undifferentiated Britishness: all its differences are ‘assumed’ and illusory, mere imaginations as compared with an unnoticed ‘unionist realism’. If we are to follow Anderson’s argument, of course, this cannot in fact be any kind of ‘realism’ but only a ‘unionist imaginary’ masquerading as the ‘real’.

Kidd is forced into this notion of a ‘banal unionism’ because the Union appears to be so utterly invisible in Scottish literature. Perhaps, however, the question needs to be reversed – why is the Union of 1707 so important to contemporary Scottish historians? The three hundredth anniversary of the Union in 2007 was accompanied by a raft of publications about Scotland and the Union, although there seemed to be almost none about England and the Union. In English/British history, the Union is a footnote to the War of Spanish Succession, or simply the legalisation of England’s already effective control over its ‘sceptered

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72 I count over twenty in the catalogue of the National Library of Scotland in the period 2005 to 2008.
73 Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan’s State of the Union (Oxford 2005) and the British Academy’s Enlightening the Constitutional Debate (2014) both discussed England’s role in the Union but in the context of the Scottish constitutional crisis.
74 See, for instance, Christopher Lee, This Sceptred Isle: The Making of the British (London: 2012; 1997), 295: ‘As long as Scotland and England had separate Parliaments it was always possible that the Scottish Parliament could follow, for instance, a totally different foreign policy. And at the time of the War of Spanish succession, this was important. Imagine the difficulties if Scotland chose to support a different side, particularly as it had always enjoyed a special understanding with France.’
The Union’s importance to Scottish historians may not be because of the importance of the event itself but rather because of its narrative value: it represents an ending (‘bought and sold for English gold’\textsuperscript{76}) and a beginning to which can be attributed all the transformations of Scottish life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But is this, perhaps, entirely the wrong context in which to try to understand the Scottish people’s relationship to Union? What if the Union was not invisible because it was ‘banal’ but invisible because it did not very much matter? After all, Scots in Scotland retained their church, their educational system, their legal framework, all the institutions that defined and shaped their day-to-day local existence. As far as Union politics were concerned, the bulk of Scots had no say until the late nineteenth century and so the politics of the United Kingdom, except in moments of possible revolutionary ferment, had far less relevance than the politics of their towns or cities or, even more importantly, of their religious communities. The Union had little impact on life \textit{within} Scotland, because, if we follow Lindsay Paterson’s argument, the nation continued to insist on, and to exist within, its own autonomous institutional traditions.\textsuperscript{77} Perhaps Scottish historians have been so fixated with the narrative of Union that they have failed to recognise that they ‘have quite simply got things wrong, and have failed to contextualize’ Scottish events ‘with appropriate sensitivity and discrimination’ (\textit{Le&U}, 16). Appropriate ‘sensitivity and discrimination’ might suggest that the Union as a political event involving two nations has obscured the fact that it was, from a Scottish perspective, primarily a union between two empires: the actually existing English Empire and the phantom Scottish Empire left behind by the failure of the effort of the ‘Company of Scotland’ to establish a Scottish colony at Darien. Political union in 1707 was only a mask for the real aim of Scottish society, which was the establishment of a Scottish empire – a Christian Scottish Empire – an aim which was to be fulfilled in the following two centuries not only by the mass emigration of Scots to North America, various parts of Africa, Australia and New Zealand but by Scotland’s missionary zeal for converting the heathen and for establishing in those territories distinctively Scottish institutions – not only churches, schools and universities but medical schools and their associated botanic gardens, as well as newspapers and publishing companies. The Union might have been invisible but the Empire was not. As Linda Colley suggested in \textit{Britons: The Forging of the Nation} (1992),

