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Table of contents

Files in PDF format

Contemporary Scottish Short Fiction: "Caledonian Polysyzygy" at Work

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The title of this thematic issue of the Journal was inspired by the seminar of the same name conducted at the 14th ESSE Conference at Masaryk University in Brno in 2018. The initial aim of the seminar's organizers, Milena Kaličanin (from the University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Serbia) and Soňa Šnircová (from Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia) was to gather and share valuable insights of the European colleagues particulalry interested in the scientific field of Scottish Literary and Cultural Studies. Since a great number of academics expressed a genuine interest in this seminar, both the morning and afternoon sessions were arranged for the presenters and eager audience. The full articles of several intriguing presenters and audience members that analytically explored the concept of "Caledonian Polysyzygy" and applied it in their reading of contemporary Scottish short fiction are included in this issue of SKASE.

It was in 1919 that G. Gregory Smith coined the term "Caledonian Antisyzygy" in order to depict the lack of organic unity in Scottish literature in particular, as well as Scottish propensity to embrace dueling polarities within one entity in general. As the concept of "syzygy" denotes an alignment of planets, Smith's phrase could literally be translated as a misaligned, scattered arrangement. Although the notion of the unexpected merging of opposing or paradoxical cultural viewpoints, or as Martin (2009: 84) put it "the idea of dueling polarities within one entity", is not solely unique to the Scots, it is "among the Scots that this contradiction becomes apotheosized" (Finlayson 1988: 22). In recent times, numerous arguments have been made against the prevalent practice of reducing Scottish polyphonic tradition to a mere set of binary oppositions. For instance, as a reaction to Smith's rather unwieldy phrase, Kelly (2009: 12) suggests a new critical term describing contemporary Scottish literature – "polysyzygy", which refers to a diverse set of "multiple alignments, plural connections, a web of interlinked ideas and words" (Kelly 2009: 12).

This thematic issue of the Journal offers a multitude of analytical interpretations of "Caledonian polysyzygy" by demonstrating a vibrant thematic and theoretical diversity in the domain of contemporary Scottish short fiction. The first two articles, by **Rachael Sumner** and **Ema Jelínková** are focused on Scottish women writing that has lately witnessed a continuing proliferation. The articles by **Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen** and **Milena Kaličanin** explore the identity issues from the perspective of the most influential male artistic voices in Scotland at present. In the similar vein, the articles by **Eva Pataki** and **Vesna Lopičić** deal with the immigrant and diasporic Scottish identity issues, respectively. **Jean Berton** offers an interesting text-context approach in his article in order to discuss Scotland's relations with the rest of the UK, Europe and America. Finally, a genuine voice of the Scottish short fiction writer **Tom Hubbard** is presented in his creative essay about "The Kilt" from his book *Slavonic Dances* (2017).

Sumner in **The Joy of Subversion - Myth and Narrative Economies in Ali Smith's Novella *Girl meets boy* (2007)** validly claims that this novella represents a reminder of the 'Caledonian polysyzygy' tendency to embrace pluralities and contradictions whereby it transcends the binaries of past and present, male and female, local and global, inviting the reader

to step into the liminal territory beyond. The author purposefully draws on theories of myth to explore the way it feeds into narrative economies - the exchange of those stories which shape the patterns of cultural identity.

The objective of **Jelínková's** paper **The Concept of "Caledonian Polysyzygy" in Kate Atkinson's Short Story Collection Not the End of the World** is to harmonize the influences of competing national as well as cosmopolitan literary traditions as they coexist in a state of polyphony in the short story collection *Not the End of the World* (2002) by the Anglo-Scottish writer Kate Atkinson. Jelinkova insightfully states that modern Scottish writing continues to be haunted by the heritage of "Caledonian Antisyzygy", as well as the historical sense of being an oppressed nation deprived of sovereignty and, by extension, voice, through becoming part of the United Kingdom. Furthermore, within an already marginalised stateless nation, the author shrewdly points to the fact that there is a doubly marginalised group of Scottish women writers, whose voices only started to be heard as late as in the 1980s. In Jelinkova's opinion, far from simply substituting the authority of one dominant discourse for another, Atkinson allows for a multitude of voices to inform her work, thus invalidating the conventional antisyzygy in favour of what might more properly be called "Caledonian Polysyzygy".

In **Scottish Polysyzygiacal Identity and Brian McCabe's Short Fiction, Aliaga-Lavrijsen** rightly asserts that at the present time, the concept of identity postulated is no longer essentialist and monologic, like the one associated to the two halves of the traditional "Caledonian antisyzygy", but positional and relational, "polysyzygiacal", to use Stuart Kelly's term (2009: 12). As this article shows, McCabe's short fiction explores Scottish identitarian issues from a renewed multifaceted and dialogic perspective, fostering an ongoing debate about what it means to be Scottish nowadays, and contributing to the diversification and pluralisation of literary representations of identity.

Kaličanin explores one of literary representations of Scottish identity in **Disillusionment and Hope in James Kelman's "talking about my wife"**. By focusing on Fromm's perception of modern individual as a mere cog that fits into the grand economic machinery, the author portrays a husband/wife relationship that serves as a potent criticism of contemporary disillusionment with politics and harsh realities of economic stagnation in Scotland (and the world at large). The author notices that the only way to restore personal dignity in Kelman's writing is to be found in the domestic sphere relying on a meaningful human interaction, long forgotten in the unjust system operating on the free market economy rules. Apart from Fromm's views, the article also relies on the theoretical insights of Bond, Rich, Marcuse and Freud.

Pataki's article, **"Nae blond wigs in Glasgae": Urban Imaginaries and Affective Relationships in Suhayl Saadi's Short Fiction,** maps the atmospheric qualities and urban imaginaries of contemporary Glasgow as portrayed in Scottish Pakistani author Saadi's fiction. Through a close reading of "The Queens of Govan" (2001c), "Bandanna" (2001a), "The Naked Heart" (2001b) from the collection *The Burning Mirror* and excerpts from *Psychoraag* (2004), the author explores the characters' social practices, memories, visions and hallucinations, as well as their bodily experiences and mental perceptions of and affective relationships with the city. Pataki potently argues that there exists a deeply phenomenological and mutually constructive

relationship between the body and the city, through which Saadi's characters are both affected by and affecting the emotional qualities and urban imaginaries of Glasgow.

In **The Cultural Web of Paterson's "Scotch Settlement", Lopičić** writes about Neil Paterson's best short story "Scotch Settlement" from the collection *The China Run: A Book of Short Stories* (1951) in the context of some traditional elements of Scottish culture preserved and persevering in settler Canada at the turn of the 19th century. The author explores a few facets of this interesting story in which two little boys steal a baby, in order to show how Paterson deals with the issues of religious devotion, family values, personal pride, orphaned childhood, kindness and love. The concepts related to Johnson and Scholes' (2008) Cultural Web model is adapted to examine the cultural environment of a Scottish family and community in Canada.

Berton in **Reconfiguring the body of Scotland** views Issue 35 of New Writing Scotland (2017) titled *SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID* as a literary correspondence of T. Devine's "Being Scottish" (2002), which enables him to apply a text-context approach in the given article. The aforementioned collection of pieces of short fiction introduces single individuals, couples and parents and children, more loosely connected characters through love and friendship, and characters belonging to folklore and legends — all being connected with Scotland. The author states that these tales lead us to open the whole collection of short fiction to interpretation: the family, or body, of Scotland, the broad community of the UK, and the broader society of men of Britain, Europe and America.

Finally, in **Absurdities and Epiphanies: "The Kilt" from my Slavonic Dances**, **Hubbard** sets his work in the context of other Scottish writers who have responded to the Prague Spring and the invasion, notably a poet of an earlier generation and longer historical reach, Sorley MacLean (1911-96). His article begins with a striking reminiscence of 1968 by the Edinburgh-born journalist Neal Ascherson, who witnessed and reported on many of the key events in late twentieth-century east-central Europe. Hubbard compares the ways in which the "little" story and the "little" poem attempt to deal with the "great" issues in life by referring to the story "The Kilt" from his book *Slavonic Dances* (2017).

In conclusion, the articles in this thematic issue of SKASE primarily represent an attempt "to portray and illustrate the burning cultural issues of modern Scotland and, hopefully, uncover the myriad of Caledonian peculiarities" (Kaličanin 2018: 1) from the perspective of Kelly's concept of "Caledonian Polysyzygy" as applied to contemporary Scottish short fiction. The mere fact that the aforementioned scholars chose a diverse range of Scottish writers and themes to write about testifies to the utmost topicality of this subject. The given articles are adequately placed into broader historical, philosophical, political and cultural contexts which is definitely beneficial to the complex task of exploration the multi-layered issue of Scottishness.

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The Joy of Subversion - Myth and Narrative Economies in Ali Smith's Novella *Girl meets boy* (2007)

Rachael Sumner

Abstract

If Caledonian polysyzygy concerns the embracing of pluralities and contradictions in contemporary Scottish literature, then Ali Smith's novella Girl meets boy is surely a joyous reminder of this tendency. Translating Ovidian myth into lived experience, Smith's work rejects categories of gender, time and place, while celebrating the transformative power of language. Composed with characteristic wit and insight, Girl meets boy is a textual space which transcends the binaries of past and present; male and female; local and global, inviting the reader to step into the liminal territory beyond. This article will draw on theories of myth to explore the way it feeds into narrative economies - the exchange of those stories which shape our patterns of cultural identity.

Key words: Ali Smith, Girl meets boy, myth, polysyzygy, Scotland, identity, narrative

Introduction: Caledonian Polysyzygy in *Girl meets boy*

If polysyzygy implies a conceptual web - the meeting and parting of disparate thematic threads – then Ali Smith's 2007 novella *Girl meets boy* encapsulates this dynamic. It is a text in constant flux, a work which deflects categorisation and a story comprised, hydra-like, of many competing, intersecting narratives. *Girl meets boy* is the product of shifting textual currents which drag the reader into potentially treacherous waters. The possibility of anything which might be termed a stable identity is contested – whether that pertains to gender and sexuality, or to nation and locality. Girl ultimately meets boy in the creation of "a whole new gender, no gender at all" (Smith 2007: 104), while binaries such as borders and margins, geographical peripheries and metropolitan centres are displaced entirely, revealing the process through which culture shifts; is made and remade.

Throughout this, Scotland emerges as a testing ground for the narrative forces at work in the novella: a product of its own linguistic and literary heritage, and of the global forces which have always shaped it. Those global forces can be detected in the homogenising tendencies of consumerism, which threaten to transform signifiers of Scottish culture into mere marketing ploys. They can also be seen, however, in the narrative economy of myth which carries tales to Scottish shores – stories which bear the subversive potential to disturb, to provoke and to change. These include narratives which stretch well beyond British frames of historical reference to ancient Greece and Rome. Identity then becomes a product of a broader referential economy: unsettled and unstable, continually rewritten in relation to a boundless and ever-changing set of narrative coordinates.

One of the myths which thus intrudes into the lives of the characters in *Girl meets boy* is that of Ovid's tale of Iphis and Ianthe from *The Metamorphoses*: female lovers inhabiting a world defined in part by strict codes pertaining to gender and the devaluation of women. Lacking conceptual space for sexual relationships which differ from this norm, Ovid's tale sees Iphis metamorphosed into a boy, and therefore capable of conforming to cultural expectations. Smith's reworking of the myth acknowledges Ovid's adherence to received narratives of sexuality and gender. As one of her characters explains when retelling the story,

"He (Ovid) can't help being the Roman that he is, he can't help fixating on what it is that girls don't have under their togas, and it's him who can't imagine what girls would ever do without one" (Smith 2007: 97). Yet, *Girl meets boy* harnesses the radical potential of metamorphosis to suggest that change is possible, vital and indeed inevitable; that narratives may always be challenged; and that we all bear responsibility for the creation and dissemination of those myths which inform culture and identity.

This paper will consider the ways in which *Girl meets boy* encourages the interrogation and re-inscription of socially and culturally ordained myths. Such a process encourages a new vision of Scotland as the locus of interplaying mythologies: physical territory re-imagined or re-shaped in the minds of the novella's characters as an arena of competing stories. Both product of the subjective conscious and of globalised systems of representation, the country is reconstructed as a third space - liminal territory in which girl meets boy, global meets local, borders cross and blur, and the potential for radical and meaningful change is opened up. Myth as a conceptual area will be explored in order to examine how that potential is achieved and the subsequent implications it carries for our awareness and understanding of Scottish identities.

Reiterations of the Iphis and Ianthe Myth

Myths themselves are polysyzygic in terms of the way they stretch beyond cultural boundaries yet remain firmly rooted in locality. While proclaiming timeless truths, they are ultimately subject to change with each re-telling. These are stories which intersect on a range of levels, whether in terms of the given mythology from which they spring or through interaction with the oral and literary heritage of the cultures into which they seep. As Lyndon Davies has observed:

> Myth […] is an endless temptation, but it is also woven into the fabric of the languages we use. Every time a poet sits down to write, a painter to paint, a musician to play, they find themselves enmeshed in a discourse that is already speaking through them and for them, nudged by an intention that relentlessly insists on the primacy of the structures of meaning that support it.
>
> (Davies 2013: 215)

Davies alludes here to the paradox which rests at the heart of myth. On the one hand its currents are so deeply embedded in our cultural circuitry that avoidance of myth is impossible. On the other hand, each successive iteration carries with it the potential for transformation and genuine change. This tension between change and continuity both structures *Girl meets boy* and functions as the novella's core dynamic. As Kaye Mitchell argues of the text,

> […] it is change that facilitates continuity; we are transformed and yet elements of the pre-transformation self-persist and develop; to be is simply to be changeable, transient. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is comprised of such stories and, in taking up this conception of metamorphosis, Smith edges towards such a 'labile' sense of identity.
>
> (Mitchell 2013: 67)

Building on Mitchell's observation, this paper will argue that three iterations of the myth of Iphis and Ianthe function concurrently within the text itself, and each refers to this change/continuity paradox.

The fundamental reiteration of this myth functions as the base narrative of the story. Anthea, the younger of two sisters, falls in love with local rebel and provocateur Robin, whom Anthea initially mistakes for a boy. In Ovid's myth, Iphis - a girl disguised as a boy - falls in love with Ianthe, another woman. Following a timely act of divine intervention, Iphis is transformed into "...the boy that she and her girl needed her to be. And the boy their two families needed. And everyone in the village needed" (Smith 2007: 99). Consequently, Ovid narrates his way around the issue of same sex love which would defy cultural norms, for "...nature, stronger than them all, consenteth not thereto" (Ovid 2002: 893-6). While the impetus of Ovid's tale is ultimately towards compliance with social expectations, Smith has her characters subvert, challenge or reject such limitations. Metamorphosis thus carries the radical potential for upsetting predetermined roles, and gender is reconceived as mutable, fluid and plural rather than binary: "I was a she was a he was a we were a girl and a girl and a boy and a boy, we were blades, were a knife that could cut through myth" (Smith 2007: 103). The myth is thus taken apart: 'cut through' even as it is retold, made to function in an entirely new context in which its revolutionary dynamic for change can be exploited.

That potential for transformation is extended in a parallel narrative in which Anthea's sister Imogen, weighted down by social expectations as family breadwinner and career woman, ultimately finds her own voice: "I'm tired of feeling things I never get to express, things that I always have to hold inside, I'm fed up not knowing whether I'm saying the right thing when I do speak" (Smith 2007: 131). Imogen's joy in finally being able to express herself - to face down the myths which have confined her - is rooted in a realisation and celebration of difference: "I come from a country that's the opposite of a, what was it, dominant narrative. I'm all Highland adrenalin. I'm all teuchter laughter and I'm all teuchter anger" (Smith 2007: 129). Scotland, its history and cultural status, are rendered here as narrative - as minor narrative, carrying the potential to disturb and upset received cultural models. The minor narrative, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, celebrates the "non-rational" (Chakrabarty 2000: 101), undermining the homogenising tendencies of the major narrative and its essentialist rhetoric. Imogen's laughter is 'teuchter'[i] laughter - a laughter which springs from her renewed sense of identity as Scottish, as Gaelic, as Highlander. As will later be discussed, the impetus of myth is towards the global and the homogeneous - the compression of time and place - whether as Ovidian tale of metamorphosis, or as function of capitalist ideology.[ii] Myth posits belief or assumption as timeless, universal truth - whether that truth is the impossibility of same sex relationships, or the "prevailing myth that thinness is more beautiful" (Smith 2007: 90). Contextualisation - whether geographical or historic - appears to offer a point of resistance to all myths, emphasising difference, alternatives and facts which undermine any pretensions towards universality. Thus Imogen's celebration of her own identity as located in difference - as minor narrative - carries with it the potential to upset dominant frames of reference and to serve as a base point for genuine change.

A second iteration of Ovid's myth occurs in Robin's narration of the story in the midst of her love-making with Anthea. Reframed by Robin, who admits to "imposing far too modern a reading on it" (Smith 2007: 91), this version is marked by digression and subversion: a new rendition or reworking of the myth through the ancient medium of oral tradition. A collaborative effort, the story is continually challenged or altered by Anthea's

interruptions and interrogations, which serve to reframe and rewrite the myth anew. Here, for example, is Robin's attempt to relay Iphis' mother's prayers to Isis:

> The woman went off to do some praying of her own. And as she knelt down in the temple, and prayed to the nothing that was there, the goddess Isis appeared right in front of her.
> Like the Virgin Mary at Lourdes, I said.
> Except much, much earlier, culturally and historically, than the Virgin Mary, Robin said, and also the woman wasn't sick, though certainly there was something pretty rotten in the state of Knossos […]
>
> (Smith 2007: 92)

Isis finds her immediate counterpart in the Virgin Mary: a subtle echo of ancient acts of goddess worship. Robin's nod to *Hamlet* invokes a further level of intertextuality; grounding the myth in alternative literary traditions. Furthermore, Anthea's interjections serve to highlight the referential nature of myth-telling, for in participating in the act of story-telling she refers back to oral-based traditions of narration which were performative and dependent on audience collaboration. Thus, while Robin claims to impose a modern 'reading' on the story, the method of storytelling itself is rooted in ancient forms of narration which stretch back to the Gaelic bardic tradition and beyond. In her study of *The Scottish Legendary* (2016), Eva von Contzen asserts that narrative intrusion is a feature of Scottish medieval literature, carried over from its reworking as oral narrative: "Indebted to patterns of oral storytelling, the narrator and his narratives form a collaborative unity in which the story level relies on narratorial comments. This, in turn, may help to explain why metanarrative is so frequent in medieval literature" (Von Contzen 2016: 67). Thus, the narratorial crosscurrents of *Girl meets boy* might be understood in terms of oral systems of story-telling; systems which have been unwittingly absorbed by the written text. Smith's story succeeds in functioning through both systems of relation simultaneously: in Robin's digressive narrative, and in its representation on the written page.

The final iteration of the myth of Iphis and Ianthe inheres in the way it resonates beyond the pages of Ali Smith's novella. If the book foregrounds the concept of renewal: of continuity in change and change in continuity, then Ovid's story becomes metonymic of that process. Effectively, Smith's text offers a replay of the concept of metamorphosis both at the macro level of narrative structure, and at the micro, atomised level of language. Almost fractal like in its construction, *Girl meets boy* embraces intertextuality at every turn, in order to demonstrate how we recycle the stories we inherit, and in doing so create our own, altered realities. Thus, for Imogen, the radical new potential that she unearths in embracing her identity as Scottish, Highlander and Gaelic enables her to reappraise stories from her own family's past – to 'reread' them in the light of this new perspective. Recalling the legend of a woman from her own clan – the Gunns – who chose death over marriage to a suitor she didn't like, Imogen observes:

> I used to think that story of my far-back ancestor was a morbid story. But tonight, I mean this morning, on this train about to cross the border between there and here, a story like that one becomes all about where we see it from. Where we're lucky enough (or unlucky enough) to see it from.
>
> (Smith 2007: 128)

Imogen undergoes a mental metamorphosis: a change in perspective, enabling her to reconceive her identity in terms of an altered relationship with the past. The story then becomes a defiant act of refusal and self-affirmation, rewritten as resistance or empowerment, rather than as a fetishising of the past. In effect, she has traded a limited vantage point for a much wider one, enabling her to re-claim this personal myth, and in doing so to reposition herself as part of a wider network of narrative threads. These are threads which extend into the oral traditions she takes from her Scottish heritage as well as outwards to those myths which she receives as both European and global citizen. The convergence of these myths gives birth to an intertextual web which is continually exploited, altered and realigned as it becomes contextualised in lived experience and the imagination. On this inherent capacity of myth for revision and renewal, Tudor Balinisteanu has observed:

> […] it is important to emphasise that each reiteration of socialisation scripts, in which social roles and social order are given anew, is also the occasion of glimpsing a realm of disorder and alterity that may be engaged with productively. Narratives thus provide the opportunity to revise the social value of myth. This revision may help to change the material practices in which the social roles and scripts derived from myths are enacted.
>
> (Balinisteanu 2009: 42)

Balinisteanu's insight is helpful in guiding us to the core dynamic of Smith's text. Metamorphosis unfolds everywhere and all the time, and thus continually offers new alignments for the construction of identity - whether in terms of gender, nationality or sexuality. Each fresh iteration inevitably brings us back to the metonymic heart of *Girl meets boy* - the transformative tale of Iphis and Ianthe, and the way in which we read our sense of self as an intertextual maze of conjoining and diverging narratives - the very essence of polysyzygy at work.

Myth and Cyclical time

The dynamic of reiteration and renewal mentioned above is writ large in the overall structure of *Girl meets boy*, which assumes the cyclical pattern of myth as opposed to chronological or linear development. Myths reach us through a process of narrative sedimentation, which Claude Lévi-Strauss formulates using an appropriately geological metaphor:

> […] a myth exhibits a "slated" structure, which comes to the surface, so to speak, through the process of repetition. However, the slates are not absolutely identical. And since the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real), a theoretically infinite number of slates will be generated, each one slightly different from the others. Thus, myth grows spiral-wise until the intellectual impulse which has produced it is exhausted. Its *growth* is a continuous process, whereas its *structure* remains discontinuous.
>
> (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 229)

This is myth reinvented as cultural DNA: a helix transcending time and space, continually meeting itself coming back, and being altered in the process. Its claims to grand truths are undermined through the act of re-narration: a return to an origin which has always slightly shifted from its impetus. If the internal logic of a myth is, as Lévi-Strauss asserts, to

overcome contradiction - to flatten out and make pliable the lived material from which it springs - then it fails on each (re)turn, since every iteration is in fact a negation of the very possibility of grand truths. Thus the cyclical form of myth disturbs, rippling out across the flow of human history, as opposed to reifying linear models of origin, development and conclusion or closure.

This circuit of parting and meeting can be seen in the imagined return of Anthea and Imogen's grandparents who have apparently been lost at sea, and are thus subsequently transformed into the subjects of Anthea's own private mythology: "They'd been kidnapped by sirens," she claims, "ensnared by Scylla and Charybdis" (Smith 2007: 23). Sailing back up the river Ness to participate in Imogen's fantasy of her marriage to Robin, they are now "...younger than the day they left" (Smith 2007: 159). Chronology, it appears - both here and elsewhere in the book - is an irrelevance when pitted against the time-travelling capabilities of the human imagination. A paradox, myth cuts through its own claims to truth to reveal the subjective interpretations of lived experience which rest beneath.

It is a paradox which is also evident in Anthea's awareness of the transience of local identities. Sitting beside the river Ness, reluctant to start her new role as a "creative" at the ironically named marketing company 'Pure', she observes:

> The river itself was fast and black. It was comforting. It had been here way before any town with its shops, its churches, its restaurants, its houses, its townspeople with all their comings and goings, its boatbuilding, its fishing, its port, its years of wars over who got the money from these, then its shipping of Highland boy soldiers down south for Queen Victoria's wars, in boats on the brand new canal then all along the lochs in the ice-cut crevasse of the Great Glen.
>
> (Smith 2007: 27-28)

Water carries an analogical function in *Girl meets boy*: its qualities of fluidity and constant flow a perfect pairing for the concept of narratorial metamorphosis. If, as will later be considered, identities function as the result of a narrative economy, then water serves as a natural economy. Its course informs the base of human existence just as stories irrigate culture. In this passage, the same river is imbued with different meanings as human experience alters it. It becomes the living artery of a community: the economy of water supplying the financial economies of the town, the basis of those fishing and shipping industries which come to define what it means to be from the Highlands and Inverness. It is the route out of this locality and into a wider world of war, of geopolitical upheaval, of globalised conflict in which young Scottish men are incorporated into a broader cultural nexus as citizens of the British Empire. And, significantly, Anthea's observation of the river leads us in a circular path from its existence pre-community, pre-nation, pre-Scotland via the technology of boat and canal, and back into the "ice-cut crevasse of the Great Glen". Those glacial realities were always there, running beneath the metamorphosis of the river: a site of departure and return, undermining the concepts of development and progress upon which Queen Victoria's wars were fought. In this apparently very local reference to a very local history, Smith draws attention to the inescapable cycles around which all myths are constructed.

"It is good to be goal-oriented," claims Imogen at one point in the book as she goes for a run. "It makes all the other things go out of your mind" (Smith 2007: 55). The irony is that her internal monologue runs in constant circles, as she fixates (among other issues) on her sister's sexuality. And just a few more paces into her run, she is paralysed: "[…] I just

stand. (I don't know what's the matter with me. I can't get myself to cross from one side to the other.)" (Smith 2007: 61). The human imagination appears parallel in structure to the circularity of myth: unable to move in straight lines. In fact, goals, chronology, development – the act of moving from point A to point B – emerge as a form of life-denial, imposing unwieldy abstractions on human behaviour and thought. Fenced in by such linear narratives, Imogen is unable to genuinely explore, understand or express herself, as she continually fails to measure up to externally imposed standards or patterns of behaviour: "I am standing at the pedestrian crossing like a (normal) person waiting to cross the road. A bus goes past. It is full of (normal-looking) people" (Smith 2007: 60). While Imogen's desperation to be seen as one of these 'normal people' results in a denial of her own self, Anthea opens up space for the subversion of homogeneity through her awareness of time as an endless cycle. Her refusal to perceive time in terms of chronology or linear narrative results, as we have seen, in an engagement with locality which stretches beyond received models and norms: "The river laughed," Anthea claims, observing the flow of the Ness. "I swear it did. It laughed and it changed as I watched. As it changed, it stayed the same. The river was all about time, it was about how little time actually mattered" (Smith 2007: 28). The river's laughter is subversive: a challenge to received perceptions of time as linear, time as progress or time as chronology. Mythical time is a paradox. The same tale transformed, it meets itself on the return. This is locality 'writing back': disproving the grand narratives which have been forced upon it, whether of nineteenth century imperialism, or of twenty-first century capitalism. The circularity of myth subverts its own claims to monolithic, universal truth. With each reiteration it is altered; undermining concomitant claims for civilising missions or the structuring of personal goals.

Myth and Globalisation

In *Girl meets boy*, Scotland proves a testing ground for the way in which myth informs identity. This process is effected through what might be termed a narrative economy in which stories are traded, transformed and received. Myth making may be regarded as a form of globalisation, with the stories which wash up on Scottish shores mixing with those the Scots tell about themselves, so that it ultimately becomes impossible to determine the boundaries between Scottish and English; European or global narratives. All are subsumed into a complex awareness of identity which is in a constant state of flux. Indeed, as Homi K. Bhabha has argued, the conceptualisation of any nation as its own intrinsic story, unmarked by the influence of external narratives, can only be achieved through "...the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood" (Bhabha 1994: 7). Thus, while Smith's Highlands birth their own myths, these inevitably find their way into a wider narratorial circuitry, and are perceived through, as it were, a bifurcated lens – a lens which might zoom in on the positioning of a myth within a given location and historical context, but which may also enable the repositioning of that myth within a wider, shifting network of interconnected stories. Stories, then, are not to be taken in isolation, but as a kind of portal or bridge, enabling transition and metamorphosis – psychological, social and cultural. "...it was always the stories that needed the telling that gave us the rope we could cross any river with," Anthea states in the closing pages of the book. "They made us be natural acrobats. They made us be brave. They met us well. They changed us. It was in their nature to" (Smith 2007: 160). Story-telling emerges as

a way of holding a dialogue with the rest of the world - a true act of polysyzygy, in which a narrative exceeds or overspills its origins, taking on new meaning as it encounters fresh models of identity. This is myth as, in effect, 'good globalisation' - respecting difference and contradiction even as it feeds into alternative narrative structures.

Countering that concept of 'good globalisation' however, is an exploration of what might be termed 'bad globalisation': of the way in which myths, when shared irresponsibly, may serve to limit or proscribe, rather than to carry liminal or transformative potential. Concerned about this possibility, Anthea asks Robin:

> I mean, do myths spring fully formed from the imagination and the needs of a society […] as if they emerged from society's subconscious? Or are myths conscious creations by the various money-making forces? For instance, is advertising a new kind of myth-making? Do companies sell their water etc by telling us the right kind of persuasive myth? Is that why people who really don't need to buy something that's practically free still go out and buy bottles of it? Will they soon be thinking up a myth to sell us air? And do people, for instance, want to be thin because of a prevailing myth that thinness is more beautiful?
>
> (Smith 2007: 89-90)

Roland Barthes famously claimed that "...everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse" (Barthes 1972: 107). Anthea's exploration of the concept would appear to reinforce that idea, positing it against a Jungian-style formulation of myth as the end product of social subconscious. Here, she suggests, myth feeds an economy which results not from basic human needs, but from the creation of needs - from the purveyance of unattainable ideals and, effectively, false consciousness. Thus water, the foundation of life becomes an abstraction - "bottled idealism" (Smith 2007: 41) – when framed within a specific form of discourse. "Semiology has taught us," states Barthes, "that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal. Now this process is exactly that of bourgeois ideology" (Barthes 1972: 142). Capitalism inheres in the reconstruction of an utterance delivered at a given historical moment - the idea that water, for example, can be sold - as a universal truth. Locating this concept within a given discursive framework - "[…] Water is history. Water is mystery. Water is nature. Water is life" (Smith 2007: 35) etc. - the message becomes calcified, and apparently admits no space for interrogation of its origins, raised as it is to the level of myth, just as other myths, pertaining to sexuality, gender or nationality also form a seeming bedrock of cultural knowledge, in spite of the fact that they inhere in discourse. "It's easy to think […] you're a mistake," says Robin at one point in the story. "It's easy, when everything and everyone you know tells you you're the wrong shape, to believe you're the wrong shape" (Smith 2007: 97). Myths, Robin suggests, have always played a role in the encryption of cultural norms - whether as Ovid's negation of same sex love, or through the encoding of water as a commercial product. Yet capitalism adds another dimension to this narrative bond, in which discursive myths feed into a capitalist economy, and purchasing power becomes an intrinsic aspect of cultural identity. This aspect of consumer dynamics is encapsulated by Jean Baudrillard in his seminal text *La Société de Consommation* (1970):

> Consumption is a myth. That is to say, it is *a statement of contemporary society about itself*, the way our society speaks itself. And in a sense, the only objective reality of consumption is the *idea* of consumption; it is this reflexive, discursive configuration,

> endlessly repeated in everyday speech and intellectual discourse, which has acquired the form of *common sense*.
>
> (Baudrillard 1998: 210)

Thus, sufficient repetition of the idea that water is a commodity may well lead to its re-encryption as such within a discursive economy. Or, as Robin states more succinctly in defacing the Pure sign, "DON'T BE STUPID. WATER IS A HUMAN RIGHT. SELLING IT IN ANY WAY IS MORALLY WRO" (Smith 2007: 43). The recoding of humans as consumers, and of human rights as needs invented by the marketplace, is bound up in the idea of modern myth encapsulated by Barthes and Baudrillard. Myth, as Barthes asserts, transforms the contingent into the eternal; the marketing ploy into a universal truth. As Kaye Mitchell writes of Anthea's observation that advertising may well be a modern mythology: "'Myth,' here, expands to encompass various kinds of cultural persuasion and manipulation; it intervenes between subject and world; it distorts self-perception; it services the economy" (Mitchell 2013: 63).

That process of intervention to which Mitchell refers - the altering of an individual's perception of the world and their place within it - extends beyond the transformation of human right into commodity. It attaches itself to an entire raft of signifiers pertaining to identity; including nationality and national identity. 'Scottishness' is thus reduced to a series of images which extend out of Pure's marketing strategy - "bottled identity," as Imogen terms it (Smith 2007: 41). During one of the Pure "creative sessions", both sisters are forced to sit through a presentation in which images of Scotland are brought up on a projector: "The town. The river I'd just thrown a stone into, running right through the centre of it. The sky, the elegant bridges, the river banks, the buildings on the banks, their shimmering second selves standing on their heads in their reflections" (Smith 2007: 35). This is the calcification of locality: its reincarnation or metamorphosis as "second self," preserved through a camera lens and sealed in by a range of signifiers intended to determine its meaning. Roland Barthes actually terms the photograph a "violent" medium, "[…] not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed […]" (Barthes 1981: 91). This notion of violence as the denial of transformation is particularly apposite with regard to *Girl meets boy*, where life is affirmed through the ability to change. Once a locality - in this case Inverness - is preserved as photographic record, it becomes in some sense fetishised; sealed within a matrix of signification, to be 'read' or categorised according to a culturally determined set of myths about Scotland. The "Tuesday creative lecture" is basically Tartanry in action, exploiting images of castles and lochs, valleys and highland cattle to provide a marketing context for a given product - "Pure water" (Smith 2007: 34-36). Where Imogen finds, in her "Teuchter" heritage, the potential for a transformative sense of self, the reductive discourse of globalised commerce flattens Gaelic culture into a few, easily absorbed symbols which can then be used to control and sell a specific myth of Scotland.

This is yet another example of the way *Girl meets boy* presents myth as paradox. On the one hand, it offers a conduit for the transmission of cultural knowledge. Myths travel, fusing with alternative narratives and identities and serving as a catalyst for change. On the other hand, a failure to engage appropriately with myths - to interrogate their origin or meaning - may lead to their acceptance as universal truths. In exploring the role of social myth in the work of contemporary Scottish and Irish women writers, Tudor Balinisteanu observes: "[…] myths permeate discursive interaction, prescribing and scripting the ways in

which subjects are constituted" (Balinisteanu 2009: xv). Myths, then, may stifle rather than energise; contributing to the categorisation of identity in terms of sexuality, gender or nationality and admitting no apparent space for alternative forms of discourse.

The Joy of Subversion

Girl meets boy, however, is an exercise in the creation of discursive space even in the midst of what appear to be the most rigid and inflexible of socially prescribed narratives. To explore Smith's subversion of myth as social construct, it is useful to refer to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival as cathartic and transformative force. Bakhtin famously construes the anarchic power of carnival in the works of writers such as Rabelais as follows:

> To permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things.
>
> (Bakhtin 1984: 34)

Criticism of Bakhtin's concept has focussed on its role in ultimately reinforcing the social and cultural hierarchies it claims to reject. As Eli Rozik points out, carnival is in a sense licensed freedom: "[…] temporary and officially restricted freedom for the sake of catharsis of functional pressure" (Rozik 2005, 210). Yet Bakhtin's theory offers another way of understanding how change and stasis might co-exist - that one does not necessarily preclude the other, and that in apparent sites of stasis, transformative traces may remain active. Bakhtin refers to this in explaining how the medieval marketplace - location for social cohesion and economic exchange is opened up to misrule and disorder:

> […] the medieval feast had, as it were, the two faces of Janus. Its official, ecclesiastical face was turned to the past and sanctioned the existing order, but the face of the people of the marketplace looked into the future and laughed, attending the funeral of the past and present. The marketplace feast opposed the protective, timeless stability, the unchanging established order and ideology, and stressed the element of change and renewal.
>
> (Bakhtin 1984: 81)

Bakhtin here stresses the potential for subversion located within the actual infrastructure and symbols of authority. Thus, the very ideological constructs on which a given culture rests, and its pretensions to timeless truths are challenged and undermined by the act of riotous joy which the feast or carnival entails. Key here is the concept of laughter: the rupturing of the social fabric through an unguarded, unrestrained, free act of expression. One is immediately reminded of Anthea bearing witness to the river's laughter; her pointed observation that "as it changed, it stayed the same" (Smith 2007: 28). If water, as previously stated, is marked analogically in Smith's novella for its metamorphic properties, then it is also marked by its carnivalesque ability to subvert - to escape, bypass or transform the conduits into which it is poured. "It's raining quite heavily," says Imogen, following a moment of love making and sexual release "[…] afterwards I can hear the rhythmic drip, heavy and steady, from the place above the window where the drainpipe is blocked" (Smith

2007: 139). Water is excess, constantly overflowing its limits, in a state of flux even while it is apparently contained or channelled; just as language, story and laughter offer a way of clearing space for subverting even the most prescriptive of cultural narratives. "I'm tired of feeling things I never get to express, things that I always have to hold inside […]" Imogen tells Paul. "I'm fed up not knowing whether I'm saying the right thing when I do speak […] Words are coming out of me like someone turned on a tap" (Smith 2007: 131). Language, then, like water, cannot be contained, and once released it poses an existential threat to the forms and structures which would seek to contain it.

The carnivalesque, in its unstymied release of language and laughter, carves up these received narratives. It is no accident, for example, that Robin dresses up, masquerade style, to deface the Pure sign: her clothes a kind of visual play on nationality and gender.

> The boy up the ladder at the gate was in a kilt and sporran. The kilt was a bright red tartan; the boy was black-waistcoated and had frilly cuffs, I could see the frills at his wrists as I came closer. I could see the glint of the knife in his sock. I could see the glint of the little diamond spangles on the waistcoat and the glint that came off the chain that held the sporran on.
>
> (Smith 2007: 43)

Duncan Petrie has argued that Scottish identity is too often constructed in terms of its 'otherness' to an England which is "bourgeois, self-interested, stuffy, repressed and effete" (19). Consequently, argues Petrie, "this kind of discourse necessarily privileges an overtly masculine and heterosexual concept of native virtue" (Petrie 2004: 19). It is interesting to note then, that Robin's visual joke in fact points to the gendered ambiguity inherent in Scottish national dress itself. Anthea perceives Robin as male because she is wearing a kilt - a piece of clothing marked by a high degree of multivalency, as Diane Tye attests in considering "the kilt's own ambiguity as a multivalent signifier of ethnicity, gender and sexuality" (Tye 2014: 193). Ali Smith here excavates and exploits the liminality inherent in one of the most salient signifiers of Scottish national identity. Space for the interrogation of cultural frames of reference can actually be created from within those reference points themselves - a kind of performance of nationality which plays on expectations, just as Judith Butler asserts that drag performances allude to "a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary" (Butler 1990: 187) In fact, Robin's role here is of particular significance. She emerges as a truly liminal figure in terms of the way she undermines straightforward binaries of gender and nationality. It is not just her ambiguous choice of clothing which troubles, but also her hybrid, outsider status: "she was a bit different," recalls Imogen, fretting over her sister's relationship with Robin, "and didn't people used to say that her mother was black, Robin Goodman, and her father was white, or was it the other way round, and was that even true?" (Smith 2007: 56). It is the lack of knowledge about Robin's origins which disturbs Imogen so much - her elision of easy modes of identification as white, Scottish, female and heterosexual. Robin's subversion of the norm is not a deliberate rejection of such categorisations, but a kind of slippage between them - a character who embodies all the contradictions and ambiguities of discourse surrounding contemporary Scottish identity. In effect, she is Bhabha's conception of the subaltern figure writ large: the inassimilable element, the minor narrative which disturbs any complacency surrounding the idea of a cohesive national subject:

> The aim of cultural difference is to re-articulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying *singularity* of the 'other' that resists totalization – the repetition that will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding-*to* does not add-up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification.
>
> (Bhabha 1994: 232, emphasis original)

Robin harnesses a carnivalesque joy in order to savage the safe distinctions between cultural norm and subaltern other through her visual puns on national costume and gender-bending acts of street theatre, which later see her and Anthea engaged in scrawling politically motivated graffiti around Inverness. This is what Bhabha refers to when he speaks of "adding-to" rather than "adding-up": the celebration of difference rather than its absorption: the carving out of subversive terrain from within epistemological, social and economic frameworks in order to shock, to challenge and ultimately to offer alternative forms of cultural performance and narrative.

Myth and Language

Finally, this article will consider language as a medium for the transmission of myth. Language, it will be argued, carries the same polarised dynamic as myth; as both limiting form of categorisation and as liminal force for change. The former conceptualisation of language and the way it informs cultural norms can be seen in Imogen's narration of a local myth concerning the relationship between English and Gaelic:

> We speak the purest English here in the whole country. It is because of the vowel sounds and what happened to them when Gaelic speakers were made to speak English after the 1745 rebellion and the 1746 defeat when Gaelic was stamped out and punishable by death, and then all the local girls married the incoming English-speaking soldiers.
>
> (Smith 2007: 55)

Language offers one of the most potent weapons in the arsenal of cultural imperialism when it is used to inscribe the values and attitudes of the coloniser. This is precisely how the English are construed in Imogen's story.[iii] To cite the Nigerian theorist and novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o:

> Language as communication and as culture are […] products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world.
>
> (Ngũgĩ 1981: 267)

Postcolonial theory is useful in drawing attention to the polysyzygic elements in Scottish literature: the way such texts are fed by cross-cultural currents which stem from a troubled history, as well as the intertextual (and inter-mythical) elements which are consequently absorbed. In Imogen's allusion to the imposition of English, the reader finds another example of 'bad globalisation' – not the mutual trading of cultural terms or narratives, but the use of cultural signifiers to stifle and repress. Yet, as with all such moments in *Girl*

meets boy, Smith hints at the possibility for subversion of the most seemingly immutable and inflexible forms of cultural signification. For even while Imogen celebrates the 'purity' of Inverness English, she refers to acts of intermarriage between Highland women and English soldiers. Some form of communication or exchange therefore took place, undermining the idea that Scottish narratives were simply written over or replaced by English ones. Furthermore, her own celebration of her "Teuchter" identity (Smith 2007: 129) offers a wonderful example of the way linguistic interpolation – to use Bill Ashcroft's term – offers a way of constructing counter-narratives which feed off, or feed back into the dominant narrative. The insertion of a Gaelic word here to stand for an entire strand of identity functions both metonymically and, as Ashcroft asserts, as a form of "counter discursive" strategy which does not, however carry "a unified anti-imperial intention, or a separate oppositional purity" (Ashcroft 2013: 47). Thus, the idea of cultural behaviour and identity as polysyzygic, rooted in varied and competing narratives, and therefore capable both of transformation and of being transformed is preserved.

Language, therefore, also emerges as paradox, infused with as much potential for repression and transformation as the myths and tropes it carries. Yet it is this transformative power which Smith ultimately foregrounds, and nowhere can this better be seen than in the challenge Anthea and Robin pose to the received myths which contribute to gender inequality. Taking their language out onto the streets, posing as "Iphis and Ianthe the message girls/boys" (Smith 2007: 133-134), the trail of graffiti they leave around Inverness can be read as a perfect example of writing back' – to borrow another term from postcolonial theory.[iv] Their language explodes across the very physical symbols of those economic and political myths which underpin cultural unity and stability: the local shopping centre, for example, or the Town House:

> Paul leads me round the Town House, where a whole side wall is bright red words inside gold. ALL ACROSS THE WORLD, WHERE WOMEN ARE DOING EXACTLY THE SAME WORK AS MEN, THEY'RE BEING PAID BETWEEN THIRTY TO FORTY PERCENT LESS. THAT'S NOT FAIR. THIS MUST CHANGE. Iphis and Ianthe the message boys 2007
>
> (Smith 2007: 134)

This is counter-discourse at the heart of hegemony itself – a carnivalesque expression of fury, and a refusal to be silenced by those myths which reinforce gender disparities. Simply put, it is language in the wrong place. It is language which cuts through complacency and demands attention: subversive, uncompromising and transformative. Yet, more than that, it is also language which serves as an example of 'good globalisation.' Here, locality – a town in the Scottish Highlands – fuses with the global. Women face the same level of discrimination everywhere, we are informed. This must change. And that change begins precisely at this given place and time, and with a perception of borders as porous and shifting, rather than as fixed and exclusionary. Inverness is as much the product of those myths it has received as those myths of Scottish identity to which it has contributed. Any challenge to those myths comes, therefore, not from outside, but from within – a subversion and rejection of what is perceived and accepted as normal, standard or mainstream. The end product of myriad discursive threads, no culture or locality ever really functions in isolation. Geography, suggest the Message Girls/Boys, poses no barrier to change, and the responsibility for myth-making rests with us.

Concluding Remarks

At the end of *Girl meets boy*, as she fantasises about her wedding to Robin, Anthea observes: "things can always change, because things will always change, and things will always be different, because things can always be different" (Smith 2007: 160). It is that possibility, that "can be" which haunts Ali Smith's novella. It is a possibility which is embedded on both a local and a global level: in the language that we use and the myths that we exchange. In this context, Scottish national identity emerges not as a cohesive system of signification, but rather as a network of narratives which feed into global patterns of storytelling and myth-making. Myths themselves are fluid discursive entities, which both inform and are informed by the cultures from which they spring. In this sense, they feed into the polysyzygy of Smith's novella: an inter-textual or inter-mythic terrain in which there are no firm borders between the local and the global, and in which stories are imported and exported as part of a narrative economy. In this fluid, textual arena the subversion of culturally prescribed norms emerges not just as a possibility, but as a necessity.

This paper has examined the way myth serves as both narrative structure and thematic core in *Girl meets boy*. The fundamental paradox of myth - that it is transformed each time it is re-told - offers potential for the subversion of inhibiting cultural norms. In perceiving myths as part of a narrative economy which surpasses both time and geography, the local may be regarded as the base point for this transformation; its own minor narratives replete with the capacity to destabilise wider mythological frameworks and their concomitant fantasies of imperialism or capitalism, of gender bias or heteronormativity. The perception of that capacity for change is founded on a subversive joy: the realisation that we may use myth against itself to break free from limiting and damaging attitudes and modes of behaviour, and to harness the potential of minor narratives to establish alternative understandings of cultural identities.

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[i] Imogen's use of the term Teuchter may also be regarded as an act of linguistic reappropriation or 'reclaiming'. Teuchter carried derogative connotations when used by lowland Scots as a term for Highlanders (Stevenson and Maclead 2000: 14).

[ii] As Jean Baudrillard asserts "Consumption is a myth. That is to say, it is a statement of contemporary society about itself, the way our society speaks about itself" (Baudrillard 1998: 193).

[iii] It is interesting to note that analyses of Scottish literature from a postcolonial perspective reinforce the principle of Caledonian polysyzygy within these texts. As Michael Gardiner asserts, "Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature are less separate trends or two sets of texts, than intricately related and often conjoined critical positionings in relation to a much longer history, which has as one of its main objects a critique of the jurisdiction of the imperial mode of British state culture" (Gardiner 2011, 1). Thus the very fact that texts such as Girl meets boy explore a shared linguistic inheritance, means they cannot avoid being read as an intertextual web of references and narratives.

[iv] "Writing back," explains Mike Hill, "means that insurgent or marginal forces are able to communicate in ways that pit the differences of imperial unity myth against itself" (220)

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The Concept of "Caledonian Polysyzygy" in Kate Atkinson's Short Story Collection *Not the End of the World*

Ema Jelínková

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to harmonise the influences of competing national as well as cosmopolitan literary traditions as they coexist in a state of polyphony in the short story collection Not the End of the World (2002) by the Anglo-Scottish writer Kate Atkinson. Modern Scottish writing continues to be haunted by the heritage of Caledonian Antisyzygy, a concept proposing a conjunction of seemingly irreconcilable opposites as the dominant characteristic of Scottish identity. Another determinant of Scottish literary production is the historical sense of being an oppressed nation deprived of sovereignty and, by extension, voice, through becoming part of the United Kingdom. Within an already marginalised stateless nation, there is a doubly marginalised group of Scottish women writers, whose voices only started to be heard as late as in the 1980s. Often using the approaches of magic realism, fantasy, and the Gothic, these women, including Kate Atkinson, revise perceived history and create unique stories of their own. Far from simply substituting the authority of one dominant discourse for another, they allow for a multitude of voices to inform their work, thus invalidating the conventional antisyzygy in favour of what might more properly be called "Caledonian Polysyzygy".

Key words: Scottish literature, women's writing, Kate Atkinson, Not the End of the World, magic realism, Caledonian Antisyzygy

Historical Background: The Tenets of Caledonian Antisyzygy

> Oxymoron was ever the bravest figure, and we must not forget that disorderly order is order after all.
>
> —G. Gregory Smith (1919: 5)

Scottish writing has a precarious position in the canon of English literature, much in the way that Scotland itself is positioned uneasily in the United Kingdom. The formerly independent Kingdom of Scotland lost its status as a sovereign state through overwrought political manoeuvres, "a series of bribes and blunders" (Gardiner 2004: 2), which culminated in the 1707 Act of Union. What was eventually to become the United Kingdom was long in the making, as the expansive Kingdom of England had already assimilated Wales in the 1536 Act of Union and was on its way to making a deal with Ireland, which joined with the Acts of Union of 1800. Scotland was never the only stateless nation in the somewhat forced political structure of the United Kingdom, neither was it the only countryless country with strong nationalist fractions on a long-term mission to oppose the union by whatever means necessary. However, when we think about which images are associated with Scotland in the popular imagination, what is most likely to come up is the wailing tune of "Scotland the Brave" played by a pipe band in Highland costumes, the larger-than-life figure of William Wallace heroically crying out for freedom as he is laying down his life for an independent Scotland, and, more recently, the heated discussions about a second Independence Referendum (IndyRef2), after the ever-hesitant Scottish electorate rejected independence in the previous 2014 vote.

"Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves," (Okri in Robertson 2003: n.p.) reads a Ben Okri quotation serving as the epigraph to James Robertson's historical novel *Joseph Knight* (2003), winner of the Saltire Scottish Book of the Year Award, which accounts for the uncomfortable and formerly not widely publicised fact that Scotland received its fair share of spoils in the British Empire's colonial enterprise. Although the current postcolonial mood facilitates non-mainstream revisionist histories, including the exposure of the significant role that Scotsmen played in the slave trade and the plantation economy, particularly in the Caribbean, the stories that the Scottish nation has historically been feeding itself are those of Scotland as a hapless victim suffering under English oppression. "If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies," Ben Okri continues to warn, but "if they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings" (Okri in Robertson 2003: n.p.). The sentiment of unearthing and re-examining one's possibly sordid and shameful national or individual past and coming to terms with its implications is manifested in much contemporary writing, Scottish or otherwise. Nevertheless, a shift in perspective does not happen overnight, and Scotland's national stories have traditionally been rooted in straightforward binary oppositions pitting against each other Scotland and England, Scots and English, Scots and Gaelic, Highlands and Lowlands, Edinburgh and Glasgow, Catholics and Protestants, Celtic and Rangers—the list goes on.