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\item\textsuperscript{75} See, for instance, Jonathan Clark, \textit{From Restoration to Reform: The British Isles 1660–1832} (London, 2014), 179: ‘The Dublin and Edinburgh Parliaments were increasingly subjected to the London government, and when the Edinburgh body threatened to break free its existence was terminated in 1707.’
\item\textsuperscript{76} Robert Burns, ‘Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation’.
\item\textsuperscript{77} Lindsay Paterson, \textit{The Autonomy of Modern Scotland} (Edinburgh, 1994).
\end{itemize}
For some Scots, though, it was less the job and trading opportunities that empire provided, than the idea of empire that proved most compelling. If Britain’s primary identity were to be an imperial one, then the English were put firmly and forever in their place, reduced to a component part of a much greater whole, exactly like the Scots, and no longer the people who ran virtually the whole show. A British imperium, in other words, enabled the Scots to feel themselves peers of the English in a way still denied them in an island kingdom. The language bears this out very clearly. The English and the foreign are still to inclined today to refer to the island of Great Britain as ‘England’. But at no time have they ever customarily referred to an English empire. When it existed, as in retrospect, the empire has always been emphatically British.\footnote{Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation (London: Vintage, 1996; Yale UP 1992), 136.}

Colley’s suggestion that it was the Scots who made the Empire British was given a different orientation by John M. MacKenzie’s suggestion that a ‘four nations’ account of British history should be applied to the Empire as well – that there was no single ‘British’ Empire but English, Scottish and even Irish and Welsh empires operating under the same flag,\footnote{John M. MacKenzie, Scotland and the Empire: an inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Lancaster on 13 May 1992 (Lancaster, 1995).} a suggestion which was amply illustrated in 2001 by Michael Fry’s The Scottish Empire.\footnote{Michael Fry, The Scottish Empire (Edinburgh, 2001).} The context of a ‘four nations’ Empire may explain one of the abiding mysteries of Scottish history – the country’s failure to produce a nationalist politics in the era when nationalism became a driving force in European history.\footnote{Kidd attributes this lack of a nineteenth-century nationalism and, therefore, a lack of a self-conscious unionism, to the power of ‘banal unionism’: ‘Between the mid-eighteenth century and the emergence of the Scottish Question in the 1970s there was no credible, sustained or widely supported Scottish critique of the Anglo-Scottish Union, and as such no call for an articulate ideology of Anglo-Scottish unionism’, Kidd, Union and Unionisms, 24.} Scotland did not need the kind of ‘resistant’ nationalism that led, in Ireland, to independence in 1922, because it was the all-too-effective source of a ‘projective’ nationalism that sought to impose new versions of its own institutions in territories across the world. Empire was the visible context of Scotland’s invisible unionism because the Union was only a means towards Scotland’s imperial ambitions. The Union might be invisible in Scottish literature, but the Empire, from Smollett’s Roderick Random to the South Sea tales of Robert Louis Stevenson or Muriel Spark’s African stories, was not. Acceptance of an incorporating British union may have been the apparent decision of 1707 but
it was not its real purpose – Empire was that purpose, and it is Empire, not Union, that shapes both Scottish history and Scottish literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Union was not invisible because banal but because it was insignificant in comparison with the pressing opportunities of Empire and imperial connections in Scottish cultural life.

As a result, ‘four nations’ history as defined by Kidd is precisely the *parochial* history of these islands: Scotland was situated, from the mid-eighteenth century to the fifth decade of the twentieth, in a multi-state history in which the most important cultural influences were not necessarily those of London but those of far more distant places of Scottish migration. The United States and Canada were, for many – perhaps even for most – Scots, as close to Scotland as England, and even Australia and New Zealand became, increasingly, part of Scotland’s imagination of its place in the world.\(^{82}\) Scotland’s culture was reshaped not by Kidd’s ‘Anglicization, assimilation, cultural integrity, and Anglo-Scottish hybridity (*L&U*, 3) but by an imperial and, later, by a decidedly and decisively American context which encouraged Scots to see themselves as, like Americans, Canadians and Australians, unassimilated by Britishness. As American capital provided the infrastructure which, from the Singer Sewing Machine plant established in Clydebank in 1867, to the role of NCR in Dundee in the creation of ATMs in the 1970s, to the filming of Diana Gabaldon’s *Outlander* novels in a studio in Cumbernauld in the 2010s, only a Pocockian history that included the United States as well as the settler colonies could do justice to Scotland’s cultural and literary relationships across the world of Scottish migration.