Writing in 1919, G. Gregory Smith coined the term "Caledonian Antisyzygy" to describe "the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness" (Smith 1919: 4), the intrinsic ambivalence of the Scottish character which Smith regards as a major constituent element of the Scottish nation and, by extension, Scottish cultural production. "If therefore Scottish history and life are, as an old northern writer said of something else, 'varied with a clean contrair [sic] spirit,'" Smith contends, "we need not be surprised to find that in his literature the Scot presents two aspects which appear contradictory" (Smith 1919: 4-5). Smith's argument is supported by ample evidence in Scottish literature of the motif of duality, around which some of the most seminal Scottish writings revolve. The foundational novel of evil doppelgängers and/or schizophrenically split personalities was written by James Hogg and published anonymously under the title *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* in 1824. The novel explores the arbitrary nature of Scottish Calvinism and the devastating effects that blind adherence to the principles of faith has on a young man's gradually disintegrating mind. An even more influential book elaborating on the subject of doubles and double minds, this time not from a theological but an ethical perspective, is Robert Louis Stevenson's universally recognised novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). The conflict between the upright citizen Dr Jekyll and his depraved alter ego Mr Hyde has become a popular trope both in Scotland and outside it to the extent that it is virtually impossible to account for all the subsequent Scottish (and non-Scottish) writings which revise, reimagine, update, and otherwise deliberately and openly draw on Stevenson's enduring story.

While Smith regards the inherent schizoid split of the Scottish psyche as a harmless peculiarity, even a creative advantage, Hugh MacDiarmid, the leading figure of the 1920s Scottish Literary Renaissance, bemoans the lack of national unity, confidence, and awareness in Scottish writing. "Our national culture," MacDiarmid complains, "suffers from all the ills of split personality" (MacDiarmid 1984: 90). MacDiarmid's solution, intended to galvanise Scottish writers into raising a strong unified voice, was the invention of Synthetic Scots, an artificial version of the Scots dialect designed to become the literary language of Scotland.

Needless to state, MacDiarmid's linguistic construct was not a particular success, and nor was it a sustainable direction in which to develop an entity as multifaceted as a nation. Smith's Caledonian Antisyzygy is clearly a crudely oversimplified approach which inevitably fails to encompass any of the complexity of the world, whose reflection literature is. While not in any way diminishing the immensely important role that MacDiarmid played in the making of Scottish literature, it must be admitted that MacDiarmid's attempts at establishing a grand narrative in literature of the Scottish nation were a step backwards. Despite the obvious reductivity of Smith's concept, Smith's prerequisite was at least "that two sides of the matter have been considered" (Smith 1919: 4), whereas MacDiarmid's attitude tended to acknowledge one side only, for the sake of unity.

Moving On: Towards Caledonian Polysyzygy

Duality speaks of binary patterns of differentiation and, simultaneously, blurs the discernment between the terms of the proposed opposition.

—Monica Germanà (2010: 98-99)

It was only in the second wave of the Scottish Literary Renaissance in the 1980s that Scottish writers abandoned self-conscious theorising about what the national literature ought to look like and almost collectively discovered in themselves the courage to start creating it on the go, exploring, experimenting, and opening up new perspectives. Of course, this is not to say that there was no literature of significance in between the renaissances, but the most memorable works were more or less isolated achievements of highly diverse exceptional individuals which did not come together to establish any general tendency and hence do not bear much relevance to the subject of this paper. The second literary renaissance was not a programmatic effort either, and yet, the unprecedented simultaneous rise of a variety of impressively innovative voices, including those previously silenced, created a striking synergy and together marked the beginning of a new era in Scottish writing. Alasdair Gray—who was to become the doyen of modern Scottish literature and whose magnificent nearly six-hundred-page novel *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981) set the second renaissance into motion—initially expressed dismissive scepticism about the state of Scottish culture:

> Think of Florence, Paris, London, New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he's already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films. But if a city hasn't been used imaginatively by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively […] Imaginatively Glasgow exists as a music-hall song and a few bad novels. That's all we've given to the world outside. It's all we've given to ourselves.
>
> (Gray 2007: 243)

While Gray speaks specifically of Glasgow, his complaint could easily be extended to Scotland in general because at that time, the literary reputation of Scotland still rested chiefly on the ballads of Robert Burns, the romantic historicism of Walter Scott, and, in the twentieth century, the nationalist poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid and the solitary figure of the satirist Muriel Spark.

Gray's incredibly influential *Lanark* managed to revive and energise the hitherto somewhat stale twentieth-century Scottish writing and perhaps incidentally pointed out some

of the multiple directions in which emerging writers were to develop their imaginative work. These hitherto virtually unexplored directions involved elements of form and style, as well as content: formally avant-garde narrative experiments exploiting non-linear plots, metafiction, self-referentiality, dense allusions, and other disorienting techniques have gradually become the current standard, along with a preoccupation with unstable national and individual identities, the everyday realities of ordinary characters, the confusion of the contemporary world, alienation and existential concerns, and, above all, the omnipresent plurality of perspectives and voices. Among the newly found voices which had hardly been heard prior to the 1980s were those of Scottish women writers. There were indeed a few female authors who sought to bring balance to the hypermasculine national literary tradition by contributing with their unique perspective and thus attempting to establish a more rounded view of Scottish experience. However, this handful of pioneering women writers sit uneasily among their male peers and cannot readily be regarded as a generally accepted integral part of Scottish literary history. A telling example of this uncomfortable position of Scottish women's writing is the already-mentioned Muriel Spark, whose clinically cool intellectual satires dissect universal human issues rather than specifically women's questions.

Both products and producers of the second Scottish renaissance, a whole new generation of women writers came into prominence in the 1980s, each of them in her own way bent on consistently questioning and challenging the one-sided excessively masculine representation of Scotland. These female writers seemed to be perfectly aware of the pitfalls of the inherited split of Caledonian Antisyzygy, which operates with opposing pairs of values and fails to account for anything in between, and set forth to chart their own routes instead of succumbing to the tempting convenience of defining themselves simply in opposition to male writers. Caledonian Antisyzygy turned out to be an unpleasant yoke: not all Scottish literary production is by default rooted in oxymoron, and Scottish women's writing especially, a marginalised category within an already marginalised nation's literary tradition, does not thrive creatively on a simplistic binary worldview. Imaginative female Scottish storytellers, such as A. L. Kennedy, Janice Galloway, and Kate Atkinson, severed the ties binding them to the once-unitary obligatory definition of Scottishness and manoeuvred the many winding paths towards alternative visions of the country and hybrid identities of the nation. These and other bold female iconoclasts opened the way into contemporary Scottish literature for themselves and for a host of their successors, eventually managing to introduce a greater diversity into Scottish writing and to establish women's production as a legitimate and organic part of the body of the modern Scottish literary tradition. Consequently, current Scottish writing revolves less around monolithic authoritative narratives and aims more at "working out problems of Scottish history, identity, gender, relation to environment, and future direction, in terms of mutual respect for each other's ideals and values, and with an increasing sense of the possible synthesis of these ideals and values" (Gifford 1997: 602).

Kate Atkinson is at the forefront of those innovative writers who court an inclusive notion of the literary tradition as a Bakhtinian choir of polyphonic voices (see Bakhtin 1984). These Scottish writers have recognised Caledonian Antisyzygy as merely one of the multitude of possible organising principles of their creative work. Atkinson in particular appears to gravitate towards the historically founded binary oppositions of antisyzygy as much as she seeks to resist the pull and vigorously strives to overthrow the outdated construct. Her oeuvre may be compared to John Donne's conceit of "twin compasses", distant and distinct, yet still marking the same territory, separate, yet undeniably joined together. Atkinson represents a group of contemporary women writers who simultaneously

despair of the ambivalence of their legacy and embrace it in a defyingly cheerful, even wanton manner. The spark of their creativity seems to be fuelled precisely by the very existence of conventional restrictions to challenge and old structures to tear down. Characteristically preoccupied with negotiating their private and public identities and positioning themselves variously within Scotland, Britain, and the world, these writers perceive Scottishness as a protean quality—always mutable, never stable—which enables them to navigate in and out of various identities without committing themselves to any single one. On the path of discovery of a meaningful wholeness, whose achievement is postponed indefinitely, there is no longer a single right way with a clearly set destination; rather, there are limitless possibilities opening up for exploration, with an array of diversions, wrong turns, and dead ends, all of them still equally valid in contributing to the overall picture.

While the old Scottish literary tradition was a comparatively homogeneous flow where digressions were condescendingly dismissed as mere curiosities, the new tradition that is under way manifests an incredible variety, diversity, and plurality which refuse to conform to outmoded structures of perception and presentation. Where Smith and MacDiarmid presumed to base the bulk of Scottish culture on the binary concept of antisyzygy as a harmonious union of seemingly irreconcilable opposites, contemporary Scottish writing should more appropriately be described as springing from polysyzygy, which corresponds to a Bakhtinian polyphony of a multitude of voices entering in incessantly shifting interactions and creating a harmony in their own right. In Bakhtin's terms, Scottish literature is determined by the condition of polyglossia, that is, the coexistence of several languages and/or dialects within a single nation, each competing for dominance against the others (Bakhtin 1981: 12). Polyglossia is a natural phenomenon in a plural, heterogeneous world, and where authoritative monoglossia happens to be achieved, it is enforced as a crude tool of the dominant discourse rather than embraced as a democratic means of promoting national unity (Bakhtin 1981: 61). What polyglossia is to the language, heteroglossia is to the world—which is another way of saying that various voices come with various perspectives and that the apparent and perceived meanings of our utterances are never stable but always shifting, depending on the circumstances (Bakhtin 1981: 271). Ultimately, Bakhtin cautions, "language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions"; rather, "it becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (Bakhtin 1981: 293-294).

A Case in Point: Kate Atkinson's Not the End of the World

> In the end, it is my belief, words are the only things that can construct a world that makes sense.
>
> —Kate Atkinson (1995: 382)

Kate Atkinson (b. 1951) is an amalgam of identities and influences which, to a greater or lesser extent, shaped the nature of her literary work, particularly her earliest attempts at largely autobiographical fiction. Born and raised in England, she left to study in Scotland, and having obtained her master's degree from the University of Dundee, she stayed to pursue a doctorate in (perhaps tellingly) American postmodern fiction. Her failure to obtain the coveted PhD devastated her, as she admits, but it also nudged her in the direction of producing creative writing of her own rather than poring over the writings of others (see

Parker 2002: 12). She embarked on her professional writing career with a short story of hers gaining a surprising win in a Women's Own competition in 1988. Living variously in Scotland and England, she started pouring out a steady stream of short stories written for magazines, and after collecting several more minor short story awards, she undertook to revise a batch of previously unpublished manuscripts and compile them in her first novel, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995), which went on to earn the prestigious Whitbread Book of the Year award. Atkinson's subsequent novels, *Human Croquet* (1997) and *Emotionally Weird* (2000), cemented her literary reputation. These were followed by a first volume of carefully organised and intricately interconnected short stories, *Not the End of the World* (2002).

Atkinson acts as a perfect example of the workings of Caledonian Antisyzygy, which, among other oppositions, draws a strict and historically hostile line between the English, associated with all that is cosmopolitan, cultured, and sophisticated, and the Scottish, to which the opposing qualities of the parochial, primitive, and vulgar are ascribed. Caledonian Antisyzygy operates within the context of the centre-versus-margin dichotomy, where England assumes the central position of pride and power, while Scotland, the repressed other, is pushed to the margins, and there is no chance whatsoever of the two extremes meeting halfway. The revised and updated concept of Caledonian Polysyzygy proposes a balancing act in which the two competing parties, or any clashing contradictions for the matter, cease to wage the inherently irresolvable power struggle and recognise their chance to move on to become mutually complementary instead of contradictory qualities. Indeed, there is a richness of still untapped creative potential waiting to be discovered by those who choose to work towards harmonising English and Scottish influences (as well as other dualities), perhaps, like Kate Atkinson, coming from the English centre but writing from the Scottish margins with a keen awareness of the broader British, European, and, ultimately, global milieu.

At present, Douglas Gifford argues, "in academic and media discussion, the growing number of what could be termed Anglo-Scots (or vice versa) are treated as a natural part of the country's production" (Gifford 2007: 251); that is, writers not necessarily born or residing in Scotland may qualify as Scottish by virtue of interest, affection, or similar affiliation. Nevertheless, the criteria for inclusion remain blurry and embarrassing omissions may occur, as was the case with Kate Atkinson, then the recent recipient of the Saltire Award for the best Scottish book for her novel *Case Histories* (2005), who initially failed to be listed on the Books from Scotland website when it was launched the same year under the auspices of the Scottish Publishers Association (see Crumey 2007: 40-41). As to Atkinson's view on the matter, in her life and above all in her work, she moves smoothly between identities, admitting to finding Englishness "lacking" (Parker 2002: 18), yet hesitant to substitute one fixed identity for another, always in the process of creating complex identities out of the various materials available to her, yet never settling for a single finished product which would restrict her growth.

In the range of her admirably varied and strikingly original literary work, Atkinson gives the impression of someone relentlessly engaged in a highly dynamic and creatively productive conversation with herself, transcending each and any of her books. Despite her readily recognisable quirky writing style, this versatile writer refrains from weighing down her playfully experimental fiction with any homogeneous pattern or clearly distinguishable structure that would boil down to predictability. Displaying an obvious delight in elusiveness and sheer joy in fictional games, her stories and novels are rife with unlimited possibilities,

unexpected twists, and characteristically open endings, which furnish some explanations but ultimately pose more questions than they answer. Atkinson's polyphonic creations present a considerable challenge to those readers who prefer tight coherence, strict linearity, and neatly tied ends. The practice of polysyzygy admittedly lends itself more appropriately to short stories rather than novels, which shows particularly in the case of *Emotionally Weird*, a novel called by Nick Rennison "a ragbag of disconnected exercises in style", albeit exercises performed "with wit and energy" (Rennison 2005: 14). In contrast, her condensed short fiction, "with its focus on the quotidian", builds its gems of insights on "the tradition of Anton Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield," as Parker observes, "but infuses this tradition with pace and humour" (Parker 2002: 17).

The volume *Not the End of the World* does not suffer from any of the possible excesses following from favouring the aesthetic form over the content; quite the contrary, the seemingly disparate stories contained in the collection are closely interconnected through a shared organising principle and recurrent themes, motifs, and characters. As a whole, the collection draws loosely on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, ancient mythology and Greek philosophy, modern literary classics and contemporary popular culture. The most visually prominent device binding together the twelve stories that are included is black-and-white reproductions of woodcuts and engravings depicting scenes from classical myths, which are used to preface each story along with a quotation taken from one or other of the various above-mentioned sources. A conspicuous structural link is provided by two framing stories, one opening the volume and the other concluding it, which feature the same main characters and are uniformly introduced by (Latin) verses from Ovid.

Individually, each of the dozen stories is densely interspersed with numerous more or less veiled allusions and references to virtually any source imaginable. In the aptly named piece "Dissonance", for example, the dissonant relationships within a family are reinforced by the ridiculously incongruous cultural (and uncultured) tastes of the incompatible family members. The prodigious daughter Rebecca, a listener to Mozart and Coldplay, sneers condescendingly at the unintellectual conclusion of a student essay on *Romeo and Juliet*, which calls the play "a sheer, big waste of love", while Simon, her unkempt sloth of a brother, has Korn's nu metal *Life Is Peachy* album booming on the stereo to accompany the violent punches he deals to his opponent in the Tekken 3 PlayStation game (Atkinson 2003: 103, 97). Later, at dinner with their mother's boyfriend Beardy Brian, there is talk about how the ancient youngsters had it better in that they could "channel all that testosterone, Spartan youth, Achilles, Herakles", while Simon drifts into chivalrous fantasies featuring Buffy, the Vampire Slayer (Atkinson 2003: 107-108). For her masterful application of polysyzygy in practice, Helen Falconer dubs Atkinson "a playful as well as erudite goddess of the pen" (Falconer 2002: 28), whereas Hilary Mantel comments that Atkinson "is not so much standing on the shoulders of giants, as darting between their legs and waving her own agenda and talking all the time, with a voice that is entirely her own" (Mantel 1996: 23-24).

Another unifying feature shared by the stories in the volume is their mode of representation, which mixes the mimetic and the non-mimetic in varying proportions, and generally falls into the category of magic realism, though Atkinson's writing eschews conventional labels and the idiosyncratic author herself would probably not choose to confine her everything-goes style by pinning it down with a particular word. As Maggie Ann Bowers reminds us, the working terms magic (or magical) realism notoriously resist a simple definition, not only because "they are oxymorons describing the forced relationship of irreconcilable terms", but because it is precisely "the inherent inclusion of contradictory

elements that has made and sustained the usefulness and popularity of the concepts to which the terms refer" (Bowers 2004: 1). Although the oxymoron (aka antisyzygy) contained in the very phrase "magic realism" on the face of it "suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy" (Slemon 1995: 409), what is both more accurate and more relevant to the concept is "the propensity of magical realist text to admit a plurality of worlds", which makes magic realism "a mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical or generic" (Zamora and Faris 1995: 5-6). In *Not the End of the World*, Atkinson contrives to create an unlikely polyphony of gritty realism and playful fantasy, which alternates between a delightful dream and an apocalyptic nightmare. She juxtaposes a plurality of radically different and frequently disturbing worlds, manifesting, as Rennison puts it, her "daring willingness to let her imagination take her into territory where so many other contemporary writers would fear to tread" (Rennison 2005: 14).

Speaking of transgressing into disturbing territories, Atkinson's decisively dark strain of magic realism is strongly underpinned with elements of the Gothic as a powerful tool of subversion, which has long been a popular mode of Scottish writers in general and has been taken up by Scottish women writers in particular, whose double bind—of being a silenced group within an already oppressed nation—makes them doubly inclined to adopt the strategy of disrupting the dominant discourse. Mary Eagleton points out the underlying agenda of female fantastic writing in that "non-realist forms permit the woman writer to express the contradictions, fantasies or desires that the demands of realism silence" since, in the end, "to query the truth, coherence and resolution of realism is to undermine the symbolic order" (Eagleton 1991: 253). The stories in Atkinson's collection constantly return to the theme of exploring the multiple conflicting identities and roles of women, which are neither fixed nor finite, and hence there is a never-ending process of questioning traditional assumptions and formulating and refining alternative definitions, only to discard them when they prove inadequate and start anew. By layering different versions of "reality" one upon another and pitting competing identities against each other, Atkinson does not resolve and write off existing contradictions; rather, she engages the opposing concepts in creative dialectics. Atkinson's identities in progress do not converge to create a new monolithic tradition; after all, as Cairns Craig contends, "traditions are not the unitary voice of an organic whole but the dialectic engagement between opposing value systems which define each other precisely by their intertwined oppositions" (Craig 1999: 32-33). What Atkinson's Gothic-flavoured dialectics achieves is, in Germanà's words, "the exposure of conflicting voices underneath the surface of official culture/history and the collapse of a logocentric approach to history" (Germanà 2011: 5).

With the combined power of the many formerly marginal voices that build up the polysyzygy resonating in the short story volume, Atkinson invalidates the perceived history of women by exposing facets of the female identity that are deeply unsettling, if not outright unspeakable. Atkinson's texts notably bear a grudge against the traditional nuclear family (see Parker 2002: 18), which they tend to present as a deeply dysfunctional unit, or rather a random collection of obviously incompatible individuals who came together for inexplicable reasons. Several stories in *Not the End of the World* experiment with alternative "family" patterns, most remarkably the unflinchingly fierce piece entitled "The Cat Lover", which is set against the backdrop of a dystopian England and plays with the stereotype of a lonely woman whose sole company is provided by her beloved cats. The story's protagonist, Heidi, is consumed by her desire to have a baby, but her job in a male geriatric ward renders the idea

of men off-putting to her. She finds an unexpected means to fulfil her desire when a haggard tomcat accompanies her on her way and does not let go, so she takes him home and feeds him up to the size of an adult tiger. Gordon the cat smoothly assumes the status of Heidi's boyfriend, which fills the woman with a peculiarly Gothic combination of terror mingled with pleasure:

> He slept with Heidi now, not on top of the bed like a normal cat, but beneath the covers, his body rolling against hers in the dead of night, fur against skin, claws entangled in hair. His breath was meaty and warm against her cheek, his whiskers as itchy as a witch's broom. He was a dead weight, heavier than any man she had ever shared a bed with. Yet there was something comforting about falling asleep with her fingers entwined in the long fur of his belly, her breathing counterpointed by his rumbling purr, as noisy as a goods train rocking through the night.
>
> (Atkinson 2003: 236)

The story concludes with Heidi finding her furry boyfriend gone into a snowstorm and herself pregnant with kittens—much to the horror of the ultrasound technician and to the genuine delight of the expectant mother.

"The Cat Lover", a tale that gives the titular phrase a wholly new meaning, may be disturbing for some readers and vexing for others: in her review, Jennie A. Camp puzzles over "why we must now sit with such a troubling image. Gordon has metamorphosed, yes, but to what end beyond mere shock value?" (Camp 2004: 25D). In fact, the story does not need to be seen simply as a self-serving exercise in superficial shock tactics; instead, it can be embraced as a piece that is an appropriate fit for the mosaic of polysyzygy, which allows all voices—no matter how fanciful, aberrant, and inconsequential in the grand scheme of things—to speak out and be heard without discrimination. "The Cat Lover" may bring to mind the classic fairy tale of the deceitful Puss in Boots, albeit revised and reimagined for an adult audience, which is in keeping with the penchant of numerous late-twentieth-century women writers for "a reworking of fairy tale and myth that moves against the traditional boundaries of these genres" with an awareness that "the traditional folk narrative structures of fairy tales and myths frequently restrict and proscribe the female role" (Tolan 2009: 275).

A similarly folklore-inspired story in Atkinson's collection, "Tunnel of Fish", appropriates the local material of Scottish legends revolving around selkies—sea creatures capable of assuming human form and mating with mortals. On the surface, "Tunnel of Fish" recounts the struggles of a single mother with her presumably autistic young son Eddie, whose sole obsession is the ocean world and whose appearance is described in terms of "a large fish without enemies", his still human "mouth hanging open all the time like a particularly dull-witted amphibian, not to mention the thick lenses of his spectacles that made his eyes bulge like a haddock's" (Atkinson 2003: 47). Eddie's name not only rhymes with selkie (if imperfectly) but also like a selkie, Eddie is irresistibly drawn to the ocean, represented by the Deep Sea World, whose creatures are his "loyal subjects" hailing him ceremoniously as "Eddie, King of the Fish" (Atkinson 2003: 64). The deceptively uneventful story records Eddie's primeval longings to "unevolve" down to the stage of the fish along with his mother's anxious thoughts about the failures of her past and the lack of promises for her future. Among her rambling digressions and disjointed memories, what stands out is the flashback of Eddie's conception on a holiday on Crete, which she explains away as a drug-induced hallucination. The stark image shows her being dragged from a boat down to the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, where she was ushered into a fantastic underwater palace

and experienced Eddie's father's "colossal, roaring presence of which she seemed only to catch fragments—the disgusting smell of fish and whale fat, the fronds of seaweed entangled in his great beard, his seed like pearls, gushing into the blue water—" (Atkinson 2003: 64).

Accordingly, Atkinson's curious story illustrates Germanà's point that "the Scottish supernatural does not belong in a transcendent other world, but challenges the stable boundaries of seen and unseen, real and imagined, same and other; […] pointing to the uncanny coalescence of the unfamiliar within the familiar" (Germanà 2010: 2). Atkinson, as a typical representative of the specifically Scottish vein of Gothic fiction—characterised by acute attention to the small-scale details of mental conflict rather than overt action, by elements of the grotesque, bold playfulness, and mordant humour, even perverse exuberance in the face of annihilation—manifests in her work "the sustained tension between psychological and supernatural readings" and an "emphasis on the quest for knowledge and self-discovery", which Germanà names among the key features of Scottish fantastic writing (Germanà 2010: 25).

Atkinson's very versatility may obscure what Sandra Meyer identifies as "the underlying connection between the different works, namely the literary presentation of unstable identities in contemporary society" (Meyer 2010: 443); however, on closer inspection, Atkinson's tales of illegitimate offspring, mysterious doubles and twins, shifting family constellations, and difficult relationships with oneself and others certainly bear evidence of the author's preoccupation with complex identities in a disorienting world. Atkinson's inquiry into the nature of identity and dissection of its constituting elements are best shown in the companion pieces which frame the collection and meaningfully complement each other as well as the remaining stories in the volume, which they embrace literally as much as figuratively. In the opening story, "Charlene and Trudi Go Shopping", a war is raging outside while the two eponymous women engage in the most trivial pursuit: strolling in a shopping mall and looking for the perfect gift for Charlene's mother. The reality threatening from the outside encroaches on the deceptively safe and dreamlike microcosm inside the shopping mall when a fire breaks out in the haberdashery. Quite unaffected by the apocalypse surrounding them, the women continue as they were; only Trudi acknowledges the fire by a remark to the effect that she should have bought the belt she had her eye on because now it would be burnt. Trudi demonstrates that when the world seems to be falling apart, one may choose to oppose it by holding on to the small things that bring comfort, such as the company of, and conversation with, a fellow human being.

The communion of the two young women gains a symbolic resonance in the concluding story, slightly ironically entitled "Pleasureland", where Charlene and Trudi hide in a flat that is gradually falling into darkness, cut off from power, water, supplies, and the rest of the world, which is apparently coming to its end. Defying the odds, Charlene remains calm and confident in her belief that "nothing dies", as the two of them exchange stories—perhaps the material of the collection—and when Charlene cannot think of any more stories to tell, it is Trudi who comforts her companion with the final words of the volume: "Don't worry, it's not the end of the world" (Atkinson 2003: 332). In Atkinson's fictional world, Charlene and Trudi do not fear death but are terrified of silence, hence their incessant stream of words, even when the stories stop and are reduced to self-indulgent lists cataloguing exquisite coffees, cocktails, and other assorted luxuries from the pleasureland of the living, which is now slipping out of their grasp. As long as the voices flow in their polyphonic symphony, though, the storytellers are safe, and so is the world, which began with the word

and, as Atkinson writes elsewhere, endures through the word, since "words are the only things that can construct a world that makes sense" (Atkinson 1995: 382).

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Scottish Polysyzygiacal Identity and Brian McCabe's Short Fiction

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Abstract

Contemporary Scottish literature has increasingly involved complex negotiations between the different Scottish identities that have proliferated since the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties. At the present time, the concept of identity postulated is no longer essentialist and monologic, like the one associated to the two halves of the traditional 'Caledonian antisyzygy', but positional and relational, 'polysyzygiacal', to use Stuart Kelly's term. As this article shows, Brian McCabe's short fiction explores Scottish identitarian issues from a renewed multifaceted and dialogic perspective, fostering an ongoing debate about what it means to be Scottish nowadays, and contributing to the diversification and pluralisation of literary representations of identity.

Key words: polysyzygiacal identity, diversification, literary representations, Brian McCabe

"A world is always as many worlds
as it takes to make a world."
—Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (2000: 15)

"I am rooted but I flow"
—Michael, in V. Woolf's *The Waves* (1977: 69)

Introduction: The Genre of the Short Story in Scotland and the Caledonian Antisyzygy

Contemporary Scottish literature has increasingly involved complex negotiations between the different Scottish identities that have proliferated since the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties (March 2002: 1). Especially in the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the (transmodern) conflicts triggered off by globalisation and glocalisation, as well as by the development of communication technologies, have further affected identity construction. But this whole process of the redefinition of identities has always been considered an ongoing process, since cultural identity is "a matter of becoming" (Hall 1993: 394).

The short-story genre as often been taken as emblem of the contemporary *Zeitgeist*, and this contributed to its contemporary diversification and pluralisation, since every individual voice claimed its right to be heard (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 83). A miscellany of voices has raised to meet the demand of the short-story's formal and thematic variety. Indeed, as recent critical studies have shown,[ii] the short-story genre is so diverse in form, themes, and style that a homogenous and general definition and study is almost impossible. As we shall see, this fact might point out towards the necessity of a heterogenous understanding of contemporary Scottish literature.

It is generally accepted that the particularities of the contemporary short-story genre in Scotland are mostly related to language and identity issues. Obviously, since language is of central importance in Scottish literature, both stylistically and ideologically, the use of the vernacular in the short-story form has further connotations than in the English short story. Additionally, the fact that the vernacular and non-standard speeches frequently appear in

many short stories may be related to the short-story's form of character presentation (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 86). Often, the function of the vernacular in this genre is not only one of characterisation and contextualization, but it is also ideological or political, contributing to the depiction of local culture and the narration of marginal experiences (May 1994: 108). In the case of Scotland, where the use of the Scots language was vilified after the Union when English became the language used for intellectual and institutional matters,[iii] the use of language cannot be easily separated from a political reading.

Edwin Muir's famous "Scottish predicament"[iv] (1936: 9) was pessimistically based on the idea that, due to this fact, the Scots were estranged from themselves, schizophrenic, since they were condemned to "think in one language and feel in another" (1936: 8). Muir, clearly influenced by Eliot's notion of tradition, held the preconception that the Scots language was inadequate as a literary language (Carruthers 2001: 21). As he further stated in his essay *Scott and Scotland* (1936), Scotland could only create a national literature by writing in English: "If we are to have a complete and homogeneous Scottish literature it is necessary that we should have a complete and homogeneous language" (Muir 1936: 178). As Carruthers points out, this notion of an ideal whole-language system is based on the idea that "language exists in an unceasing hierarchy which is not simply about how languages are perceived relatively within the context of cultural power-relations. […] Thus, the expression in the Scots language must always be necessarily inferior once the hegemony of English is established" (Carruthers 2001: 21). In this line, Muir believed that life and literature were no longer part of a coherent and single system and that, consequently, literary creativity in Scotland was ruptured and doomed (Carruthers 2001: 22). In his own words: "Scottish life is split in two beyond remedy" (Muir 1936: 36).

Despite the fact that the use of the Scots language in literature was revitalised by the Scottish Literary Renaissance, led by figures such as Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, the idea that the Scottish mind was split endured, and this was reflected in fiction too, both thematically and stylistically. Thematically speaking, the figure of the Double — or *Doppelgänger* — became a *topoi* symbolising this Scottish fracture or split self. Examples of this would be classic such as James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and also contemporary works such as Alasdair Gray's "The Spread of Ian Nicol" (1956), Emma Tennant's *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* (1989), Brian McCabe's *The Other McCoy* (1990) and "The Host" (2001), Jackie Kay's "The Woman with a Fork and Knife Disorder" (2001), or Ali Smith's "The Hanging Girl",[v] to cite just a few.

As Angela Wright states, nineteenth-century Scottish writers explored the national crisis after the Union by using Gothic conventions and tropes (Wright 2007: 73). Some authors have identified the Scottish linguistic fissure as the source of a real and mythical inarticulacy, which has become a central preoccupation in Scottish fiction (Wallace 1993: 221). According to Paul Coates, when the double is explicitly dealt with in fiction, it is often "written by authors who are suspended between languages and cultures" (1988: 2). Examples of such authors include Joseph Conrad, James Hogg, R.L. Stevenson, Henry James and Oscar Wilde, among others (1988: 2).[vi] Hence, and given the fact that this figure is found in many other world literatures and cultures, for one might wonder if this particular use of the *topos* of the Double to symbolize the lack of a coherent linguistic or national unity is exclusively Scottish. However, it cannot be denied that, as a consequence of this theoretical tradition, the

Jekyll-and-Hyde figure has been interpreted as the monstrous son of this Scottish linguistic and identitarian ambivalence or disunity (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 221).

Stylistically, Scottish — dissociated — literature became identified with a "dissociation of sensibility" (Eliot 1921:4), a "swithering of modes" (Craig in Hart 1978: 406), a "zigzag of contradictions" (Smith 1919: 4), or a "sudden jostling of contraries" (Smith 1919: 20) which Gregory Smith termed "antisyzygy" (Smith 1919: 4). Traditionally, the literature of Scotland has been believed to be characterised by the oxymoronic nature of "the Caledonian Antisyzygy" (Ibid.: 4), namely, a reflection of all the contrasts — or "intermingledons", to use Burn's term (in Ibid.: 34) — present in Scottish history and culture that shows a mixture of contraries or things alike: "real life and romance, everyday fact and the supernatural, things holy and things profane, gentle and simple, convention and 'cantrip,' thistles and thistledown" (Ibid.: 20). Linguistic disunity or the so-called Caledonian antisyzygy have often been dramatised by means of narration and characters. Moreover, irony, juxtaposition, multiple voices, and habitual counter-pointing are said to be distinctive of Scottish culture, expressing an ongoing crisis of identity (Simpson 1988: 251). Perhaps in a more positive light, G. Gregory Smith states that "energy and variety" (Ibid.: 35) are at the very core of the Scottish narrative mood. As Smith further states in his seminal work *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919):

> Scottish literature is not so placid. […] If a formula is to be found it must explain this strange combination of things unlike, of things seen in everyday world and things which, like the elf-queen herself, neither earth nor heaven will claim.
>
> (Ibid.: 35)

This combination of the supernatural and the realistic has been said to constitute an essential trait of Scottish fiction and of the Scottish sense of self in general (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 86). One of the halves of the Caledonian antisyzygy would correspond to down-to-earth realism, and the other to the realm of imagination and fantasy. Additionally, the tendency of the short-story form to mix fantastic and real elements will be accentuated in Scottish literature, since the "polar twins of the Scottish Muse" (Smith 1919: 20) dwell on opposites and combine the interest in the intimacies of life (Ibid.: 41) with the allure for strange worlds and moods (Ibid.: 23).

Nevertheless, these strict dichotomies — which come from the *a priori* assumption that Scotland presents its self in counterpoints — are not valid anymore, in the sense that they reveal themselves as highly simplistic and prevent Scottish culture from showing its many nuances and from further developing and exploring new complex identities (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 87). In fact, many contemporary writers, such as Iain Banks, Janice Galloway, Alasdair Gray, Jackie Kay, James Kelman, A.L. Kennedy, Brian McCabe, Ali Smith, Alan Warner, Irvine Welsh, explore a number of possible identity-configurations and tend to focus on characters who struggle to reconfigure the fragmentations of identity created by stereotypes like the Scottish antisyzygy or the Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde myth.

As we shall see in the present article, in Brian McCabe's short stories, the realistic and the fantastic or supernatural are not elements present in oppositional terms. "They are rather an amalgam that reflects the many shades of meaning they convey, a flux which fits the changing processes of experience" (Ibid.: 87). At the present time, the concept of identity postulated is no longer essentialist and unitarian, but positional and relational. This contemporary performative, multiple, plural, multifaceted, adaptable and relational self is

always in process, negotiated. Moreover, as the self is produced in a discourse that is always, by definition, dialogical, the relation self-others is at the core of identity. The focus of attention has shifted towards the processes of identification and dialogue, which are revealed as key forces at work in identity construction (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 1). Bearing all these ideas in mind, discourse, and contemporary literature seem ideal fields to explore the mechanisms of contemporary identity construction and representation.

New Approaches to Identity: A Caledonian Polysyzygy?

Historically, Scottish culture has explored the different identities that are developing in line with the changes taking place in society at large, from its medieval sovereignty as a nation, its Union with England in 1707, its 1998 Devolution within the United Kingdom, and presently, its negotiations regarding Brexit. Until the turn of the twentieth century, self and nation were viewed in binary terms as oppositional entities: the self was defined by opposition to the Other, and Scotland by opposition to England. However, Scottish art in general and fiction in particular have been one of the major sources of exploration of the adaptability of the Caledonian sense of self and nation. The Second Scottish Renaissance, taking place in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the subsequent literary flourishing, taking place at the beginning of the new millennium, offer a variety of literary voices and genres that reveal new and contemporary complexities which go beyond the traditional stereotype of the Scottish male, white, heterosexual author. Scottish contemporary literature has no doubt contributed to the redefinition of a more flexible and open identity. Writers such as A.L. Kennedy and Jackie Kay, among others, have questioned "standard assumptions of both national and gender identity by articulating a position of in-betweenness, or of downright unease with traditional definitions" (Sassi 2005: 158).

Despite the fact that Scottish literature tends to be resistant to neat classifications, there is a need to find new theoretical tools to describe and analyse the new literary and dialogic reality, as new realities demand new critical tools. According to the previous negative or pessimistic vision of Scottish identity as the damaged product of adverse historical circumstances, polarity and fragmentation appear as characteristics to be avoided. However, if the cultural and linguistic diversity in Scotland are perceived as a multiplicity rather than as a splitting, then an enriching reality is revealed.

Until the turn of the twentieth century, self and nation were viewed in monologic terms — that is, as self-contained and exclusive entities; and consequently, defined in binary terms: the self was defined by opposition to the Other, and Scotland by opposition to England. But the monologic understanding of the self was set into question, especially by modernist and postmodernist literature and criticism,[vii] and it was progressively abandoned in favour of the logic of multiplicity (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 82-83). The works of the Bakhtin group in the early twentieth century and, from the nineteen sixties on, that of Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, displaced this notion of identity in favour of the notion of self in dialogue or in relation, that is, presupposing an active interaction between individuals, between self and other(s) (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 259). Later, postmodern sociological and philosophical accounts of a heterocentric and polyglot self further contributed to new understanding of the dialogic, hybrid and multiple selves and cultures — we are not isolated entities but are always interconnected —, pointing out to the necessity of an ethical relationship between self and other. The self "is no longer plausibly

understood as a unitary entity but appears instead as one fragile moment [caught up in the flux of] dialogic circuits" (Gilroy 2000: 109).

In the light of this dialogical turn, Scotland could no longer be considered as a damaged or split land or an 'artistic wasteland', and Scottish identity would no longer be understood as being divided. For example, Cairn Craig proposes a positive view of Scottish art and literature as examples of a culture that is engaged in the dialogue with the other(s), engaged in a conversation in different dialects, a dialectic that is the foundation not only of persons but of nations (Craig 1999a: 115). Once dialogism questions the unity of language, it is easy to see the beauty and creative energy of the polyphony created by a plurality of languages coexisting in the Scottish nation, giving birth to a complex and dynamic relational social entity constructed "through mutuality of personal relationships" (MacMurray 1957: 38). Therefore, and in order to enhance the richness and complexity of this new contemporary writing in Scotland, new theoretical concepts and criticism should be developed, as this will reveal new and fresh readings of Scottish works.

In his introduction to the collection of short stories titled *Headshook. Contemporary Novelists and Poets Writing on Scotland's Future* (2009), Stuart Kelly comments on the characteristic fluidity and plurality of Scottish identity: "'Scotland' is not a fixed and immutable entity, but a discontinuous succession of states, actively imagined in each and every generation" (Kelly 2009: 2). Scotland has been and is a "stateless nation", "a multivocal nation", "a multi-ethnic nation" (Sassi 2005: 9), and also a globalised and changing nation. As he further states, "the infamous 'Scottish Double'" has been over-used by critics to the point of exhaustion" (Kelly 2009: 12). And its use has negative consequences for the interpretation of Scottish literature: G. Gregory Smith's term 'Caledonian antisyzygy' "was actually descriptive of the failure of Scottish literature — its lack of organic unity" (Kelly 2009: 12, emphasis added). If we want to escape the negative readings fostered by this type of metaphors, we need others that recognise the richness and plenitude of contemporary Scottish literature. As Kelly proposes, "[a] new critical term should be made: polysyzygy — multiple alignments, plural connections, a web of interlinked ideas and words" (Kelly 2009: 12). This playful turn of the screw of Smith's term is indeed very helpful and representative of the new trends in 21st-century literary writing.

Moreover, the concept of the 'polisyzygy' or the adjective 'polysyzygiacal' could also be applied to the representation of Scottish identity in contemporary literature, as we shall see. The Scottish interest in identity might be defined as an 'obsession' which is 'healthy' — "insofar as it has gradually encouraged a more flexible and encompassing approach to issues of identity, as Carla Sassi notes (Sassi 2005: 10). As she further explains, while syncreticity and polyphony might not be unique to Scottish culture and literature, "it is true that Scotland, like other countries, has been led (almost compelled) by historical contingencies to represent its identity in layers" (Sassi 2005: 152). And many Scottish writers show this deep concern with identitarian issues in their work. One of these authors is Brian McCabe.

3. The Short Fiction of Brian McCabe

Brian McCabe was born in 1951 in Easthouses, a small mining community near Edinburgh. In the early nineteen seventies, he formed a Poetry Society with other aspiring writers, such as Ron Butlin, Andrew Greig, and Liz Lochhead, becoming "The Lost Poets" (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 36). They obviously started as a poetic group, but some also progressively developed into writing fiction, especially short stories: Butlin published *The*

Tilting Room (1983) and McCabe *The Lipstick Circus* (1985), whereas Greig stuck to poetry, and a bit of essay, and Lochhead started writing drama. At present, McCabe is a fully recognised creative writer in Scotland who has been writing for more than forty years. He has published five poetry collections,[viii] a novel[ix] and four collections of short stories: *The Lipstick Circus* (1985), *In a Dark Room with a Stranger* (1993), *A Date with My Wife* (2001), *Selected Stories* (2003).

McCabe's short stories belong to the tradition of the modern short-story genre inaugurated by Chekhov, among others. As McCabe himself has stated: "I remember reading Chekhov's short stories when I was quite young, and in a way I was trying to copy them; but there was nothing, there was nothing to imitate, there was no style that I could see" (in Aliaga 2013: 45). According to McCabe,

> what makes Chekhov so good is his insight into human psychology and motivation, which you can't imitate, so that was a kind of lesson. I suppose though, that it was a kind of influence, because it showed me the great thing that a story could be, that a short story could be just as much a great work of art as a novel, and that made me want to write my own stories as well.
>
> (Ibid.: 45)

Characteristically, as Ford explains, in Chekhov's short stories the dark territories of mankind are indirectly revealed in normality, without epiphanic moments or dramatic outcomes (Ford 2006: 20). So that, in many of his stories, there is a hidden truth that can be perceived through the everyday. McCabe has praised, as many other have, Chekhov's ability to get into the human psyche.[x] Both authors' works share a deep interest in common people and their everyday life, in what makes us human and what makes us individuals. This interest in everyday identity is indeed shared by McCabe's fiction, as all of his stories, even those with fantastic elements, show the commonalities of their particular lives.

Regarding style, McCabe is also a friend of minimalism. His relatively undemanding and simple vocabulary and syntax are deliberate, as McCabe believes that simplicity is a key element for the success of writing. His minimalist style is by no means accidental: "I'd eschew a thick language stew / — too many wordy ingredients / fighting to be the flavour" (McCabe 1987: 74). In his short fiction, he tends to stick to just a few characters in a concrete and delimited space (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 46). And this restraint has also been applied to his only novel *The Other McCoy*, which has the rhythm of a short story, which contributes to the unity of effect. The author himself commented in a personal email that he deliberately chose a concrete and reduced space and time for his novel, "trying to keep things, economical and manageable" (McCabe 2005). The whole plot unfolds in the streets of Edinburgh on a single day: Hogmanay.

Thematically, McCabe's writing revolves around identitarian issues. Typically, the narrators in Brian McCabe's short fiction undergo some kind of self-discovery via a personal crisis or they are "frontier subjects", that is, subjects who "reveal a position that understands vital stability as an apparent and passing cognitive construction, since they have to be flexible and open to the other(s) if they are to adapt to the environment and survive" (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 88). Moreover, the liminality of the particular situations that characters undergo in his short stories can affect the whole text-world, as the boundaries between reality and fantasy are often blurred by the focalisers' unreliable or altered perceptions. This indeterminacy in the characters and in the narration challenges "the traditional exclusiveness

of certain subjects", as Smith said on Scottish literature in general (Smith 1919: 36), and also the exclusiveness and fixity of the subject, as we shall see.

McCabe's stories are always set in Scotland, depict common people with everyday problems and questions and are, mostly, close to his own experiences. However, they are so imaginative, that sometimes they even enter the realm of the fantastic.[xi] We could argue that the realistic and the fantastic are skilfully combined in striking imaginative terms that allow readers to glimpse at a hidden reality which is there at work in our perception and construction of his created world (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 88). McCabe's narrators and characters usually have to face the strange hidden in the everyday, and this demands an adaptation of their perception and understanding.

Brian McCabe uses the complexity of the perceptions of his character-bound narrators to present subjective yet universal experiences that combine the common and the uncanny. McCabe is generally interested in the representation of liminal states: childhood, when characters start discovering how strange the world they inhabit is; adolescence, when in the process abandoning childhood, they start discovering the strangeness of adulthood; or the liminal states of sleeping, dreaming, being drunk, having a nervous breakdown, etc. All of these processes are in-between states with a blurry ontological ascription (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 89). The estrangement of McCabe's narrators and characters convey an overwhelming perplexity in the perception of the world, where the necessity of relating with others can be difficult, but which is always essential.

His short stories permit the construction of some kind of plural or multiperspectival focalisation that suggests some kind of unity made out of various and inevitably partial bits. In that sense, we could argue that the perspective represented in many of his short stories is 'polysyzygiacal'. Sometimes we find stories which offer diametrically opposed perspectives, thus offering the reader the possibility of constructing a whole scene through the juxtaposition of various partial and subjective perspectives. This imagined scene becomes somehow an objective or at least quite plural space where different voices are set in a dialogic relationship to each other (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 91).

Given all the multiple perspectives and focalisations in McCabe's collections of short stories, readers are forced to draw their own conclusions, a task that, as Kirsten Matthews has pointed out, is encouraged by "the developing empathy through the angle of perception appropriate to a situated speaker" (Matthews 2008: 74). In other words, in order to understand, readers have to enter some kind of dialogue with the text and empathise with the different characters' perspectives.

A Date with my Wife (2001) and the Representation of Polysyzygiacal Identity

I have chosen to focus on three stories from the collection of short stories *A Date with my Wife* to analyse the representation of plural or multiple identity due to the variety of narrators and characters found in them: "Losing it" (McCabe 2001: 23–31), "The Host" (McCabe 2001: 33–44), and "The Night" (Ibid.: 155–161). Brian McCabe's third collection consists of eighteen short stories that question the mechanisms of the mind and the relation self-other, as well as identity issues in general.[xii] The narration of all the stories in the book is heterodiegetic, and the focalization is presented through the main characters, who have a precise and distinctive emotional perception.

The first short story, "Losing It", explores the relation of the individual with the virtuality of the contemporary world.[xiii] It presents the story of a man, John, — "who

depended on computers for his living" (McCabe 2001: 23) — just after he has smashed his computer screen in a fit of anger. The motivation for his irrational outburst of violence is that he has lost all the work he had been doing in the last months: "Almost a year's work had gone, had vanished into cyberspace in a split second" (McCabe 2001: 24). The title thus refers both to the losing of impalpable but essential information and the losing of self-control: "He stabbed a finger at the monitor, as if to say it had got what it deserved. Then he began to shudder with a strange laughter" (McCabe 2001: 24).

As in many other stories by McCabe, losing control is associated with non-social laughter, that is, with uncontrollable hysterical laughter: "it burst in his chest like an underwater explosion and his throat was crowded with it as it rushed to his mouth and spilled out in a froth of giggles" (McCabe 2001: 24).[xiv] And it often expresses what characters cannot put into rational words.

The protagonist admits that "it felt good to have let his anger out, let go of it completely" (Ibid.: 26). He resets his mind, so to say, in order to start again. At this point, like other McCabe's characters, the protagonist gives the particular incident that has brought him to a "threshold position" a paradigmatic entity (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 184). As he recognises, "maybe it wasn't the computer, maybe he'd lost it with himself" (McCabe 2001: 26). After this, readers may interpret metaphorically his remarks about the machines that have to be fixed — the broken interface, the car —, the "limbo files" (Ibid.: 29), the "noise" (Ibid.: 29), the messages that do not "get through" (Ibid.: 28), the "lost signal" (Ibid.: 31), as referring to his entropic and chaotic mental state, to his existential condition.

The computer with a broken interface or John phoning his own number and getting his own voice on the answering phone (Ibid.: 30) could also be interpreted in this same symbolic line as signs of the isolation he is experiencing. Real communication with the others is, then, as difficult as ever in the age of communication. As he phones his own number again and gets the answering phone:

> He heard his own voice trying to sound as neutral as possible as it told him: "Hello, this is John. I'm sorry you got the machine. If you have a message for me […] please wait until you hear the tone." He waited until he heard the tone.
> He was about to leave the message when he lost the signal completely.
>
> (Ibid.: 31)

Even though he differentiates between himself and his voice on the answering machine, he cannot differentiate the loss of the signal from the loss of himself.

The fact that he phones his own number, listens to his recorded voice talking to him creates a reduplication of his identity in a sense. We have a John trying to contact another John via a technological communication device. This element points out to the surge of 'virtual doubles' in contemporary times. Although, in fact, the virtual world offers a wide range of possible avatars[xv]or virtual identities, the development of internet technologies and human interaction with multiple human subjects in the virtual realm has brought to the fore the complex nature of digital embodiment in a fictitious space. The existence of virtual worlds reveals identity as a performative, multiple and fluid entity. In this sense, we can no longer speak of a scission of a monologic self, but rather of a proliferation of multiple and dialogic representations of the self. A polysyzygiacal identity.

Brian McCabe's stories have a tendency towards ambiguity and usually allow for various readings and possible interpretations, which prevent either-or interpretations and suggest the existence of various layers of meaning. It is left to the reader to interpret this

'loss' as a Luddite break from his dependence on virtual machinery or as the death of his answering-machine *Doppelgänger*. In both cases, Jack frees himself from the splitting caused by contemporary technology (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 185). Another possible interpretation is that he has lost real direct human contact, the ability to establish a real dialogue with others and with the other(s) within himself (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 185). This is a danger that we are often preoccupied with nowadays, as we mostly communicate via technologically-mediated virtual avatars. Communication among individuals does not necessary improve in a transmodern technological world.