Kidd’s version of ‘four-nations’ history remains fundamentally the history of assimilation by and to England, but Scotland’s involvement with Empire and its aftermath has given it a very different orbit from the ‘concentric circles’ so beloved by those who can only see Scotland as nestled within the Union. The Union was Scotland’s stepping-stone to a very much broader world with which the country has been far more involved than it has been with the increasing banalities of Anglo-British culture. Cultural Americanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries redrew the border that distinguished Scotland from England, as Scots enthusiastically adopted and adapted American products and American cultural artefacts. It is no accident (as they used to say in literary histories) that one of the most important of modern Scottish novelists, James Kelman, spent some of his teenage years in Los Angeles as the son of Glasgow migrants, and has a brother who remained there and is an American citizen and a

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\(^{82}\) See, for instance, the touring itineraries of such Scottish celebrities as Andy Stewart, the Alexander Brothers and Billy Connolly.
Kelman insists that his influences were ‘from Russian literature, some German, some French, and some American’ but that ‘there was absolutely nobody in English literature’; equally, almost all the major Scottish poets of the second half of the twentieth century developed their styles by learning not from English precursors but from Americans – Douglas Dunn from Robert Lowell, Edwin Morgan from William Carlos Williams and the Beats, Liz Lochhead from Sylvia Plath. They did so because ‘Americanization’ gave them a way out of what had become an increasingly defeatist ‘Anglo-Scottish hybridity’ ruled over by an ‘English Ascendancy’ culture. ‘Essential Scotland’ as a literary category exists only in the imaginations of those who are committed to British History as the fulfilment of ‘essential Englishness’.

VII

As all literary critics know, stories are constructed from a point of view that assigns certain characters to the foreground and others to the background of a plot. Authors can play games with these boundaries by, for instance, killing off the character who appears, initially, to be in the foreground and allowing one of those in the background to become central to the narrative, or by making the narrator, who appears to be no more than an observer of the action, instrumental in its actual development. The same – if less self-consciously – is true of the historian, and it is therefore significant that what is important in modern Scottish literature for Kidd are not the narratives foregrounding working-class vernacular, as exemplified by James Kelman and Anne Donovan, nor the apocalyptic science fictions of Alasdair Gray or Iain M. Banks, nor even the bestselling genre fictions of Ian Rankin or Val McDermid. In the foreground of Kidd’s account of modern Scottish writing is Douglas Galbraith’s *The Rising Sun* (2000), which is about the attempt to found a Scottish colony at Darien. This novel and Kidd’s focus on it are part of a longstanding pattern in Scottish culture, in which Darien needs to be imaginatively revisited every time that Scotland looks as though it might threaten to gain some degree of political independence. John Prebble’s *The Darien Disaster* was first published in 1968, when the SNP had begun its initial rise to public notice after the election of Winnie Ewing in the Hamilton by-election in 1967. The book was reissued by Mainstream in Edinburgh in 1978 on the eve of the first devolution referendum and issued again by Birlinn, under a slightly different title, in 2000 in the immediate aftermath of the establishment of the Scottish parliament.