Another short story which deals with the topics of the difficulty of communication and the apparition of the figure of the double is "The Host", the fourth short story in *A Date with my Wife*. "The Host" was published for the first time in *New Writing Scotland 15: Some Sort of Embrace* in 1997, and afterwards in *Damage Land: New Scottish Gothic Fiction* (2001), edited by Alan Bissett, and later in McCabe's collection, *Selected Stories*, published in 2003.The story was also adapted to film in 2003 by the director Simon Hynd, and it was screened at the Edinburgh Film Festival and the Milano Film Festival in 2004, winning the Best Fiction Prize and the Audience Award of the Scottish Students on Screen 2004. The story could be considered a contemporary version of the old Scottish Double *topos*, as the protagonist, who shows signs of some mental and/or linguistic dissociation, observes "a man with two heads" (McCabe 2001: 33) sitting in his living room. "The Host" starts with the protagonist disconnected utterances: "SO . HOW . WAS . The . Film" (Ibid. 33). As he further narrates: "I was speaking in words but I didn't know what I was saying and my voice sounded thick and moronic and my mouth was dry" (Ibid.: 33). As readers find out, the man is agoraphobic and has some problems when trying to relate to the outer world, as well as to other people. His isolation is so strong that he harbours doubts about himself and the reality of his performative actions: "Had the words come out of his mouth at all or had they come sounding so strange that no one could make sense of them?" (Ibid.: 33). The dissociation that the main character feels materialises in the form of the Double: a fantastic creature with two heads who is, apparently, only observable by himself, as the other guests sitting in his room acts "as if nothing was out of the ordinary" (Ibid.: 35).

It would not be farfetched to interpret that this Double-headed man could represent the fragmentation of the protagonist's self. The fact that the other characters act as if nothing extraordinary were happening adds a touch of uncertainty in line with Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic,[xvi] as readers never know if the double-headed man is really present or if he is just a figment of the subject's imagination (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 186). However, the main character cannot ignore the presence of the two-headed man, as, while one of the heads "smiled with the corner of its mouth" (McCabe 2001: 38), his smaller head starts addressing him directly, with "the dark eyes look[ing] directly" at him: "That was very interesting. […] I don't mean what you were saying, but the way you were pretending to cough. Most people don't cough unless they have to, do they?" (Ibid.: 38). This naturalness of the strange creature's behaviour and the story's "fantastic realism" echoes Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (1846), whose protagonist, Mr Goldyadkin, who is extremely self-conscious and a bit paranoid, encounters his double at the office where he works, sitting on a seat opposite him. Utterly paralysed by shock, he starts doubting his own identity, whereas his double sits peacefully in front of him (Dostoyevsky 2003: 53). The main character in "The Host" is also paralysed and astonished, since the smaller head, which seemed to him an inert appendix of the bigger head, is in fact "a thinking and feeling being […] a person" (McCabe, 2001: 40). The smaller or secondary head narrates then its story: it

was once a normal head with a normal body, but one day, the other bigger head, called Douglas, started growing out of him, usurping "the other's head place" (McCabe 2001: 41). As in Dostoyevsky's *The Double* or in Nikolai Gogol's "The Nose" (1846)[xvii] the apparition of the double destabilises the subject's identity and threatens with supplanting him and usurping his identity. But the subject cannot react; he, like Goldyadin, is a passive and pusillanimous character (Herdman 1990: 107).

When the protagonist's friends and the double-headed man leave, and he is left on his own, he "breathed more freely" (McCabe 2001: 43), and he observes that the room "became familiar again" (Ibid.: 43). The protagonist's bond with the world is damaged, and it is then, when he is feeling "exhausted by the evening's events" (Ibid.: 43), that he sees his reflection jump out of the bathroom mirror (Ibid.: 43). Horrified, he observes a terrible image:

> It was there, no matter how often I wiped the condensation from the mirror with my sleeve, a mushroom-like swelling on my neck: the face was not fully formed, but already I could make out the mildly interested eyes and the constant, rather vacant smile.
>
> (Ibid.: 44)

As Agnieszka Sienkiewicz-Charlish states, in "'The Host' the idea of multiple selves is literally realized" (Sienkiewicz-Charlish 2011: 84); a process described by Todorov — who understands the metamorphoses of the fantastic as the erasure of the matter/mind boundary — as the "consequence of the possible transition between matter and mind: we are several persons mentally, we become so physically" (Todorov 1975: 116). The metaphoric becomes tangible; the idea becomes flesh.

In the light of the protagonist's chronic paralysis and shame, it could be understood that the main character is traumatised by the apparition of his double, who is also paralysed and inert (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 187). As Claudia Eilers has explained, the fear of the imperfect self produces a fearful self, and shame produces aggression (Eilers 2007: 68). The imperfect self would split, under the pressure of guilt, into two parts or characters, one, the materialisation of a shameful part or character, the other of shame. From this perspective, the short story's protagonist would incarnate his passive and fearful facet, and his tiny double his shameful part.

Nevertheless, the excessive presence of doubles in "The Host" —where two pairs of Double-headed men appear— could be interpreted as a parody on the *topos* of the double, so relevant in Scottish literature. Alasdair Gray has also parodied this *topos* in "The Spread of Ian Nicol" (1956). In Gray's short story, the literality of the Scottish split self[xviii] leads to a grotesque proliferation of doubles fighting with each other, which could be interpreted as a *reductio ad absurdum* (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 187). In contrast, in McCabe's story, it seems to lead to a silent and passive and absurdly unnoticed proliferation of doubles.[xix] In this excessive and grotesque story, the Caledonian double, or antisyzygy, is parodied and so becomes a multiplicity, a polysyzygy, so to say.

The next short story, "The Night", also tackles the issue of mental normality/abnormality —which is quite characteristic in Brian McCabe's fiction—, through the story's main character: Joe, a mentally immature man. Joe shows a perplexing attitude when reading a newspaper in a pub: he would look up, suddenly alert, and cock his ear in his hand" (McCabe 2001: 155). The extradiegetic narrator does not have Access to Joe's thoughts, who has serious difficulties in relating to other people. Neither the other characters in the story, the men at the bar, nor the reader, know what Joe is talking about: "Suddenly he

said aloud: 'The night. What about the night?" (McCabe 2001: 156). Nobody asks, so the mystery remains: "He put his hand behind his ear and cocked it to listen […]. After a few moments, he said to nobody in particular: 'There it is. Ah can hear it'" (McCabe 2001: 156). When he starts talking to the barman about work, the topic of taboo is raised, without being mentioned. Joe, who has motioned the barman to come closer, speaks into his ear through his cupped hand:

> "Ah'm different," he said.
> "We're all different, Joe," said the barman.
> "No you're no," Joe said. "No like me."
> […] Through his cupped hand, Joe whispered something into the barman's ear.
> The barman stood up quickly and fixed Joe with his eyes. […] "You're not supposed to call it that nowadays, Joe. You're supposed to –".
> "Shh!" Joe opened his eyes wide and put a finger to his lips.
>
> (McCabe 2001: 159)

This strategy of not mentioning the central issue is a recurrent strategy used by McCabe, as for example in the short story "Say Something",[xx] in which the central topic is a taboo which cannot be mentioned.

What is never explicitly mentioned in this story is Joe's apparent intellectual or communicative disability. The reader understands then why the other characters ask him questions strangely. The mystery about the night — "The night. What's on the night?" (McCabe 2001: 159) — eventually reveals itself as a communication gap caused by the abnormal attitude of the characters towards Joe (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 210). However, the mystery of Joe's open pondering remains still unsolved, open, for all: "'The night,' said Joe. 'What about the night?' He turned to stare at the men standing at the bar, as if waiting for their opinion" (McCabe 2001: 161). The mystery could be that of the natural world (the night) without a narrative explanation. Readers might wonder if the night could stand here for the darkness surrounding human life in a world ruled by randomness, or for the inscrutable Other. This Other — commonly associated with silence, madness, the unconscious, etc. — could also be associated with Joe's otherness or stigma, as he has been excluded by the group that fears his alterity, just as Joe fears the inscrutability and darkness of the night.

What makes perhaps this story different is that it recognises the existence of an inscrutable Other, while at the same time it also points out to the necessary ethical approach towards it despite its impenetrable character. In a dialogic relationship, there is change and interconnection, but there are always things left behind, untouched, indecipherable.

Concluding Remarks

In the last decades, a miscellany of literary voices has raised in Scotland, a fact that highlights the need for a heterogenous approach to contemporary literary forms such as the short story. As this article has shown, depending on the theoretical tools applied to the analysis of some contemporary Scottish short stories, one will obtain a certain reading or interpretation. If we insist in following Muir's "Scottish predicament" and applying Smith's "Caledonian-antisyzygy" model, Scottish culture and identity will still be seen in a pessimistic light which dooms them to be a broken, unhealthy and schizophrenic wasteland. Besides, the allegedly oxymoronic nature of Scottish culture will be extrapolated to the whole of the Scottish

identity, which will also be understood as being dissociated, split, in a sense. In this tradition, often symbolised by the *topos* of the Double, the possibility to explore other multiple and hybrid identities is also severed.

However, later terms such as Stuart Kelly's 'polisyzygy' allow Scottish works to flourish and exhibit the tremendous versatility and the abundant variety of their forms and contents. In like vein, a dialogic or polysyzygiacal approach to identity, such as the one presented in Brian McCabe's fiction, unveils new and fresher forms to understand the Caledonian self beyond the narrow borders of the traditional stereotype of the Scottish white, heterosexual, alcoholic, working-class man. Engaged in a conversation in different dialects, Scottish identities can form a dynamic relational social entity, ethically constructed "through mutuality of personal relationships".

The present literary questioning of the Scottish "Geist" implies that Scottish identity issues will be further and thoroughly questioned from non-essentialist perspectives, fostering an ongoing debate about what it means to be Scottish nowadays, and what it entails to be a human being in contemporary times. Moreover, it will also allow to contextualise Scotland in a broader scenery, open to future non-exclusive reconfigurations in a world that is becoming more and more technological, virtual and interconnected.

In short, the fact that both a second Scottish Literary Renaissance is taking place in Scotland and that literary theory is spurring the creation of new concepts and approaches to the literary canon, as well as to the representations of the self in contemporary literature, brings excellent news: the vitality of contemporary Scottish literature in undeniable.

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[ii] In the last decades, many key essays on the genre approach the short-story form in its diversity from a varied number of perspectives and angles. For more on this, see: May (1994); Iftekharuddin et al. (1997); Iftekharuddin, et al. (2003); Fernández Sánchez (2001); Ibáñez et al. (2007).

[iii] T. S. Eliot defended an idea of culture as a monolithic tradition based on the stability of (a single) language. In this line of thought, Scotland would be a cultural wasteland, as its tradition could not be considered monolithic.

[iv] The Scottish predicament has been epitomised as the total elision of the evidence of the past [...] that it is impossible for the individual to relate to his or her personal memories. [...] The constant erasure of one Scotland [...] makes Scotland unrelatable, unnarratable: pasts Scotlands are not gathered into the being of modern Scotland; they are abolished" (Craig 1999a: 21). In this sense, Scottish culture could be considered as a traumatic culture.

[v] For an analysis of J. Kay's and A. Smith's short stories see: Agnieszka Sienkiewicz-Charlish. "Double Identities: The Theme of the Double in Contemporary Scottish Gothic". In The Supernatural, the Fantastic and the Oneiric (ed. Spyra, P., Wachowska, A.). Lodz : Biblioteka, 2011, pp. 79–86.

[vi] Paul Coates forgets to mention other famous German authors such as Jean-Paul Richter, E.T.A. Hoffman or Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Russian writers such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky or Nikolai Gogol, or Spanish authors such as Miguel de Unamuno and Jorge Luis Borges, among many others.

[vii] It could be argued that the conception of the self as artificial constructions, which came to fruition in the postmodernist period, was already formulated by the Scottish philosopher David Hume in the eighteenth century (Hume 1888).

[viii] *Goodbye Schooltie* (1972), *Spring's Witch* (1984), *One Atom to Another* (1987), *Body Parts* (1999), and *Zero* (2009).

[ix] *The Other McCoy* (1991).

[x] Chekhov would have acquired an invaluable knowledge of human nature through his job as a doctor (Maugham, 1958: 167).
[xi] A most dramatic example is "The Host" (1997), as we shall see in the following section.
[xii] I have discussed somewhere else the first two short stories in the collection: "Welcome to Knoxland" (see Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2015) and "Something New" (see Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2011), so I will skip them for length reasons.
[xiii] McCabe has explored this issue in other short stories in this volume, such as "Welcome to Knoxland" and "Something New". For more on the topic of virtuality in McCabe's fiction, see: Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2015.
[xiv] As in other stories, such as "Norman and the Man" (McCabe 1985: 46–52), "The Sky" (McCabe 1985: 109–118), "Strange Passenger" (McCabe 1993: 1–32), laughter possesses the individual, it takes control, or, rather, the individual no longer feels in control of his or her behaviour: "Possessed by this glee-less laughter, he marched back and forth in the room, shaking his head and flailing his arms as if having to swim upstream" (McCabe 2001: 24). In these short stories, laughter becomes a form of non-verbal communication or as an emotional relief, and it serves to relieve us of nervous tension (Morreall 1987: 131).
[xv] Avatars are digital representations of self. The term avatar can be applied to both representations of AI and representations of humans (Stair and Reynolds 2010: 479).
[xvi] "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature confronting an apparently supernatural event." (Todorov 1975: 25)
[xvii] Gogol's story –where Assessor Kovalyov wakes up one morning without a nose, because it wanted to be independent and live its own life as a whole person– mixes social satire, fantastic humour and aberrant psychology (Herdman 1990: 99).
[xviii] "'No doubt about it, Nicol,' said the specialist, 'you are splitting in two down the middle'" (Gray 1997: 4–5).
[xix] In this line, McCabe's short story could be read as a parody of the figure of the double where the protagonist's passivity —as opposed to the activity of Gogol's and Gray's protagonists— is being criticised (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2013: 187).
[xx] For a more detailed analysis of McCabe's use of silence and taboos see Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2011.

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Disillusionment and Hope in James Kelman's "talking about my wife"

Milena Kaličanin[i]

Abstract

In The Sane Society (2002), Fromm argues that man "with his desires and woes, loses his central place in the system…this place is occupied by business and production…[he] ceases to be "the measure of all things" in the economic sphere." (2002: 83) This claim implies that in modern Western society, basic human necessities, such as connection and comradeship, are denied for the purpose of better maintenance of the economy: man "becomes the means for the economic interests of another man, or himself, or of an impersonal giant, the economic machine." (2002: 91) Fromm's perception of modern individual as a mere cog that fits into the grand economic machinery is applied in the critical interpretation of Kelman's 'talking about my wife" (2009). Through the portrayal of a husband/wife relationship, contemporary disillusionment with politics and harsh realities of economic stagnation in Scotland (and the world at large) are potently criticized. The only way to restore personal dignity can hopefully be found in the domestic sphere relying on a meaningful human interaction, long forgotten in the unjust system operating on the free market economy rules. Apart from Fromm's views, the paper also relies on the theoretical insights of Bond, Rich, Marcuse and Freud.

Key words: disillusionment, hope, Fromm, Kelman, Marcuse, Freud.

Introduction: (Dis)Illusions of Modern Living

In his memorable study, *The Fear of Freedom* (1942), Fromm claims that modern world is regretfully ruled by advertising and profit, while man represents a mere "cog in the vast economic machine" (Fromm 1942: 96). Before Fromm made his insightful observations on the unjust and unnatural pace of modern living, it was Freud who prophetically expressed the idea that human beings are basically denied happiness in civilization. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929, 2005), Freud insists on the claim that the civilized social order opposes the fulfillment of basic human needs, i.e. the gratification of all desires. In order to find security in civilization, man has to sacrifice the gratification of certain desires, since various external obstacles stand in the way of personal wish fulfillment.

> Life as we find it is too hard for us; it entails too much pain, too many disappointments, impossible tasks. We cannot do without palliative remedies […] There are perhaps three of these means: powerful diversions of interest, which lead us to care little about our misery; substitutive gratification, which lessen it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it.
>
> (Freud 2005: 7)

The gloomy reality that hampers wish fulfillment is rather difficult to bear; hence, there are various forms of distraction, mostly channeled through the means of mass media and modern variations of entertainment. These powerful channels provide modern man with a false sense of purpose thus directly maintaining the economic equilibrium. Being too busy and overwhelmed to despair over his personal misery, with the goal of life which generally

boils down to consuming as much as possible, modern man's genuine desires are purposefully thwarted and "the individual is blocked in realizing his sensuous, emotional and intellectual potentialities" (Fromm 1942: 156), which creates an overbearing feeling of "unaliveness" (Fromm 2002: 196).[ii]

This contributes to the creation of what Simmel defines as "the metropolitan type of man" who "develops an organ protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart." (Simmel 1950: 410, 411) Instead of cherishing intuitive emotional responses towards other people and oneself, modern man is required to be punctual and calculating:

> Punctuality, calculability, exactness are forced upon life by the complexity and extension of metropolitan existence and are not only most intimately connected with its money economy and intellectualistic character. These traits must also color the contents of life and favor the exclusion of those irrational, instinctive, sovereign traits and impulses which aim at determining the mode of life from within, instead of receiving the general and precisely schematized form of life from without.
>
> (Simmel 1950: 413)

The presumed necessity to lead mechanized lives requires relying on numbers and logic, which molds a social character[iii] that is calculating and predominantly intellectual. This type of character is capable of superficial emotions that would not interfere with the "proper" functioning of society. The inability of "irrational, instinctive, sovereign traits and impulses" to act out is in other words smothering of affect in favor of intellect. In a mechanized environment these character traits are not stimulated and therefore remain underdeveloped. As Fromm remarks, this kind of life organization creates a "monocerebral man", whose main characteristic is the split between thought and affect. The monocerebral man is able to perceive the world intellectually but not affectively, he approaches the world "as a conglomerate of things to be understood in order to be used effectively […] One might say feelings have withered" (Fromm 1973: 352).

In order to preserve the last traces of humanity, in *The Sane Society* (2002), Fromm writes about possible ways to transcend the entrapment of the consumerist system. One of the solutions he proposes relies on forming new ties to others in the form of symbiosis or through loving connection by retaining individual integrity. The symbiotic union is usually formed at the expense of individual's integrity and implies domination over another human being. Therefore, the identity an individual forms in regard to others can be that of reciprocity, based on love, or that of subjugation, based on a symbiotic relationship. The system obviously reinforces the latter with the help of the type of character (rather similar to Simmel's metropolitan type of man) that turns every human interaction into a business relationship devoid of emotion. Fromm refers to this type as the marketing character.

> The marketing character neither loves nor hates. These "old-fashioned" emotions do not fit into a character structure that functions almost entirely on the cerebral level and avoids feelings […] Since the marketing characters have no deep attachment to themselves or to others, they do not care, in any deep sense of the world, not because they are so selfish but because their relations to others and to themselves are so thin.
>
> (Fromm 2008: 121)

The marketing character structure is built to further the accumulation of profit. The most effective course of action to succeed in this task is the one that excludes intense emotion, this obviously being the reason why the marketing character type is molded to feel moderately. The system ideology represents the sole motive for the marketing character's unemotional responses and indifferent relations to others, as well as to oneself. "In our society emotions in general are discouraged […] it has become an ideal to think and to live without emotions. To be emotional has become synonymous with being unsound or unbalanced" (Fromm 1942: 211). The system proscribes moderate emotional response, ideally the exclusion of emotion altogether, as Fromm explains.[iv] To be overly emotional means to be mentally unstable. Ultimately, the system manages to represent an ideal individual as a smooth functioning emotionless robot that always strives to complete his tasks with a fake smile. An ideal type of personality would be the one that shows a minimum of (superficial!) emotion that does not defy the system. Should a person experience discontent regarding the prescribed role and thereby express this dissatisfaction through an outpour of emotions, that individual must be submitted to an appropriate therapy treatment.

Thus, it goes without saying that nurturing the capacity for compassion and empathy does not aid the accumulation of profit and does not help to maintain the system; on the contrary, it may have a subversive effect. For this reason, the industrial society nurtures the having orientation in life, thus encouraging mass consumption that relies on human greed and selfishness. In *To Have or To Be* (2008), Fromm points out that Western civilization nurtures the belief that identity is built on possession i.e. people are what they own. "The having orientation is characteristic of Western industrial society, in which greed for money, fame, and power has become the dominant theme of life" (Fromm 2008: 17). Furthermore, Fromm also asserts:

> The growing person is forced to give up most of his or her autonomous, genuine desires and interests, and his or her own will, and to adopt a will and desires and feelings that are not autonomous but superimposed by the social patterns of thought and feeling […] by a complicated process of indoctrination, rewards, punishments, and fitting ideology, it solves this task by and large so well that most people believe they are following their own will and are unaware that their will itself is conditioned and manipulated.
>
> (Fromm 2008: 64)

Through an elaborate process of education and pedagogy the aim of which is to properly instill the appropriate ideology, Fromm rightfully claims that modern individual is deprived of his or her ability to think and feel freely. All choices are ready-made, and the individual is left with an illusion of choice, having the free market and liberty to choose any desirable product. The only decisions people get to make are in fact trivial. Making trivial decisions and having the illusion of choice is what Herbert Marcuse calls fulfilling false needs.

> The range of choice open to the individual is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom, but what can be chosen and what is chosen by the individual […] Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear – that is, if they sustain alienation. And the spontaneous reproduction of superimposed needs by the individual does not establish autonomy; it only testifies to the efficacy of the controls.
>
> (Marcuse 2002: 10)

As Marcuse declares, modern man in actuality has no freedom. Choosing products to buy is not real freedom if one is trapped in the system, being forced to maintain it.

One of the ways of maintaining the current system of values relies on the stimulation and manipulation of human desires, advertising being most common of all. Advertisements promise the fulfillment of any desire in exchange for buying the advertised product linked to the desire in question. Since human desires are limitless and are relentlessly stimulated, modern man becomes greedy and insatiable. The unlimited consumption, sadly, becomes a paradigm of happiness.

> Cultures that foster the greed for possession, and thus the having mode of existence, are rooted in one human potential; cultures that foster being and sharing are rooted in the other potential. We must decide which of these two potentials we want to cultivate, realizing, however, that our decision is largely determined by the socioeconomic structure of our given society that inclines us toward one or the other solution.
>
> (Fromm 2008: 86)

What Erich Fromm so eloquently expresses in the previous quote is the fact that the consumer capitalism of modern Western civilization fosters the having mode of existence, which is required for its self-preservation. The potentials for greed and selfishness are as inherent in human beings as potentials for altruism and compassion, they develop in great part according to the stimulation. However, the fact is that without human greed and selfishness, the consumerist system would be untenable. Therefore, those are the qualities that are stimulated. For the system to be able to maintain the equilibrium the qualities it required of human beings "egotism, selfishness, and greed" were proclaimed to be "innate in human nature; hence, not only the system but human nature itself fostered them" (Fromm 2008: 6). Gradually the fact that the system generates and stimulates these human qualities for its own purpose was dismissed, and all that was left was the proclamation of selfish human nature. Hence, people living in a consumerist society believe that this system is the only one that functions to fulfill basic human needs.

As already stated, the powerful capitalist ideology operates in close connection to the ideology of consumerism. Both ideologies rely on human selfishness and greed as the driving force. Capitalism puts emphasis on profit accumulation transforming it into the main motive of human activity. The existence of free market, private property and apparent individual freedom create the illusion that capitalist system is the ideal system designed to fulfill human needs in a most democratic manner. Given that human selfishness and greed are artificially stimulated and encouraged as desirable qualities, the statement that the capitalist system fulfills genuine human needs becomes invalid, to say the least. The need of every average consumer to acquire as many things as possible is also artificially generated. The two systems merge into one vast economic machine that operates on its own will.

Unfortunately, the economic machine controls the society and therefore all aspects of life. In *The Sane Society* (2002) Fromm argues that profit has ceased to be a means to an end and became an end in itself. At the dawn of the capitalist age, the accumulation of profit served as a means to provide for human requirements. As the development of capitalism progressed, the role of man within the system changed. "The living human being, with his desires and woes, loses more and more his central place in the system, and this place is occupied by business and production. Man ceases to be "the measure of all things" in the economic sphere" (Fromm 2002: 83). This means that the economy no longer serves the purpose of attending to human needs. On the contrary, basic human necessities, such as

connection and comradeship, are denied for the purpose of better maintenance of the economy. As Fromm concludes, in contemporary Western society it is the law of the market that has its own life and rules over man: "[…] a living human being, ceases to be an end in himself, and becomes the means for the economic interests of another man, or himself, or of an impersonal giant, the economic machine" (Fromm 2002: 91). Therefore, not only does the economy lose its purpose of attending to human needs, but it also transforms man into a means for achieving economic interests, that is into an object, a mere cog that fits into the grand economic machinery. Fromm states that in the capitalist hierarchy of values, capital is valued more than human labor and amassed things bear more importance than life.

One of the methods for keeping the economic machine operational is creating distance among people. Isolated and detached individuals are better consumers because the only source of happiness for such individuals is material possession. The system dictates and controls desires; it artificially implants desirable thoughts and feelings, as already discussed. The relatively good quality of life "makes for a happy consciousness" (Marcuse 2002: 79) which prevents people from having a judgmental attitude towards the socially proscribed norms, values and needs. As a consequence, people accept those norms, values and needs as their own and thus subject themselves to the unconscious mind control.

However, since man has a natural need to connect with other people,[v] the process of failing to create a bond with others leads to what Fromm terms "a sickness of the mind". In this situation, isolation becomes unbearable: "Man has to relate himself to others; but if he does it in a symbiotic or alienated way, he loses his independence and integrity; he is weak, suffers, becomes hostile, or apathetic" (Fromm 2002: 66). As Fromm elaborates in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973), if man experiences himself as entirely passive, a mere object, he will likely compensate for this feeling with the act of violence. The violent act becomes a source of the excitement due to the realization that he is able to affect the outward world, even though through destruction. "It is much easier to get excited by anger, rage, cruelty, or the passion to destroy than by love" because that kind of "excitation does not require the individual to make an effort." The energy invested in a loving act requires patience, while the act of violence offers instantaneous excitement (Fromm 1973: 242).