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84 Ibid., 178.
Galbraith’s novel was published in that same year – perhaps it was intended for 1999? – and a play on Darien, entitled *Caledonia*, was produced by the National Theatre of Scotland in 2010, the year in which a minority SNP government was threatening to become a majority one. ‘Darien-as-history-as-literature’ is used to insist that Scotland’s history is the history of a failed nation which was redeemed by the Union of 1707. Kidd’s summary of the novel reinforces this particular reading of Scottish history:

*The Rising Sun* reads in several places like a parable on nationalist delusion. Galbraith describes the Darien mania that induced otherwise canny Scots to invest in a speculative colonial project (whose failure swallows much of Scotland’s limited capital resources). Moreover, he uses the Darien colony itself – Caledonia, which had its chief settlement at New Edinburgh and a defensive enclosure at Fort St Andrew – as a dark satirical microcosm of the Scotland the colonists had left behind. Soon ‘Caledonia is divided’; given ‘our tendency to faction’, the colony becomes a ‘fractured society’, each segment of which was preoccupied ‘with its own enemies’. In echoes of the anti-Presbyterian tradition in Scottish literature, the colony’s rigid Presbyterian chaplains strive to make Caledonia a dour place of righteousness . . . (*L&U*, 34–5)

Darien is not simply a colonial failure but a ‘dark satirical microcosm’ of the Scotland from which the colonists had departed. Kidd lights on this particular novel out of all the Scottish novels of the new century because it accords with his own conception of Scottish history as faction-ridden and regressive in comparison with the English history which backward Scotland had the good fortune to join. A very different view of Scotland’s relation with Empire might have been drawn from James Robertson’s *Joseph Knight* (2003), but Kidd also chooses to focus on Josephine Tey, pen-name of Jennifer M. Henderson, who wrote a radio play about the unjust hanging of three English seamen in Scotland in the run-up to the decision to pass the Act of Union. This event also appears as the conclusion to *The Rising Sun*, revealing that those who were against the Union were not representatives of the values of an ancient nation but simply a degraded and self-destructive mob:

On the scaffold the men died and were still. The crowd glared at the bodies in sulky, disappointed silence. The hangmen cut the ropes with a hatchet. The bodies fell and were thrown on a cart.
Only when the great sullen mass formed a procession behind the cart did it begin to find its voice again. Even so, the attempts at jubilation were never whole-hearted... The crowd was jaded and resentful. As it approached the city and was pressed together by the narrowing road it began to tear at itself. Insults and accusations were thrown from group to group. It kicked and punched and bit.  

The mob is the antithesis of Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ as ‘unisonance’. The implication is clear: the ‘rising sun’ which had been the hope invested in Darien will give way to the rising sun of the Union. The narrator-protagonist escapes from faction-ridden Scotland to journey towards London, in the company of a Jewish merchant who says,

‘Listen, son to what an old Jew has learned about countries. I know it wasn’t God who made countries. What are they for? I ask. No one could ever tell me. What sort of a thing is it that no one knows what it’s for, I ask you? Countries? Forget about them! God grant that we never have one of our own to break our hearts. No one needs a country.’ He waved his hand imperiously towards the south. ‘There’s always plenty of space in someone else’s, if you make yourself amenable.’

Kidd’s decision to highlight this novel – a good novel, but by no means among the outstanding achievements of the period – is because it fits a particular narrative of Scottish history in which Kidd has himself invested, the narrative of a blighted country redeemed by the opportunity to acquire and to contribute to the culture of its more advanced neighbour. In Hayden White’s terms, history as tragedy turns into history as comic romance: what might have been a tragic ending as Scotland descended into the bankruptcy of its Darien escapade is, in fact, a new beginning, in which the Union – that *Rising Sun*, foretelling the Enlightenment to come – will pay back the nation’s losses. Thereafter, its most talented individuals can, like the protagonist of Galbraith’s novel, set off for the future that is London, leaving dark, delusional and fanatic Scotland behind them.