Apart from violence and aggression, profound boredom also characterizes the mental state of modern man and all of these states could be equated with depression. In *The Sane Society* (2002), Fromm defines depression in contrast to happiness. Whereas happiness is the result of productive living and satisfaction arising from love as the genuine human emotion, depression is essentially the inability to feel. The state of depression can be avoided either fundamentally, by being productive and thus experiencing happiness, or superficially by pursuing various forms of entertainment and mistaking them for happiness. Average modern man frequently chooses the latter, the superficial solution that is easily obtainable in the consumer culture but is also short-lived. This pursuit of pleasure consists of satisfying all desires immediately in an incessant flow. The goal is to remain constantly entertained - from incessant shopping, watching television, to consuming alcohol, narcotics and seeking sexual satisfaction. This effort to keep oneself entertained is so eagerly invested because if the chain of amusement is broken, the sense depression manifests itself acutely.

Kelman's Disillusionment: Is Hope an Option?

It is not a coincidence that the theoretical framework of this research mostly relies on Fromm's valuable insights. Openly proclaiming himself a socialist humanist, Fromm with his political views and activism is rather close to Kelman's fervent support for traditional left-wing causes, particularly in the domain of social justice. Though not a member of a political fraction, Kelman declares himself as an initially libertarian socialist anarchist (1992). Mostly preoccupied with the life of the Glaswegian working class in his writing, Kelman bears the title of one of the most controversial Scottish authors. He still remains the sole Scottish author who was awarded the Booker Prize (in 1994, with *How Late It Was, How Late*).

The whole Booker event was rather contentious. One of the judges, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, denounced the decision to the media and declared that the book was "frankly […] crap". The columnist Simon Jenkins, writing for *The Times* of London, called him "an illiterate savage". Among other literary fallacies, the profanity of Kelman's style has represented a conspicuous objection to his creative writing. However, according to Kelman, these objections were mostly related to the use of Lowland Scots and Glaswegian dialect in his novel, and in his own defense, he pleaded that verbal elitism of those who prefer "received pronunciation" or "educated speech" basically equaled actual racism. As a writer, Kelman believes that his duty is to stand up to any kind of oppression: "My culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that […] A fine line can exist between elitism and racism. On matters concerning language and culture, the distance can sometimes cease to exist altogether" (Wood 2014).

It is precisely the habit of giving voice to the dispossessed members of the Glaswegian working class that Kelman reinforces in one of his latest short story collections, *If It Is Your Life* (2010). In the story, "talking about my wife", all the burning issues of language, class, politics, gender, age that came in the spotlight during the 1994 Booker episode, are vividly portrayed.

Kelman's common method of the first-person narration is employed in this short story which enables the readers to deeply grasp the author's intentional mingling of the private and global political/economic domain. The story depicts a habitual walk home from work of a night shift worker whose area of expertise is purposefully not stated anywhere in the text. Kelman wisely suggests that the situation in which this night shift worker finds himself is unfortunately quite frequent in modern Scottish society; also, the usage of the first person narration allows for the interpretation that this member of the Glaswegian working class is the author himself thus boldly erasing the borderline between the intellectual elite and uneducated poor.

As the story unveils, the readers are obscurely informed that the main character was fired by his boss the night before. Apart from the worker's personal wounded dignity, this news is rather difficult to convey to his wife since his monthly salary is inevitably counted on for domestic expenses that provide his four-member family (with two teenage daughters), more or less, with a decent living. Instead of portraying the unscrupulous act of the middle-aged worker getting fired, Kelman describes the whole event by depicting the worker's private sphere. Thus, his wife's reaction to the new situation is eagerly expected, and, simultaneously, deeply dreaded. However, Cath does not utter a single word. Her silence potently speaks a history: "I could only shrug and tell her the truth, an approximation to the truth. I had a fall out with the gaffer, there was a bit of bother. Other women might have accepted that. Cath was not other women and her silence continued" (Kelman in Kelly 2009:

186). What bothers the main character of the story is obviously not the fact that he was sacked, but how to convey bad news to his family. The wife's silence is rather intuitive; in other words, she has a hunch that something has changed in her husband's behaviour and is rather curious to detect the reasons of this visible change. Drifting in optimistic thoughts is definitely not a proper way of dealing with the situation for the main character – popular optimistic sayings about tomorrow that offers new opportunities cannot ultimately change his state of mind: "Tomorrow is a brand new day. Except literally it was not. It was the exact same day as here and now" (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 186).

Even the word "sacked" sounds strange to him and he openly claims that there is something anti-human about that term (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 190). When his wife finally speaks, she verbalizes the words that he is intuitively anxious about: "So what happens now? Do you mean you have got the sack?" (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 186). As a naughty boy caught in the act, he denies being fired, immediately sensing that he is being scanned all the way to his fingertips.

Her continued silence indicates that she wants further information on the matter. However, it is rather difficult to convey the truth to Cath, as the main character informs us. Her life has been totally detached from the unjust or better to say, inhuman way of the system's dealing with common replaceable work force and, in that sense, Cath, like all other women, represents a true representative of the middle class. She could not properly grasp the borderline between power and powerlessness:

> The truth is she was innocent. There are a lot of women like Cath. They know nothing. Cath knew nothing. She had never experienced the actuality of work. Genuine work. Jobs where things like "angry gaffer" and "sack" crop up regularly. In her whole life she had never worked in an ordinary hourly paid job. Office stuff was all she did. That was a thing about women, they were all middle class. She knew nothing about real life, the kind of job where if ye told a gaffer to eff off you collect yer cards at the end of the week. That was power and that was powerlessness.
>
> (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 190)

Thus, it is up to the husband to open the eyes of his wife on the matter of gloomy reality. The bare truth is totally different from her expectations – an ordinary worker is constantly denied power. Being in such a powerless position, it is crucial for him to please his superiors so that he would keep his post as long as he could. It is precisely this fact that the night shift worker can no longer endure: after the enormous effort to please everyone at work, he has to behave in the same way at home. Kelman's astounding movement from the global political/economic to personal domain here is rather intentional in depicting modern man's genuine impotence:

> Here is the reality: I was an ordinary worker. Power there is none. It did not matter I was a would-be author on matters cultural, political and historical, to wit my life. None of that mattered. I existed in the world of "angry gaffers", data such as "sack" and other matters of fact. Man, I was fucking sick of it. And having to please everybody. That was part of it. That was an essential part of it. Then coming home here and having to do the same in one's domestic life.
>
> (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 191)

Being initially disappointed with his wife for blaming him without even knowing the circumstances (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 192) of the quarrel with the gaffer and then for her

naïve way of thinking that he can find another job since this one is rotten as he used to say frequently (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 192), he sarcastically comments: "Sure. Jobs don't grow on bushes" (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 193). The last straw that he holds for is the possibility to apologize to the boss, because it was him who attacked him in front of other people. Then, the very next moment he talks about inducing physical damage to the gaffer, violence and aggression being instinctive responses to the unfairness and immorality of the situation.

The rotating effect of depression and urge for violence of Kelman's worker definitely corresponds to Fromm's description of modern man's frequent reactions to the predominantly having orientation of Western culture that basically cherishes material possession as the ultimate standard of living (Fromm 2002, 1973: 242). This culture intentionally breeds greed and selfishness whereas altruism and compassion are completely non-existent in the global political/economic sphere. The mere truth of the whole matter boils down to the main character's frank confession:

> The truth is […] I don't think I can handle working these days. It is all just cowards and bullies. One is surrounded by them. Ye cannay even talk in case it gets reported. Times have changed. I cannot talk to these blokes, I cannay actually talk to them. Except about football maybe.
>
> (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 194)

What Kelman's night shift worker passionately explains to his wife is the conspicuous fallacy of the capitalist system which offers a form of invisible authority that provides an illusion of certainty. Fromm claims that man has an innate need for a frame of orientation.

> The fact that man has reason and imagination leads not only to the necessity for having a sense of his own identity, but also for orienting himself in the world intellectually […] But even if man's frame of orientation is utterly illusory, it satisfies his need for some picture which is meaningful to him.
>
> (Fromm 2002: 62)

Capitalism is proclaimed to be the ideal system that perfectly responds to human needs. It provides a purpose in life – the maintenance of the economic machine, it provides a motivation for human action – the accumulation of profit. Even though all action is stimulated within the boundaries of the system requirements, an illusion of purpose and meaning exists.[vi]

This artificially created illusion of purpose and meaning makes for the system to easily maintain itself. However, there are people who can see through this fake apparatus, Kelman's night shift worker, being one of them. At the age of forty-two, he describes that all his youthful dreams and hopes have utterly vanished. The only thing that he and his co-workers genuinely desire now is to become old-age pensioners ("I wish I was a pensioner already. I want to go to a green field and just lie down" (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 198)). Happy pills would be the second solution to immense hardships of everyday life in Scotland that has lately become "a complete waste of space" and Great Britain that has lately become "the existential nightmare", as he prophetically proclaims:

> I don't actually care. I'm forty-two years of age. Do ye know what we talk about during a typical tea-break in one's typical factory workhouse? How effing glad we shall be to reach one's seniority; in other words, our chief desire is to become old-age pensioners. What happened to all our hopes and dreams! That is what happened to them. This is

> what I am talking about, give me the happy pills. Great Britain today, the existential nightmare that would have driven my poor old father off his fucking nut if he hadnay had the good sense to die at the advanced age of sixty-one and three quarters. So-called Scotland, be it known, a complete waste of space: I refer here to one's existence.
>
> (Kelman in Kelly 2009:198)

What the gaffer really has against Kelman's worker is the fact that he is a "throwback" type (204), that is, a kind of person who constantly looks back into the past and pines for bygone times. Apart from this, he also represents a potential threat because the young people listen to him rather than to the voice of authority. The boss in the story unfortunately represents a universal modern paradigm of authority - a proper emanation of Simmel's metropolitan type of man (Simmel 1950: 413) or Fromm's marketing character (Fromm 2008: 121): a person void of genuine emotions, punctual, calculating, interested more in profit and realization of business plans than in the personal domain of his co-workers. It is no wonder then that the night shift worker is perceived by his boss as a mentally unstable character; namely, he shows genuine interest in his colleagues' problems and not in further accumulation of profit. The mere fact that he is a would-be author, as he calls himself, is perilous for his boss's business expectations and, generally, potentially subversive for the proper maintenance of the system ideology.

What the gaffer in Kelman's story demands of his workers is a proper illustration of Fromm's symbiotic union (2002) among individuals in modern society: complete obedience, subjugation to his wishes, paying attention to his monologues, whereas the existence of dialogues among colleagues is very much frowned upon. As Martin Buber elaborates in *I and Thou*, an individual actualizes his existence through a dialogue based on reciprocity with another human being. This way he is able to acknowledge the other human being as an equal. An individual who is not able to perform a dialogue and thus actualize himself performs monologues. This individual fails to perceive the existence of others as equals and thus experiences them as objects. Buber calls this relation I-It, which is characteristic of the modern age, its dehumanization and isolation. In the I-It relationship an individual treats others, people and things alike, as objects to be used. The reduction of a human being to an object is insufferable and as an inevitable consequence aggression appears.

> Man cannot live as nothing but an object, as dice thrown out of a cup; he suffers severely when he is reduced to the level of a feeding or propagating machine, even if he has all the securities he wants. Man seeks for drama and excitement; when he cannot get satisfaction on a higher level, he creates for himself the drama of destruction.
>
> (Fromm 1973: 8)

The artificial order within a hierarchical society imposes the feeling of powerlessness on man. Being a part of the system is literally like being dice thrown out of a cup, people have little or no control over their lives and they are hardly free to live as they please. Instead, they are a part of the vast economic machine, and those who become aware of that fact are inevitably enraged, while the rest remain apathetic.

It is not a coincidence then that one of the last images in the story is the painting of Brueghel, the worker describes the village scene with all the people, horses and dogs. His wife reminds him that in fact this painting is entitled "The Slaughter of the Innocents" (207), which unequivocally confirms Kelman's version of the story of power and powerlessness in the capitalist system.

One of the solutions that Cath offers is to get away, at least for a period, but not to Ireland or Hebrides as her husband suggests. The need is to go away to a place where the society is completely different: "There are choices to make and we've got to make the right yin" (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 207). Both of them are ultimately aware of the fact that modern culture purposefully creates what Fromm termed "illusion of choices" (Fromm 2008: 64). The getaway journey would have the goal of inducing a radical change in their lives by creating a rebelling attitude towards the consumerist culture's sets of values. Its primary aim is definitely not to advertise a good quality of life and thus "make for a happy consciousness" (Marcuse 2002: 79). In this case, the whole getaway episode would be merely illusory, because it would basically trivialize their decisions and ultimately fulfil false needs, as Marcuse rightfully declared (2002: 10).

However, both the husband and wife in Kelman's story are instinctively aware of the fact that the getaway has today become impossible, simply because all places are more or less similar and a possible elopement would not entirely solve the problem. It seems that the only thing that one can rely on is basic human interaction. Cath and her husband perform all the usual activities families do: they make tea, eat toast and marmalade, listen to their favourite tunes, smoke, in other words, communicate with each other. Cath keeps telling her husband to relax. The readers get the impression that if you are lucky enough, the meaningful human interaction is nowadays reserved solely for the private sphere:

> Cath smiled. She left her cigarette smouldering in the ashtray and came towards me. I made space for her to see out the window, put my arm around her shoulder. Far below a woman was passing along the pavement and entering very close. It made us both smile. I found that very positive.
>
> (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 209)

Finding a reason to smile is the last ray of hope that Kelman's main character clings to. Positive attitude is definitely untypical of Kelman's writing, but this story testifies to his more optimistic tendencies. Thus, the end of the story is rather affirmative about life in general. To Cath's final question "What's up?" (209), her husband replies: "Nothing" (Kelman in Kelly 2009: 209). Kelman's "nothing" is, as in Shakespeare, pregnant with meaning. One of the possible interpretations is definitely that the sole way to preserve sanity and personal integrity in modern world is to rely on the microcosm you yourself create, which again gives evidence to the significance of preserving human interaction among the predominantly alienated emotional robots of consumer culture, as Fromm wisely suggested (2002).

Conclusion: Hopefulness Regained

As Lionel Trilling recounts in his essay *Freud: Within and Beyond Culture* (2004), there is an inner part of man inaccessible to culture.

> Freud's emphasis of biology in human fate might be a liberating idea. It proposes to us that culture is not all-powerful. It suggests that there is a residue of human quality beyond the reach of cultural control, and that this residue of human quality, elemental as it may be, serves to bring culture itself under criticism and keeps it from being absolute.
>
> (Trilling 2004: 268)

Trilling has an optimistic belief in human nature, the very essence of man that remains untouched by culture and enables man to criticize it, perhaps change it and prevent it from becoming all-powerful. In accordance with Trilling's belief, Tzvetan Todorov writes:

> In the eyes of the humanists, man is a potentiality rather that an essence: he can become this or that, act one way or another; he does not do it out of necessity. But in addition, and this is essential, even in the presence of the clearest determinations, human beings always have the possibility of opposition, therefore of standing aside from themselves; without that, they are no longer, or not yet, fully human.
>
> (Todorov 2002: 34)

Modern man is taught to believe that his predicament is unavoidable, however, according to the humanist belief there is always a possibility of opposition. The task at hand remains finding the opposition in a productive way. Kelman is just one among modern thinkers and artists who embrace Fromm's idea of transcending the entrapment of consumerist system by forming new ties to others in the form of loving connection by retaining individual integrity (2002). Once individual integrity is hopefully preserved, an individual is able to develop a critical mind towards modern culture, which represents yet another form of nay-saying to the dominant set of values that Kelman passionately opts for in the short story analysed here.

Namely, the best way of developing a critical mind, suggested by Adrienne Rich, is reading "as if your life depended on it" (Rich 2003: 21). To read with a keen sense of understanding, instead of just acquiring information, means to develop a critical mind. An individual with a developed critical mind is self-assured and able to tell right from wrong without relying on any authority for guidance. It is of paramount importance that people learn to think independently to be able to understand the messages that art is to convey.

Thus, it is not a coincidence that Kelman's main character in "talking about my wife" (2009) is both a powerless worker and a potentially powerful would-be author. The power of art is great, and every artist has a responsibility, states Edward Bond in the Author's Preface to *Lear* (1983), to write about the problems that present themselves before the writer. In his writings about violence Bond points out that human beings respond aggressively when they are deprived of physical and emotional needs, this unnatural behaviour causes alienation from the self and bears both physical and emotional consequences. It is important that the artist shares his insights with the rest of the society, providing the hope that human situation can and must be changed.

According to Fromm, Marcuse, Rich, Trilling, Todorov and finally Kelman, the primary purpose of art then is to help people reconnect and that way communicate meaningfully so that the shared human experience can be properly understood. Through the nurturing power of imagination man can transcend the self and see the world through another's eyes, thus making the necessary identification with another human being and reestablishment of the I-Thou connection possible.

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[ii] "boredom is nothing but the experience of a paralysis of our productive powers and the sense of unaliveness" (Fromm 2002: 196)

[iii] It is the function of the social character to shape the energies of the members of society in such a way that their behavior is not a matter of conscious decision as to whether or not to follow the social

pattern, but one of wanting to act as they have to act and at the same time finding gratification in acting according to the requirements of the culture (Fromm 2002: 77).

[iv] Fromm rightfully claims that indifference is in general a social sickness of the contemporary world. "We cease to be excited, our emotions and our critical judgment become hampered, and eventually our attitude to what is going on in the world assumes a quality of flatness and indifference" (Fromm 1942: 216).

[v] Modern society consists of "atoms" (if we use the Greek equivalent of "individual"), little particles estranged from each other but held together by selfish interests and by the necessity to make use of each other. Yet man is a social being with a deep need to share, to help, to feel as a member of a group (Fromm 2002: 135).

[vi] The need for a frame of orientation exists on two levels; the first and the more fundamental need is to have some frame of orientation, regardless of whether it is true or false. Unless man has a subjectively satisfactory frame of orientation he cannot live sanely. On the second level the need is to be in touch with reality by reason, to grasp the world objectively. But the necessity to develop reason is not as immediate as that to develop some frame of orientation, since what is at stake for man in the latter case is his happiness and serenity, and not his sanity (Fromm 2002: 62).

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"Nae blond wigs in Glasgae": Urban Imaginaries and Affective Relationships in Suhayl Saadi's Short Fiction

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Abstract

According to Alev Cinar and Thomas Bender, "the city is located and continually reproduced through […] orienting acts of imagination, acts grounded in material space and social practice." (2007: xii) As imagination creates and recreates urban spaces, it bestows upon them a host of atmospheric and emotional qualities resulting in a multitude of urban imaginaries of the city. Or is it the city – illusory and shape-shifting as it may be – that triggers acts of imagination and thus generates its own images and imaginaries through the moods and emotions it arouses in people? Does the city have a million faces or is it its inhabitants who, through the masks they hide behind, incite this image? To find an answer to these questions, the present paper maps the atmospheric qualities and urban imaginaries of contemporary Glasgow as portrayed in Scottish Pakistani author Suhayl Saadi's fiction. Through a close reading of "The Queens of Govan" (2001c), "Bandanna" (2001a), "The Naked Heart" (2001b) from the collection The Burning Mirror and excerpts from Psychoraag (2004), I explore the characters' social practices, memories, visions and hallucinations, as well as their bodily experiences and mental perceptions of and affective relationships with the city. I shall argue that there exists a deeply phenomenological and mutually constructive relationship between the body and the city, through which Saadi's characters are both affected by and affecting the emotional qualities and urban imaginaries of Glasgow.

Key words: the body, the city, Suhayl Saadi, urban imaginaries, affective relationships.

Introduction: Suhayl Saadi's Glaswegian Fiction

In an essay on ethnicity, writing and identity, Saadi referred to his short story collection *The Burning Mirror* (2001) as "high-octane, hallucinogenic, urbanised fiction." (2006: 118) The most exciting questions arising from this claim is what or who makes these stories about cities hallucinatory, and what the connection between hallucinations (vision, illusions, phantasms), urban space and the individual experiencing both is. One starting point for analysing this connection is provided by Anthony King, who contends that the city is impossible to be taken in in its entirety, as our experiences are always already confined to certain segments and aspects of a city, and are necessarily influenced by our own perspectives and perceptions. As King claims, "what is referred to as 'the city' exists only in our heads" (2007: 2) – that is, what we perceive is an imaginary space and we are in fact the creators of urban imaginaries. What follows is that

> What is real about cities, then, is also their intangible qualities: their atmospheres, their personalities, perhaps …Something about city life lends itself to being read as if it had a state of mind, a personality, as having a particular mood or sentiment, […]These commonplace experiences of the personality of a city may feel real, yet also they are phantasms that vanish as soon as light is cast upon them.
>
> (Pile 2005: 2)

Steve Pile's claim emphasizes the phantasmagoric and illusory nature of cities, which may derive both from their phenomenological and spatial character, and the feelings and emotions they generate in the people who experience them. One person's experience can differ considerably from that of another and may as well be totally different from any previous experience of the same city by the same person, as a result of several internal and external factors (some of which I shall examine in this paper), thereby creating a myriad of urban imaginaries, "both emotional and unconscious" (Pile 2005: 2) by definition.

Such individual, affective relationships with the city are at the core of Suhayl Saadi's fiction. Although, as Bettina Jansen points out, Saadi's literary representation of the Pakistani diaspora in Scotland may be labelled as British Asian fiction, Scottish-Asian fiction, and (post-) devolutionary Scottish fiction, thus producing "a triple positionality" for both their protagonists and the narrative (2018: 188), due to their setting, language and characters I see the majority of his stories primarily as love letters to Glasgow, representatives of the contemporary Glasgow novel and short stories, through which Saadi redefines Scottish identity[i] and puts Glaswegian fiction back on the map of British Literature.

In the 1980s, the major problematics of the Glasgow novel was that, in Christopher Whyte's words, "Glasgow lacks, in cultural terms, context and collocation" (1990: 318) and the place itself "induces a kind of amnesia" as a result of which the characters in a Glasgow novel rarely have a sense of coming from somewhere" (Whyte 1990: 318). While Saadi's Glaswegian characters sense a loss of identity (Stotesbury 2010: 99), I shall argue that his Scottish Pakistani protagonists may, in fact, use this hiatus to construct a new cultural and regional identity for themselves through their affective relationship with the city of Glasgow.

As a representative of the "New Weegies" (Bisset, 2007: 66), Saadi both follows the traditions of the Glaswegian novel and expands its boundaries. Linguistically, his fiction presents a unique blend of standard English, Scottish demotic and Glasgow Patter, interspersed by Urdu and Punjabi phrases, while the setting and characters in the majority of his writings call for the construction of a regional identity. Joining Louise Welsh, Anne Donovan and Alison Miller, Saadi portrays the rebranding of "The Friendly City" (2004: 202),[ii] but with an ethnic twist: presenting Glasgow as a postcolonial territory reterritorialized by the Pakistani diaspora in *Psychoraag* (critically acclaimed as the first Scots Asian novel[iii]) and his short story collections, such as *The Burning Mirror*.

Psychoraag tells the story of a Scottish-Pakistani immigrant, DJ Zaf, and the six hours he spends in his cubicle at the final night of Radio Chaandni, playing songs, talking to his listeners and, first and foremost, remembering. Zaf embarks on a mental journey recalling his parents' "epic voyage" (Saadi 2004: 129) from Pakistan to Scotland, their early days of settlement and the creation of diaspora space in Glasgow. He also laments on the past events and loves that have defined him. Recording Zaf's journeys through time and space, the novel is thus, to borrow and paraphrase David Harvey's (1990) term, a literary "time-space compression:" a story woven from overlapping and interconnected time scales, physical and mental spaces, to create an intricate, flexible and fluid pattern of music, mood and memory, or, as Saadi puts it, "states of altered consciousness […] efflorescence of liminality" (Mitchell 2006: n.p.), which overrule and transgress temporal and spatial boundaries and may be interpreted as Saadi's metonymy of Scottish identity, itself a time-space compression.

As for the three short stories from *The Burning Mirror* to be analysed here, "The Naked Heart" focuses on a white Scottish character, John, a defrocked priest and his emotional crisis, while "Bandanna" and "The Queens of Govan" both contest the simplified

image of Celtic Scottishness by foregrounding the hybrid identities of their young Scottish Asian protagonists – Sal, the 'gangsta,' and Ruby, the waitress, respectively – and by presenting a "vision of a new, all-encompassing unity of Glaswegians" (Jansen 2018: 188). The latter two stories also serve as predecessors of *Psychoraag*, connecting them through some of the characters and revealing the racially diverse, hybridised nature of Glasgow: for example, the Qaisara Kebab House where Ruby works is "in the heart ae Govan which wis gie unusual fur an Asian-run Carry-out. Maist ae those were in the slightly safer territory ae Kinnin Park, where broon faces outnumberd the pink and where the Changezi family held an easy sway wi machetes an hockey sticks" (2001: 23). As depicted in *Psychoraag*, the 'safety' of Kinning Park (also known by the hybrid name of "Wee Faisalabad," named after the village the immigrants came from) is ensured by criminal activities and territorial behaviour: it is a place where the Kinnin Park Boys, a youth gang from the "baratherie"[iv] (2004: 102), took over the crime scene and "the Changezi Family ruled […] The pavements hereabouts were all Punjabi" (2004: 373). Although the description of the place and its inhabitants may refer to a kind of immigrant ghetto and foreground a distinctive cultural identity, the use of language gives away the hybridity of both space and self: "Wee Faisalabad" is a name coined from a Scottish slang and an Urdu word, while bhangra denotes the British Asian youth culture and their hybrid musical style of traditional Punjabi dance and Western electronic music. The description of Kinning Park and Govan thus highlights the multi-ethnic heterogeneity of Glasgow, calls attention to hybrid Glaswegian subject positions, and points to the possibility of inextricable links between the identity of Glasgow and its inhabitants.