The account of the history of Scottish literary criticism in *Literature and Union* is no less dominated by delusion: ‘There is a tale to be told’, Gerard Carruthers tells us, ‘about the solipsism of twentieth-century Scottish literary criticism’ (*L&U*, 349), its curiosity being its origin in Gregory Smith’s tracing, in *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*, of a ‘rather manic sensibility in Scottish literature’

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86 Ibid., 516.
(L&U, 351). By treating Gregory Smith as the origin of the discipline of Scottish literature, Carruthers ignores the discipline’s long eighteenth- and nineteenth-century development, which culminates in John Hepburn Millar’s compendious A Literary History of Scotland, published in 1903, or the generous space devoted to Scottish literature in The Cambridge History of English Literature (1907–21). The discipline of Scottish literature was not born in the aftermath of the First World War, in conjunction with the ‘self-determination’ principles of the Treaty of Versailles. It had been implicated from the very beginning of the discipline of English Literature – which Robert Crawford attributes to Adam Smith and Hugh Blair87 – by Blair’s public defence of the ‘Poems of Ossian’ as the expression of an early Celtic society which retained all the elements that made the works of Homer so distinctive. Carruthers suggests that a fake ‘celticism’, derived from Matthew Arnold’s account of the English imagination, shaped the emergence of the discipline of Scottish literature: ‘Arnold’s mid-Victorian encouragement of Celticism lent permission for a whole raft of Scottish critics to advance a strong Celtic component in their accounts of Scottish literature’ (L&U, 350). This, however, ignores the fact that Arnold was himself responding to Macpherson’s Ossianic poetry, and to Blair’s account of it, and rejecting the attributions of falsity to its ‘celticism’:

Make the part of what is forged, modern, tawdry, spurious, in the book, as large as you please; strip Scotland, if you like of every feather of borrowed plumes which on the strength of Macpherson’s Ossian she may have stolen from that vetus et major Scotia, the true home of the Ossianic poetry, Ireland. . there will still be left in the book a residue with the very soul of the Celtic genius in it, and which has had the proud distinction of having brought this soul of the Celtic genius into contact with the genius of the nations of modern Europe.88

In a truly ‘British’ context Arnold is a latecomer and it is Blair, often accused of the Anglicisation of Scottish literature,89 who insists on the priority of Celtic literature as the foundation on which modern English literature has to be built. ‘Celticism’ is no recent and delusional product of twentieth-century literary criticism: it is absolutely foundational to what ‘British’ meant in the aftermath

89 Robert Crawford, ‘England’s Scotland’, Literature & Union, 335: ‘Part of this problem is explained by the “Scottish invention of English literature” as a university subject. Its pioneers, including Adam Smith and Hugh Blair, liked to champion Anglocentric values.’
of the Union of 1707. There could be no ‘Britain’ if there was not appropriate acknowledgment and inclusion of the Celts. British ‘contexts’ might be more appropriate if this – rather than a harmonious, undifferentiated, anglicised uniformity – was acknowledged as one of the fundamental contexts of Scottish literature and its criticism.

And Gregory Smith’s contribution might be better understood if it was acknowledged that the original lectures on which his book was based were delivered in Belfast in the aftermath of the Easter Rising in Dublin, and with the prospect of partition as the outcome of the negotiations over the future of Ireland. Smith’s account of the nature of Scottish literature was an implicit defence of the Union and of Scotland’s place in it, made in the context of the looming end of the Union after the general election vote in December 1918, which gave Sinn Féin an overwhelming majority of Irish seats at Westminster. These were seats the new MPs would not take up, planning to withdraw to Dublin to establish an independent Ireland. Gregory Smith’s account of Scottish literature was delivered in Unionist-voting Ulster as a defence of Scotland’s difference within English literature – even if a difference which was steadily being eroded – but also as an emphatic insistence on Scotland’s unassertive and unthreatening distinction within the Union, one that ensured its compatibility with a Unionist future. In other words, the British and Unionist perspective which Kidd and Carruthers complain has been ignored by Scottish literary critics was the very ground on which modern Scottish literary criticism, in their account of its origins, was built. If Scottish literary criticism has been deformed by the influence of Gregory Smith, it has been deformed not by Scottish ‘essentialism’ but by Scoto-British Unionism.

VIII

Kidd takes James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) to be the ultimate statement of ‘banal unionism’, because the original action of Hogg’s *Confessions* takes place ‘with the momentous contemporary events that comprised the making of the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707 lurking unobtrusively in the recessive backdrop of the novel, a matter of seeming indifference’ (*L&U*, 39). Despite the amount of critical attention that has been devoted to Hogg’s novel in recent years, Kidd reads it as it was first read in the 1940s and 1950s after over a hundred years of neglect: it is a novel ‘of Calvinist psychology and the antinomian excesses that – taken to logical extremes – it is liable to engender in the self-assured elect’ (*L&U*, 38). If this were indeed the central theme of the novel, there would be no need for the same events to be presented twice, once in the Editor’s account and once in Robert Wringleh’s
own. The point of the double narrative is precisely to set in doubt that the people of a later time can, as Kidd believes historians do, ‘aim to recover the values of our ancestors on their own terms’ (L&U, 16). Hogg’s point is that Wringhim’s world is simply unbelievable to the modern Editor of his text: ‘Were the relation at all consistent with reason, it corresponds so minutely with traditionary facts, that it could scarcely have missed to be received as authentic; but in this day, it will not go down that a man should be daily tempted by the devil, in the semblance of a fellow-creature’.\(^{90}\) Wringhim is a man trapped twice-over in narratives of someone else’s devising – first in the delusions imposed on him by the Devil, whom he has inadvertently invited into his life, and then by the Editor’s re-presentation of his life as one in which ‘it is certainly impossible that these scenes could ever have occurred, that he describes as having himself transacted’.\(^{91}\) Set in the context of the Editor’s secular scepticism, Wringhim’s account of himself becomes incredible. What had once been the common belief of a Christian world – the reality of Satan and his tempting of human beings to damnation – has no place ‘in this day, and with the present generation’. Even when, by an apparent miracle, the text of Wringhim’s confession survives, its intended meaning is devoured (like Scotland after the Union?) by a context it could not foresee.

Wringhim’s narrative does not simply dramatise ‘Calvinist psychology’: it dramatizes the ‘forging’ of history, in which the ‘realities’ of the past become inconceivable to a later generation, who must re-read the past as an ‘allegory’\(^ {92}\) produced by ‘not only the greatest fool, but the greatest wretch, on whom was ever stamped the form of humanity’.\(^ {93}\) However, it is the Editor of Wringhim’s text who is the ‘greatest fool’, because he is incapable of comprehending that what Wringhim’s Confession leaves to the future is the knowledge that evil and the Devil are real and have not left the world, undeflected by a mere improvement in historical circumstances. The Editor, of course, is a nineteenth-century representative of the anglicising world which Kidd takes to be the true Scotland of post-Union experience. The Scotland that Hogg presents, however, both in its religious and its folk traditions and in its modern transformations, is very different: it is a Scotland deeply resistant to secular modernity’s assumption of its historical superiority.

Perhaps it is symptomatic of the blindness of the discipline of history in Scotland that it has not engaged with the consequences of those strong versions of theory which have found in Hogg’s novel a powerful precursor because of the ways in which it puts in doubt the communicability of the past – and, therefore,

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\(^ {91}\) Ibid.

\(^ {92}\) Ibid.

\(^ {93}\) Ibid.
puts in doubt the foundations of the discipline of history itself. And perhaps it is symptomatic, too, that Scottish historians do not perceive in the *Confessions* an ironic image of their own versions of pre- and post-Union Scottish culture. And perhaps, in the end, the Scottish historian needs to look in the mirror of Hogg’s novel and see in it the distorting reflection of those who believe that they can construct the Scottish past in their own image.

‘Context’, British or otherwise, is very much more disruptive of our versions of the past than *Literature & Union* would have us believe.

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