The Postmodern City

When DJ Zaf of *Psychoraag* claims that "[i]n our hearts, we are all Glaswegian" (2004: 360), his words not only display a degree of local patriotism but also underlie the idea that "[t]he *experiencing* of a spatial environment is characterized by *emotional* participation" (Hasse 2016: 52) [original emphasis]. Zaf's emotional relationship with the city is complex and continually fluctuating between different personal and communal perceptions and experiences. When Zaf is on the air, wishing to "share himself with the whole of Glasgow" (2004: 330), he sees the city as an enabling place for building a bridge between East and West, a community with a shared sense of belonging. From the point of view of his parents and their fellow Pakistani immigrants, Glasgow is "Migra Polis, the deepest layer ae hell" (2004: 310), where the first-generation's immigrant experience involves a sense of alienation, isolation, and rootlessness.[v] Most of the time, though, especially when contemplating his own past, present and future in parallel with that of the city, Zaf experiences Glasgow as a transitory place: "the liquid city" where "time wis always out of joint" (2004: 395, 8), the spatial embodiment of "metempsychosis" (178). These urban imaginaries evoke different feelings in Zaf and convey different atmospheres of Glasgow for the characters and the reader alike.

According to Gernot Böhme (1993: 114):

> Atmospheres are indeterminate above all as regards their ontological status. We are not sure whether we should attribute them to the objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them. We are also unsure where they are. They seem to fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze.

One of the most thought-provoking aspects of this theory is the link it suggests between bodily experience, emotions and spatiality. Atmosphere seems to have both mental and physical connotations, connecting people and spaces/places through what Elizabeth Grosz calls "mutually defining relation between bodies and cities" (1992: 242), as a result of which the city is embodied and the body is "citified" (1992: 242), that is, urbanised and, in the case of immigrants, also hybridised. Transformation thus happens through the bodily experience and mental perception of Glasgow, and plays out in different contexts and forms and with various connotations in both the novel and the three short stories analysed here, thereby producing a multitude of specific and highly subjective atmospheres and spatial imaginaries of the city.

One urban imaginary of Glasgow is created by John of "The Naked Heart," who describes the city as "the anonymous conglomerate" (2001b: 135) with "the postmodern streets filled with grey figures and emptiness" (2001b: 137) and admits that he feels "out of place in that cold, northern city with its weeping walls, its glass soul" (2001b: 133). In contrast with Zaf's sense of community, John and his fellow city dwellers appear to be isolated and unconnected, but beyond this common portrayal of urban space characterised by anonymity and alienation, the image of the city is much more alive and atmospheric than expected. The weeping walls evoke the religious symbolism of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, an emotional place of prayer and pilgrimage; the glass soul generates associations with fragility, clarity and soulfulness; while both images involve personification: Glasgow as a space coming to life through its own emotional spaces/places and a space that embodies the hidden emotions of the protagonist. Although John claims that he is "whole, pomegranate-like" and that "[e]ach segment of his being [is] a world in itself and, yet, each [is] a part of a greater existence" (2001b: 136), his religious belief apparently does not save him from a sense of emptiness and guilt, generated by the love and lust that he feels for Terri and which made him move away to "lose himself in the metropolis" (2001b: 134). Hiding in a flat like a cell, John portrays the world outside with phrases such as "the indifference of the city" and "callous streets" (2001b: 134), "the wailing emptiness of urban foxes outside" (2001b: 137) and "spunk-infested alleys" (2001b: 138). His choice of words displays an ambiguous sense of being detached from yet also responding emotionally to the postmodern city. This may be due to what Tonino Griffero calls the "atmospheric affordances" of space: the messages spaces send out about their possible uses and functions (2014: 4). Drawing on this concept, for John the city seems to be a limited and limiting space: uninviting, consciously rejecting any relationship with its inhabitants, keeping him at a distance. Furthermore, in Griffero's view, "to an atmospheric affordance indeed one reacts not necessarily with a behavior" but "at times also with an aesthetic distance," that is, "the perceiving of an atmospheric affordance seems to 'demand' a special objectivity" (2014: 4). John's physical distance from public spaces of the city may indeed offer the possibility of objectivity but his references to crying, coldheartedness and anger give away a strong emotional reaction and a unavoidable subjectivity in his perception and bodily experience which, however, he tries to counterbalance by fleeing into the realm of hallucinations and vision, where there is "[n]o sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no will, no intellect, no memory" (NH 141), just pure presence, a transcendental existence. Shutting out the physical city, all there is left is its atmosphere, which Böhme explains as a "*Zwischenphänomen*" [phenomenon of in-between] (2001: 55), deriving from a "*Spüren von Anwesenheit*" [feeling of presence] (2001: 45) situated between subjectivity and objectivity or, in John's case, between physicality and spirituality.

The phenomenon of in-between and the sense of in-betweenness also play a vital role in "Bandanna." Here Glasgow is portrayed through the eyes of the young Scottish Asian Sal, choosing to roam around the city with his gang instead of helping out his parents in their corner shop. At first, the description is rather minimalistic and realistic: the images of "the suffocating rhythm of the morning. Plastic on tarmac. Spittle. The big sky" (2001a: 109) project an urban reality that may characterise any city in general. However, as Sal crosses the streets and contemplates the gap between the lives, fates and desires of his parents' generation and those of his own, the image of the city becomes increasingly complex. A vision of his gang's future, turning into their own parents living on the border and stuck in the past, makes Sal recall the Mullah's words: "*Behind every image, there is always a jagirdaar.*[vi] *Just as* […] *in ever Coca Cola tin there is a naked Amrikan slut, her legs overhanging the metal*" (2001a: 115) (original emphasis). Since *jagirdaar* means big landowner in Punjabi, the claim may sound out of context and place in contemporary Glasgow but still gives away a kind of rootedness and inability to perceive life outside the immigrant's own cultural roots and traditions. Furthermore, the idea of Glasgow being merely an image with such an improbable meaning behind it points to Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, "a real without origin or reality" (1994, 2000: 1). This interpretation is further complexified by the reference to a prevailing American culture, which may not only signal the influence of the West on immigrants in the form of temptation and contamination but also on Glasgow and Scotland itself, forcing them to wear the mask of American consumerism, which Sal portrays as follows: "The Great White Superstores, solid bastions thrown in a ring aroon the city. His father often railed against the toilet-friendly conglomerates […] the Safeways, the Sainsburys, the ASDAs besieging Glasgee, attacking Scola" (2001a: 116).

The commodification of postmodern life and urban space can produce a simulacrum of authentic environments and traditions (Harvey 1990: 87) but may, in fact, also denote the loss of authenticity for both the city and its Scottish Pakistani inhabitants. As Alan Bisset points out, "Glasgow as a signifier is now detached from any lasting and definite signified beyond consumerism itself, that is, beyond the eternal ingestion of images, the purchasing of objects divested of their history, the exploitation of anonymous, unidentifiable bodies" (Bisset 2007: 61). It may as well be this detachment that Sal fears the most: the possibility that he, "too, had been there […] between the jag-scarred thighs of the slut and had swum around (beard, frown-and-all) in the great fizzy vacuum of the west. Of Amrika, of Glasgee" (2001a: 116). Sal's words indicate that the first generation's belief of the unavoidable dangers of the west permeates his own perception of the postmodern city and generates a sense of 'nowhereness,' an in-between space of vagueness, unbelonging and emotionlessness. Since in Heiko Schmid, Wolf-Dietrich Sahr and John Urry's view "[a]n atmosphere is an emotion with spatial character" (58), Sal's sense of a physical and emotional vacuum may be both generated by and actually creating the atmosphere of Glasgow as a cold, detached, in-between postmodern metropolis.

The Hybrid City

The postmodern atmosphere and urban imaginary of Glasgow is revised and contested by the immigrant experience of DJ Zaf's parents, for whom "this wis the end, this city, aifter here, there wur nae mair crossins, nae mair lang loops across the waruld" (2004: 72). The image of

the end, of spatial limitations is in direct collision with the hopeful vision of "the land of the open sky" where "anything would be possible" (2004: 123) but where the parents end up leading "hermeneutic lives" (2004: 205) in a self-induced immigrant ghetto, giving a physical shape to the difficulties and problematics of the postcolonial situation. As Zaf sees is, the "Friendly City" is but a mask: for the immigrants, Glasgow is not the land of endless opportunities but "the desert of the soul" (2004: 390). Ambivalent as it is, this image of the city gives away a host of emotions, wavering and fluctuating between the what ifs and the should haves, the extremes of hope and hopelessness, loving and loathing. Zaf reveals the inextricable links between the Pakistani immigrants and the city the following way:

> These were ... the *kisaan*[vii] who had powered the buses, the underground trains, the machines of the sweatshop underwear-manufacturers. The whole of Glasgow had walked in their footsteps and worn their clothes. With bare soles they had trodden out new, hard paths along the Clyde and they had clothed the lily-white bodies of whole generations of Scots and then, later, they had filled their stomachs, too. You eat what you are. If that wis the case, then Glasgae wis Faisalabad a hundred times over.
>
> (2004: 242-43)

What the quotation implies is that the immigrants' social practices transform Glasgow into some 'immigrant city,' the urban imaginary of a marginal space which may provide a chance for reterritorialization[viii] and a consequent acquiring of a sense of belonging, but it also disempowers and dehumanises the diaspora subject. The process of dehumanisation makes the presence of first-generation immigrants basically invisible, metonymic – they may have been the predecessors of current native Glaswegians, but they have already vanished physically, leaving behind nothing but the paths they had trodden out, the clothes they had laboured on, and their cuisine to feed 'Scottish stomachs.' According to Bissett, the quotation also implies the immigrants' interaction with the natives, as well as a mutual transformation, that is, by highlighting the interconnectedness of Glasgow's 'white' history with Scots Asian history, Saadi demonstrates the ways in which "either group interacts with, informs and ultimately transforms the other. Glasgow literally consumes Asian culture, while Asians become assimilated into Glasgow" (2007: 65). In my view, however, interaction here is strongly metonymic, since the word consuming suggests that Glaswegians may assimilate into Asian culture, but their transformation into 'immigrants' is, in a way, an act of cannibalism.

The invisibility of the first Pakistani immigrants in Glasgow may also be read as a ghost-like quality: 'haunting' the white Scots through the cultural products they have left behind, permeating urban space with their imperceptible but palpable presence, they create an atmosphere of haze, and turn the city into a phantasm or an urban uncanny. As Lucy Huskinson explains, "The urban uncanny denotes the slippage or mismatch between our expectations of the city […] and often surprising and unsettling experiences it can evoke within [us]" (2016: 1). The presence and social practices of Pakistani diasporians in the city, and the consequent transformation of the cultural space and atmosphere of Glasgow may indeed turn it into an urban uncanny for both the immigrants and the 'natives': for the former, it is not what they expected to be; for the latter, it is not what it used to be or what they remember it to be. As a result, although the immigrants have marked out their territory with "bhangra boots," making the cultural space Punjabi (2004: 373), it simply does not feel like home. Similarly to Kinning Park, Zaf's home, "the Shiels" (i.e. Pollockshields) is described as the exclusive territory of a tribal group, a "town enclosed within a town" (2004: 115),

where the immigrants protect their own kind, keep others out and imprison themselves. As Zaf recalls, " the Shiels wis a skin of sorts, an armour against the scaldin winds of an all-white Alba. [...] Halaal butchers, subcontinental grocers [...] religious bookshops [...] Silent churches with no visible congregations. *Masjids*[ix] secreted in tenement flats devoid even of Glasgow light" (2004: 379). Interestingly, while the neighbourhood is a shield – both literally and figuratively – it does not seem to be able to provide a sense of security for its inhabitants, since while the shops can 'come out' as Pakistani and provide something familiar in an alien city, the mosques and, by extension, religious beliefs have to be hidden to be protected from the West or for the sake of avoiding trouble. The Shields is thus both visibly culturally other and wearing a mask to conceal its otherness – or at least a certain aspect of it. It may, in fact, be this ambiguity that is (partly) responsible for the immigrants' ambivalent affective relationship with the city, as well as their identity crisis and fears, which points to another aspect of the urban uncanny:

> The urban uncanny […] reveals the urban subject as one alienated from himself or herself, as a divided, repressed subject who reflects the situation of their environment as a place that promises the security and familiarity of a home but cannot provide it. The urban uncanny thereby denotes an existential gap or mismatch between city and citizen. It is as if the urban subject searches for a promised city that cannot be found, whilst the city that is accessible to the subject withholds and conceals the home that is expected of it.
>
> (Huskinson 2016: 5-6)

Relatively secure but alienated and not at home in their new hometown, the first-generation immigrants close themselves off to the opportunities of the immigrant city they created themselves: the inhabitants of the Shields spend their whole lives behind closed windows, Zaf's father loses his memories and connection to reality, and Ruby's father (in "The Queens of Govan) turns to alcohol.

The second generation's reaction to their parents' situation and the atmosphere of Glasgow as the city of immigrants is diverse, but a closer look may reveal certain recurring patterns in their behaviour. In *Psychoraag*, the Kinnin Park Boys' aggressive territoriality, "a set of behaviours and cognitions [...] based on perceived ownership of physical space" (Bell et al. 304), means that the gang treats Glasgow as their personal territory, confined by invisible yet clearly marked boundaries, signifying "the power of defining space" (Madanipour 2003: 55). As Ali Madanipour points out, a sense of territoriality is also "derived from emotional attachment and familiarity" (2003: 44), that is, by reterritorializing the city the immigrants achieve emotional attachment, which then enables them to appropriate and control the place as their own primary territory and may generate a feeling of "distinctiveness, privacy and a sense of personal [and cultural] identity" (Bell et al. 1996: 306) – in other words, a sense of belonging. In a somewhat similar fashion, Sal's gang in "Bandanna" also conceive of Glasgow as their own territory, marked out by movement, as well as sound and action:

> They were on the film-set, they were living in total. There were no spaces in their existence. No gaps of silence. The Gang turned west, away fae the mosques, towards Maxwell Park. That's where they were heidit. To the pond and the trees. To muck up the quiet. To fill it wi gouts ae Bhangra and Baissee. They skatit past the tenement closes, each one a blink in the Gang's eye. The sound of generations carved into each

> corniced ceiling […] The black slaves had bled in blue: R'n'R, hip-hop, reggae, and now the swastika-daubed Paki shop-owners would disembowel the air of syncopation. Together, with night torches, they would fire the swastikas and, in the fractured air, would spin them around in great wheels up and down the streets of Glasgow.
>
> (2001a: 112, 116-17)

Sal's focal point reveals the second generation's determination to leave the roots, both cultural and religious, behind and, as opposed to the first's generation's efforts to hide away, to indicate their presence as visibly and loud as possible. One particularly interesting aspect of this quote is how it uses historical and musical references to add a new shade to how the immigrants permeate and hybridize the cultural space of Glasgow. Looking back on the oppression of black people in the USA, Sal (or, more precisely, Saadi himself) emphasizes the power inherent in music to unite individuals through their shared experience and to generate change. His words suggest that if the first generation could accept their own hybridity and learn from the battles and victories of the oppressed of the past, they could successfully fight racism and claim the city as their rightful home. Furthermore, by turning Glasgow into a home, *their* home, the immigrants could do away with the prevailing sense of the urban uncanny.

Drawing on Huskinson's assertion that [t]he city is uncanny when it reveals itself in a new and unexpected light; when, for example, its familiar streets and buildings suddenly appear strange, even hostile" (Huskinson 2016: 1), it is also possible that by claiming and hybridizing Glasgow, the immigrants, many of whom were rural people back in the subcontinent, may get rid of the formerly perceived uncanniness of urban space for a more rewarding emotional relationship. Furthermore, they could subvert the formerly perceived hostile atmosphere of the city and make the 'natives,' too, feel the urban uncanny, which could lead to a better understanding of each other's situation and offer a chance of becoming a community – hybrid, yet distinctively Glaswegian.

On the other hand, the phrase "film-set" suggests that the vision of the immigrants taking up the fight is a mere phantasy, perhaps never to be realized due to their fears and weakness, or to the atmospheric affordances of Glasgow, an illusion created by the city itself, while all along the urban uncanny feeds their anxiety that "the city is playing a game according to undisclosed rules" (Huskinson 2016: 6). No wonder, then, that the second generation also play a game, that of masquerade, not necessarily for the sake of protecting themselves from discrimination and racism, but to appear more street-wise and powerful than the city would 'expect.' In *Psychoraag*, the Kinnin Park Boys borrow the looks and persona of American gangsters, posing as a "[k]ind of Al Pacino in a shalvar kamise," a "mini Cosa Nostra" (2004: 104), while in "Bandanna," Sal and the gang exchange "Bronx palm-slaps" (2001a: 111). Although, as Zaf notes, this choice is not conscious, the young Pakistanis eventually become what they pretend to be: feared and fearless. Their transformation may be explained by Judith Butler's theory of performativity, according to which "[c]onceiving identity as performative means that identities are constructed by the 'very "expressions' that are said to be [their] results" (1990: 45). The marginalized second-generation immigrants can thus take centre stage and become larger than life as the Kinnin Park Boys, the 'crime lords' of the city, and the Black Bandannas, the 'gangstas' of Glasgow.

As Sal admits, the Black Bandannas wear black "because it made their faces look whiter" (2001a: 112-13), which is thought-provoking from two aspects. On one hand, their wish for a perceived whiteness gives away their awareness of the disadvantages of being visibly other, as well as a sense of identity crisis, manifested in a desire to shed their

complexion as a racial marker. On the other hand, wearing a bandanna is in itself a manifesto of a culturally different collective identity, a deliberate attempt to grab people's attention and become a visible force, a "hundred-strong baratherie" (2001a: 110) with a power integral to unity, the embodiment of change, which Sal describes the following way: "They were all small time, forming and disbanding from one year to the next in tenuous hierarchies of slang and spittle […] Nothing was static. Life was movement, juddering, twitching, filmi-star movement. Peasant to refugee, refugee to kisaan, emigrant to immigrant, Paki tae dhokan-daar, shopkeeper tae gang-member" (2001a: 113). The change described evokes a sense of fluidity for city dwellers and, by extension, urban space as well: as the former become Scots Asians, hybrids hiding behind a mask but speaking Scottish, the latter comes to be seen as the hybrid city.

The Phantasmagoric City

Besides change and hybridity, fire and water are also characteristic tropes and metaphors of Saadi's description of contemporary Glasgow in the stories analysed. One aspect of this portrayal may, in fact, derive from the history of the city itself, which the heroine of "The Queens of Govan" refers to as "the rage that simmered beneath the skins ae Govan. The rage ae the dead ships an the closed factory gates an the games lost and won, an the rage of the marchers wi their blue-an-orange banners which had been hauled, blood-spattered, fae houses ae God" (2001c: 31). Ruby acknowledges the changes her native neighbourhood has gone through after the decline of its shipbuilding industry, and witnesses how the despair generated in its working-class community is manifested in rage attacks at lost Ranger matches and Orange Order marches (Jansen 2018: 194). She can relate to or identify with these emotions, just as much as with her own anger following racist assaults (e.g. the catcall she receives as an exotic other) (2001c: 25), but decides not to act on them: "And sometimes Ruby felt herself tae be a part of that inchoate fury but she had shied away from it because she knew that, like the great, black waters ae the Clyde River, it would sweep her away, not to the sea but to a darkness from whence there would be nae return" (2001a: 25). For Ruby, fire and water feel similarly dangerous, as they signal an inability to control herself and her situation. Furthermore, both are directly connected to the city and its uncanniness, this time in a Freudian sense, which Huskinson explains as follows: "the uncanny is the subject's encounter of unconscious contents (such as experiences, feelings, memories, or ideas) that he or she has attempted to disown and neglect, but which have suddenly reappeared" (Huskinson 2016: 2). But what is it that Ruby suppresses and that reappears in these images of (self-) destruction?

Throughout the story, Ruby appears to be well aware of her own in-betweenness: "Ye couldnae hide in Govan. It wis pubs and carry-oots an alleyways where dogs an hookers plied their trade. Dark places, amidst the neon. It wis either wan, or the other. If ye tried tae live between the two, you would split apart like the moon. Or like Pakistan" (2001c: 26): Ruby's words are intriguing on several levels. First, they suggest that leading a double life, living in the in-between is unavoidable and necessarily leads to an identity crisis, as she is forced to be either this or that but never both – this points to Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity as the "third space" of the "in-between" (1994: 38), that is, a metaphor of cultural difference, "a metonymy of presence" (1994: 115). Ruby's 'absence' and invisibility is a result of her ability and choice to steer between lives: at home, she puts on a "Mashriki mask"[x] (2001c: 23) to please her parents, suppressing her self that is not Pakistani, whereas outside, in the

cultural space of Glasgow, she enjoys more freedom to express herself and appear to be whoever she wants to. However, the image of whiteness she tries to achieve through wearing black and working out to look thinner and thus more western proves to be yet another illusion, a mask she puts on, a role she plays. As Ruby herself recognises, roleplay has its limitations: "Nae blond wigs in Glasgae. Aw that stuff wis for them in London, where ye might pretend tae be anything and no one would give a shit. Sometimes she longed fur that kindae anonymity, fur the chance of jist droppin off the edge of the world and seeing where y'ended up" (2001c: 24). Ruby's words suggest that although she is free to wear any mask she chooses, her sense of in-betweenness cannot be eliminated by mimicry, a partial representation which thus becomes a mockery (Bhabha 1994: 120). Apparently, Glasgow enables masking – after all, it is also wearing masks itself, especially that of the friendly city for the sake of tourists – but it does not allow deceit and mockery, the denial of a true self, no matter how multiple or fluid that self may be. It is one thing to slightly adjust one's looks for the sake of blending in, and quite another to almost completely disappear under a literal or metaphorical wig – thus Ruby also has to face and publicly show off the part of her self she wished to suppress. This, however, may prove to be a more fruitful way to reconstruct her identity as regional, rather than cultural or ethnic. If there is no anonymity in Glasgow, then the character of the city and its inhabitants can shine through the mask, creating the uniquely Glaswegian atmosphere of urban space and identity of the people. From this aspect, Glasgow as "the liquid city" is not only ever-changing, but also transparent, like water.

Perhaps it is the recognition of this transparency that makes Ruby opt for a kind of subversion of her hybridity: instead of the stasis of in-betweenness, she appears to exist in a fluidity that she derives from the city and which simultaneously creates an atmosphere of fluidity in Glasgow, as well. Putting out fire and rage, water permeates the city in the form of the June rain that makes people tipsy and the Clyde that Ruby perceives as seeping through the bricks of the kebab shop, having "burst its banks an […] washin doon the Copland Road, but the waters it brought would not be pure" (2001c: 21). Interestingly, there is a certain ambivalence about the image of water here, pointing to both purification and abjection, which may symbolise the white Glaswegians' fear of changes brought along by the immigrants, as well as the immigrants' fear of losing their pure, fixed identity through a process of hybridisation. Likewise, depending on her mood, Ruby experiences the presence of water in two ways: in the rain, she feels alive, but once she becomes unable to control her anger, she feels "the cold waters ae the Clyde flow around her and take her down intae a darkness without end" (2001c: 35). What is described here is an inextricable link between emotions, bodily experience and atmosphere, underlying the claim that "emotions are not private states of the inner world of the soul, but they are spatially extended atmospheres" (Schmid, Sahr and Urry, 2016: 58) involving corporal feelings. The atmosphere created embodies and strongly influences both Ruby and Glasgow, unifying Glaswegians through their shared experience and creating yet another unique urban imaginary.

Ruby's vision of the Clyde permeating the buildings and pulling her down in a whirlpool may also be read as a phantasmagoria, a real or imaginary image as if seen in a dream (Benjamin (1927: 40), explained by Pile as either "an experience of movement, of a procession of things before the eyes" (2005:3) or something "beyond the immediately visible or tangible" (3), a dream the underlying processes of which are imperceptible (2005: 19). Since Ruby's experiences seem to take place on the elusive border of reality and illusion, both of these interpretations may explain the phantasmagoric qualities of Glasgow, played

out in a host of various images and affective relationships in the three short stories and *Psychoraag*.

In "The Naked Heart," John has recurring dreams of his love, Terri standing on a field in the sunset wrapped in a breeze that is at times "skin- scathing" (Saadi 2001b: 139), other times the embodiment of Christ she is waiting for. Eventually, Terri becomes "nothing" as she has "lost the will to knowledge and the knowledge to will" (2001b: 139) and John's dream also dissolves in the cold, unwelcoming urban space. What remains is a lingering emotion that both transcends the physical shape of the city and forms it, exemplifying how "phantasmagoria is highly suggestive of the importance of particular kinds of emotional work for city life" (Pile 2005: 3). In "Bandanna" the emotional and dream-like qualities of Glasgow are portrayed through Sal's parallel vision of his parents' past and the gang's unavoidable future:

> They were on the border. Alang the silent razor. Between the dots. Sepia, again. Short-haired men with wives. Babies, dead – already. Visions of the past, of past lives. A long, Hindu cacophony. […] An image of a large bonfire. The Gangs, all throwing their bandannas into the flames. Black, red, blue. Even the Kinning Park Boys. All sprouting long, grey beards and adopting a bow-legged walk.
>
> (2001a: 115)

The trope of fire, thus, may both symbolise the second generation's rage (as in the phantasm of setting the swastikas on fire), and the dismay of all that made them different from the first generation. Although the burning of the bandannas may also denote the end of gang warfare, it more emphatically calls attention to the possibility that in the end anger and violence, the gang's primary tools to control and shape the city, will give way to acquiescence and sinking to inertia, into oblivion, which resonates with DJ Zaf's bleak vision of the transforming power of the city:

> Zaf had wandered through this city his whole life. He had given his spirit to the buildins, the parks, the broken neon signs and the people. The soul of Glasgow had penetrated the core of his being. He had allowed it to enter him and, like some dissolute whore, he had welcomed it, had allowed it to fester within him and he had held back nuthin. And so, now, when he needed some of this spirit back, just for a while, just for tonight, the city wis not forthcoming. It turned its hard Presbyterian face away from its own children, it averted its thin lips. So why on earth should it bother to acknowledge a changeling like Zaf? He no longer recognised himself in this place. The city had changed. Or mibbee he had changed.
>
> (Saadi 2004: 199)

Although the change Zaf describes here is by no means positive or welcome, as he feels betrayed by the city, this transformation may be attributed to the mutually transformative relationship of the body and the city. It seems that the city has come to life owing to the emotions it generated in Zaf and a concomitant bodily transformation. Furthermore, the materialisation of the atmosphere of urban space and personification through phrases like "Presbyterian face" and "thin lips" reveals a decidedly emotional or affective relationship between Glasgow and Zaf, a complicated 'love affair' that touches and transforms the soul of both man and city, and which involves affection, obsession, jealousy and betrayal.

Similarly to Zaf, Sal goes through a palpable transformation in the matter of few hours in and because of the city. Saadi's portrayal of the teenager reveals a degree of identity

crisis, generated by Sal being "fair-skinned, almost white" (2001a: 110) but not white enough to avoid discrimination, as well as a hybrid self that he perceives being "a freedom-within-freedom" (2001a: 112), that is, his hybridity results in and also lends itself to wearing a mask, performing his identity in a way that he becomes the embodiment of rage and all the changes that it may bring along. When Sal reaches Maxwell Park with the aim "to orgasm in vandal with the Gang" (2001a: 111) and "scream in blood and banghra" (2001a: 117), his rage suddenly disappears and he feels at peace with his surroundings and himself:

> The sun was streaming into his eyes and he could feel its golden brilliance flood through the coils of his brain. […] [I]t occurred to him that one day, not far in the future, it would be his fingers that would be pushing up the grass and that what he thought, felt, did, created during that minuscule pause in his fate might live beyond him, his family, the tribe to which he happened to belong, and that the only constant in the whole of Maxwell Park – the trees, the birds, the water, the kids – the only beat that dumped all other rhythms was the beat of love. Salman took a deep breath, the deepest he'd ever taken; it filled parts of his lungs which had never before breathed, not even at the moment of his birth. He felt a great swell of happiness explode infinitely slowly from the centre of his being. His love spread across the grass, the trees, the chunks of dead elephants and returned to him sevenfold. […] Ripping off his bandanna, he ran his fingers through his long hair. Felt free. […] [H]e faced towards Grobals Cross and began to pray.
>
> (2001a: 118-20)

Since Sal's eyes are closed, his perception of urban space around him is limited to a pure bodily experience of the atmosphere of Glasgow, which generates a rush of positive emotions, pointing to Böhme's (2001) claim that the atmosphere of the city is mainly sensually perceived, and intrinsically, bodily felt since it is "scripted in emotional states of being" (Plesske 2014: 139). Whether it is the warmth of the sun filtered through his eyelids or the sudden realization of belonging, the understanding and sense of love appears to be more of a phantasmagoria than a real feeling, especially in light of the closing scene, Sal's unexpected turn to religion, which may even seem hypocritic (Upstone 2010: 195). As Pile assert, "phantasmagoria implies a peculiar mix of spaces and times: the ghost-like or dream-like procession of things in cities not only comes from all over the place (even from places that do not or never will exist), but it also evokes very different times (be they past, present or future; be they remembered or imagined)." (2005: 3) Drawing on this interpretation, Sal's emotional state may, in fact, be generated by Glasgow, the phantasmagoric city, which acquires an atmosphere of warmth, love and solace in return.

As Sal, the gangsta disappears in the phantasmagoria of love to give its place to Salman Ishaq, so does DJ Zaf eventually dissolve, turn into music or into something other than human – "immortal. Invisible, formless, perfect" (2004: 85) in the phantasmagoric space of Glasgow, "the liquid city [that] would sink aw intae nuhin." (2004: 395) Zaf attributes the transformation of self and atmosphere to the Clyde, to the endless movement of the water:

> [E]verythin seemed to be regressin – not so much into the past as into essences, sensations, concepts […] The city seemed to be shiftin constantly […] in the slippin of time through brickwork and concrete – a feelin that Zaf couldn't pin down, a frontier sense of exhilaration of ridin the west wind on the back of this city of light and dark where everythin was an illusion.
>
> (2004: 372)

Zaf's dream or vision of change in the form of regression to essences and sensations suggests that the complex and ambivalent but decidedly affective atmosphere of the city may, in fact, reveal its core behind the multitude of masks, its soul as an ever-changing "liquid city" that refuses to be stuck in time but takes up the everyday challenges posed by the change of the times, and by its inhabitants, both old and new.

Conclusion

Through the individual and collective experiences of the characters of "Bandanna," "The Naked Heart," "The Queens of Govan" and *Psychoraag*, as well as their bodily perceptions, emotions and imagination, Suhayl Saadi offers a host of urban imaginaries of contemporary Glasgow. His portrayal reveals the complexity and ambiguity of affective relationships and the mutually transformative power of these relationships for the city and its inhabitants alike. My analysis of the characters and the depiction of Glasgow found that whatever the emotions the first generation of Pakistani immigrants, DJ Zaf, John, Sal and Ruby derive from Glasgow's atmosphere they may in fact be the exact same emotions they give a physical shape to as they constantly construct and reconstruct the image and atmosphere of the city – that is, the individuals are both affected by and is affecting the emotional and atmospheric qualities and Glasgow, creating its urban imaginary as the postmodern city, the hybrid city and the phantasmagoric city. While the characters' self-expression, and the impermanent and illusory nature of Glasgow tends to be manifested in phantasmagoria and suggests that both are wearing masks, I argued that what these masks represent and what lies behind them may in fact point to the same fluid identity that makes the city and the people – and, by extension, Saadi's fiction – uniquely Glaswegian.

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[i] Saadi describes his redefinition as follows: "With my pen, I draw refrains from the sighs of the dead and trumpet them as tales of the new Alba. My long, hirpling fall is a supra-mythic Scottishness which I cannot explain. Neither tribal or territorial, it is an Albannach shroud which emerges liminally through fiction" (2002: 239).

[ii] For a discussion of how Glasgow was compelled to become more attractive for tourists, see Bisset (2007: 60).

[iii] In his review Nick Mitchell labels Psychoraag "the first ever novel of Scottish-Asian identity" while Saadi himself calls it a "significant contemporary Scottish rock 'n' roll novel" ("Psychoraag"), thus refusing a hyphenated identity.

[iv] A baratherie is an Urdu word denoting a person's extended family or a clan.

[v] Simone Weil's concept of rootlessness marks the decline of a political spirit; it is a so-called déracinement. Based on Thucydides' idea of stasis, the concept also refers to the loss of a collective communal spirit, that is, the loss of a common past and common ancestors (see Dietz 1988: 154).

[vi] Big landowner in Punjabi.

[vii] A peasant or peasants.

[viii] Employed in diaspora studies (not entirely in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari), deterritorialization and reterritorialization denote the loss of an old territory (in the homeland) and taking possession of a new one (in the host country).

[ix] Mosques.

[x] Mashriki means eastern and connotes respectability and sophistication.

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The Cultural Web of Paterson's "Scotch Settlement"[i]

Vesna Lopičić

Abstract

The claim "the best story-teller Scotland has produced since Stevenson" makes Neil Paterson (1915-1995) an interesting research subject. The result is somewhat disappointing since he seems to be forgotten, not being listed among the few hundred best Scottish authors ever. However, the author who won an Oscar for a screenplay (Room at the Top, 1959) and was widely read and translated in his time definitely deserves to be revisited. His best short story "Scotch Settlement" from the collection The China Run: A book of short stories (1951) is especially worthy of attention in the context of some traditional elements of Scottish culture preserved and persevering in settler Canada at the turn of the 19th century. Our aim is to explore a few facets of this interesting story in which two little boys steal a baby, in order to show how Paterson deals with the issues of religious devotion, family values, personal pride, orphaned childhood, kindness and love. The concepts related to Johnson and Scholes' (2008) Cultural Web model will be adapted to examine the cultural environment of a Scottish family and community in Canada in the hope that Neil Paterson will re-emerge as an author of relevance even today.

Keywords: Cultural Web model, Scotch Settlement, Neil Paterson.

> "The cultural self is the sum of the scenarios in which one participates."
> Jay Ruby

Introduction

It is easy to agree with Celeste Ray that today Canada is awash in Scottish memorabilia: "The Tartan days, clan gatherings, highland games, and showings of films like *Braveheart* indicate a sense of Scottish-ness that is informed by stories, narratives, or myths of the homeland's rural, resistant past" (2005). Scottish heroes of old live in the memory and imagination of the people worldwide, Scottish genius can be found behind many inventions and achievements that the world can boast of, Scottish intellect left a deep mark in literature, academia and science all over the globe, the Scotts were the pioneers without whom the New World would have been different today. After Arthur Herman (2001) thus explained *How the Scots Invented the Modern World,* a number of authors such as Ken McGoogan (2011) focused on Scottish presence in Canada and showed that Scots created Canada as well. A substantial body of research corroborates the idea that the Scottish legacy in Canada has become the foundation of Canadian values (J. M. Bumsted 1997, L. H. Campey 2005, P. E. Rider and H. A. McNabb 2006, M. E. Vance 2012, J. Calder 2013). Herman's claim that being Scottish is a state of mind (2001: VII) is perhaps the most succinct tribute to the Scottish heritage, especially in Canada. In combination with the pioneering spirit, emphasized by Susan Warwick (1987), it creates the historical mythos that is the ground base for the emerging Canadian identity.

Clara Thomas is one of those researchers who clearly outline all facets of Scots' presence in early Canada:

> The Canadian mythology of the Scotch was based, of course, on a solid ground of fact – on the numbers of Scotch who were prominent in the exploring and settling of the

> country, in its fur trade and later, on every level of government and financial enterprise; on the Presbyterian church, the Established Church of Scotland and so a prime and powerful institution to its people; and above all, on the pride of race and clan among the Scotch, a pride that distance from the homeland enhanced and fostered.
>
> (Thomas 1977: 47)

According to the editor of the magazine *Celtic Life International* (July 1, 2017), Scottish Canadians are the third-largest ethnic group in Canada and among the first to settle in Canada. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* quotes the results of the 2016 Census of Canada: a total of 4,799,005 Canadians, or 14 per cent of the population, listed themselves as being of Scottish origin (Bumsted 2018). Evidently, sheer numbers are impressive, and even more so the positions and impact of many individuals of the first and subsequent generations of Scottish immigrants. From the very beginning of their settlement, Scots have been highly visible both in politics and business, but also in education and religion. As Leslie Marion Campbell concludes "The complexity and the longevity of the Scots' influence in Canada is unquestionable" (2000: 111). In fact, it has become almost imperceptible because it has become part of the Canadian system of values.

Scottish Ethos in Canada

Canada's social and ethic fabric has been woven largely by Scotch settlers and immigrants whose efforts alongside people from other cultures contributed towards the creation of a distinct identity recognizable in Canada today. Though this contention is often disputed, Canadian identity being considered controversial and undeveloped (P. W. Bennett and C. J. Jaenen 1986, W. K. Carroll 1992, Nelson Wiseman 2013), it is unquestionable that the myth of the Nation-Builder Scotch (Thomas 1977: 38) belongs to the warp and weft of Canadian society. The Scots pioneer experience is well-documented since it left a deep mark in the imagination and memory of the people. All the hardships and successes of coming to terms with the land, of setting up prosperous crofts, of struggling with the climate and indigenous people, seem to have enhanced the pride of the settler Scotch who attributed their success to the glory of their clans. Far away from home to which they would never return, they exalted the old values which allowed them to prosper in the new homeland. Campbell lists industriousness, integrity, and thriftiness (2000: 11) as sample virtues which characterize the Scottish ethos and which are definitely sustained by the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Its religious puritanism is supposed to be softened with generosity and hospitality, proclamation of the gospel of Christ and constant social reforms to the common benefit. The Kirk and its values were through the process of cultural translation (Gittings 1997) transferred to Canada where they encountered fertile soil to quickly regenerate and continue flourishing. Likewise, words set in gold on the ceremonial mace in the Scottish Parliament are not only the four founding principles of the Parliament but the values which Scottish people have always embraced for their governing body. The transition of compassion, wisdom, justice and integrity from Scotland to Canada also testifies to the uncompromising character of Scotch identity. Despite the pressure to integrate, they struck a fine balance between being accommodating and distinctive and to this day managed to remain recognizable in the cultural mix of modern Canada. Therefore, transposition of Scottish values to settlers' Canada proved existentially and culturally beneficial so that today Scots form an integral part of Canadian culture, and as Nation-Builders they still build the nation's ethos and economy.

The Cultural Web of a Scotch Settlement

During the 18th century a combination of push and pull factors brought the first significant numbers of Scottish immigrants to various geographical regions of Canada where their courage and determination made them stay, spread and prosper. Not all of them were poverty stricken nor did they all perish during the first winter.[ii] Quite the contrary, their success kept encouraging new waves of migrants throughout the 19th century so much so that Lucille H. Campey in her numerous books on Scottish history in Canada[iii] insists on regarding them as a founding people. However, the relocation inevitably caused changes which were not easy to deal with, especially because they were not related so much to physical survival as to psychological shifts. Maintaining the 'status quo' (Schein 2010) as a resistance strategy is short-lived and ultimately doomed to failure, since change and accommodation to new circumstances, however undesired, is still inevitable.

In their very influential study *Exploring Corporate Strategy* (1988), Gerry Johnson and Kevan Scholes identified a number of elements which can be used to describe, influence and change the culture of an organization. They created the Cultural Web model which consists of six interlinked elements that make the paradigm and that are represented graphically as six semi-overlapping circles which together influence the cultural paradigm. They are Rituals and Routines, Stories and Myths, Symbols, Power structures, Organizational Structure, and Control Systems. Though it is widely used as a management tool, we believe that the Cultural Web can help understand a specific cultural paradigm even outside of the corporate world. The model in question is the one of a Scotch settlement in Canada depicted in the story "Scotch Settlement" by Neil Paterson from the collection *The China Run: A book of short stories* (1951).

Along with Ralph Connor, Sara Jeannette Duncan, Alice Munro, and Margaret Laurence, Neil Paterson is among the first authors who tackled these challenges of cultural change in the context of Scottish migrations to Canada. The main characters are two brothers, Harry aged eight and Dave aged four, whose caregivers are their grandparents, James Mackenzie and his wife. When the granddaddy refuses to get them a dog, the boys steal a baby which leads to the climax of the story. In the end, the baby is safely returned and the brothers get their dog. Applying the Cultural Web model, the story will be analysed in terms of Cultural Paradigm, Rituals and Routines, Stories and Myths, Symbols, Power structures, Organizational Structure, and Control Systems exercised in the story in order to understand the complex interplay of factors influencing members of early Scottish communities in Canada.

Cultural Paradigm: Transposition of Scottish Values

Johnson and Scholes' cultural paradigm is a pattern or model of a work environment which emerges as a web of the six elements and which is easily recognizable for its values, mission and practices, or in the famous phrase of the McKinsey organization, that culture is "how we do things around here" (Denning 2018). A Scotch settlement in early Canada would perfectly fit this description, because a stock answer to any question related to the community's beliefs, attitudes, values or practices would be "this is how we do things around here." The cultural

paradigm developed in Scotland through long centuries of experience survives in the new environment and initially resists any change of the unwritten ground rules.

The location of the Scotch Settlement from the title of Paterson's short story is not specified but it is in a typical Canadian setting, by the lake with some hills in the background, probably in Nova Scotia or somewhere in New Brunswick at the turn of the 19th century where farming was still the primary source of livelihood.[iv] It seems that Granddaddy Mackenzie has an oat farm and that he does most of the chores on the farm by himself, his son and daughter-in-law having both passed away. His system of values is typical for a Scottish Presbyterian heritage and shared by the members of most Scotch communities in Canada, regardless of their actual denomination, as Raymond MacLean summarises:

> Their attitudes on education, their loyalty to the state, to institutions, to individuals, their conception of the role of religion, the maintenance of a folk culture and a strong attachment to their native soil — all these lived on with them and were reinforced in eastern Nova Scotia.
>
> (MacLean 1976: 102)

Indeed, the significance of education, religion, loyalty, and pride of origin cannot be overstressed when Canadian Scots are in question. The interplay of these elements creates a solid cultural paradigm which can withstand subversion and corruption.

Good education seems to be of utmost importance, and the elder brother Harry attends school in their Scotch Settlement despite the economic hardships of the family and the need for an extra pair of hands on the farm. Education was deemed necessary as a way to put one's faith into practice and serve the world in God's name. It is not surprising that there is a school in their Scotch Settlement because when immigrant Scots settled in a new place, they would try to build first a church and then a school. Mr. Mackenzie has no formal education himself, unlike his wife, but both of them gape in disbelief when they learn Harry was absent from school for two days. The principal insists that the boy be punished because he has sinned doubly, and Granddaddy immediately sends him to the woodshed, the place designated for beatings.

The cultural paradigm of the Scotch Settlement is mostly defined by the strict Presbyterian doctrine. Social cohesion at that time depended mainly on the Kirk, and the faith was governed by the moral ethos. "The evidence indicates that religion was the most important single factor influencing the lives of these people, for it permeated their homes as well as their churches" (MacLean 1976: 107). Even missing school is considered a sin, and even a child of eight is supposed to be physically punished for that sin, and for not confessing to it when asked: "You stand for judgment. Hev you aught to say?" (216), his Granddaddy solemnly and angrily declares.[v] Education and religion were tightly related and Mister McIver from the story is both a preacher and a dominie.[vi]

However, as Campbell explains, "the disturbing repressiveness fundamental to Calvinist-Presbyterian doctrine" as practiced in early Canada (2000: 11) is the cause of anguish and bitterness that lead to resistance even in a small child. Harry refuses to confess to his sins even though he believes in God. Later in court he says: "The Lord have mercy on me […] I am eight years old and a sinner, but I aimed at no harm" (221). Although more egalitarian in nature than other Christian denominations, and more tolerant to differences between churches due to pioneer conditions, the Scottish Presbyterian Church maintained a rigid patriarchal structure intolerant of any insubordination. For that reason, the brothers and their granny are expected to obey the will of the grandfather who is feared more than loved.

His stock answer is always "It's God's road" (207), reminiscent of "this is how we do things around here."

Loyalty to the Crown is another constitutive element of the Scotch Settlement cultural model. Granddaddy Mackenzie's views on patriotism are not explicitly given because as a Presbyterian he does not adorn his mantelpiece with the King's picture, and his loyalty is evidently with the Bible. Based on the interpretation of the Second Commandment that "God is a spirit and no image can do Him justice" (Strain 2016), strict Calvinist Presbyterians are not supposed to decorate their bodies or their homes. "Thus Christians in the Reformed tradition have focused on verbal images of God rather than visual ones though some verbal descriptions of God are no less idolatrous than visual images" (Miller 2018).[vii] However, the system of values cherished by the Granddaddy is passed onto his wards, and when they decide which name to give to the stolen baby Harry says: "I am goin' to call my babby George after the King," and they both agree that "George is an extra good name" (213). Still, in their great desire to have a pet, the boys violate the rule and commit a sin by acquiring a picture of a dog which they hide in Granddaddy's boot.

Andrew Hill Clark claims that "In pride of origin Nova Scotia Scots are equaled, if that is possible, only by the Norsemen overseas" (Clark 1960: 66). Truly, the Scotch cultural paradigm is primarily characterized by the pride of origin which gives the Scotch a distinct sense of identity, necessary during the creation of new social systems and stratification in Canada. Scottish traditions got firmly rooted and significantly impacted North American cultures and heritage, which in turn further contributed to a sense of nation pride (Jonak 1996: 86). This feeling of self-righteousness and self-worth stemming from Scotch origin permeates the story whose main characters are all powerful personalities. Granddaddy Mackenzie is an especially proud man who would never allow strangers to see him without his good boots on. His reputation of a stern Christian secures him a place of honour at any table and respect of the whole Scotch settlement.

Consequently, education, religion, loyalty, and pride of origin are the main building blocks of the Scottish cultural paradigm which is at the centre of the Scotch Settlement cultural web. Further, as the cultural paradigm influences and is influenced by the six inter-relating factors of the model, each aspect should be considered separately to see how they brought about the change in the community and in the Mackenzie family.

Rituals and Routines: Praying and Washing

Johnson and Scholes define rituals and routines as the daily behaviour and actions of people that signal acceptable behaviour. In an organization these are the unwritten ground rules as to how things are done and what is valued by management. In a Scotch settlement in Canada these would be the rituals related to religious observance and the welfare of the community. In Paterson's story these rituals, foremost praying, are the routines practiced by the members of the family. Following the Presbyterian tradition, the brothers say their prayers before and after every meal and before going to bed, just like their grandparents. This routine is strictly observed and even the four-year old Davy is made to go through it to the last Amen. The boys being so young, and especially in the absence of the granddaddy, the words of the prayer get mumbled and shortened,[viii] yet the prayer is never omitted. Belief in God becomes an integral part of their value system and daily practices so that when eight-year-old Harry gets caught, he spontaneously prays to God: "Lord sweet God, have mercy on me […] A poor sinner" (216).

Besides regular praying, regular washing is a routine repeated before eating and sleeping. It is grandmother's duty to teach them that cleanliness is next to Godliness, which she does rigorously. On a tub night, she scrubs them thoroughly and little Davy often hides the scrubber. "She rubbed the skin near off me" (207), he complains.

These rituals and routines reflect the core belief that faith should be practiced daily and that bodily cleanliness is related to the cleanliness of the spirit. The health benefits of these two practices are indubitable, and among other things they may have helped to sustain the Scotch communities in their early days of settlement.

Stories and Myths: Mommy and Grandaddy

Johnson and Scholes also explain the significance of stories and myths defined as the past and present events and people talked about inside and outside the company. The purpose of these stories is to convey a message about what is valued and what behaviour should be avoided. In "Scotch Settlement" there are allusions to different stories some of which gain mythical proportions for the two children, especially for Davy who is actually the main character.

The first one is the story of his late mother. Davy was too small when his mother died so he relies on Harry's and granny's stories about her. Harry's memory is good and he often describes their mother and father to Davy while lying in their bed, how big and clean their daddy was, and how beautiful and tender their mommy was. Harry remembers how he and his mommy changed Davy's nappies, how she would stroke him and lough with them. In a childlike and heart-rending way he relates the story of loss and longing that his grandparents do little to mitigate so the brothers quietly ache, yearning for any creature they could pour their love on. It is evident that Gramma also misses her daughter-in-law and has fond memories of her:

> Your mamma was somethin' special, even if she did marry our Alec. Remember always she was somethin' special, puir lassie; she had hands fine as a lady's.
> What are ladies' hands like, Gramma? I asked.
> Very clean, my gramma said.
>
> (213)

Based on these stories little Davy creates the myth of his mother as an ideal being from a picture book who becomes his idol. He would like to emulate her so he sometimes washes his hands even if he is not told to do so. He wanted to be something special too.

On the other hand, the granddaddy is a frightening authoritative figure and Davy confesses to his granny that he doesn't like him. He believes that the granddaddy is not on their side because he would not buy them a dog, but worse than that he is sure that he would eat the dog if they got it. Davy's imagination runs wild and when he sees the granddaddy with a gun he believes he would kill both the visitors and their horses. He admires the granddaddy for his forging skills, for his strength and the respect he commands but he is also convinced he would eat the dog skin and all. That is how he interpreted the granddaddy's reason why they could not have a dog: "A dawg is of no use […] You can't eat a dawg" (206). In Davy's mind this dog-devouring becomes a haunting picture that terrifies him when the granddaddy discovers the baby they were hiding.

The stories of an angelic mother and a dog-eating granddaddy stand at the opposite ends of the ethical model developed in the Mackenzie family. They reinforce the family's

beliefs and traditions but also demonstrate the conventional gender roles in a Scotch settlement that helped preserve the stability of the community.

Symbols: Boots and Dawgs

The third element of Johnson and Scholes' Cultural Web are symbols, explained as organizational logos and designs, which also extend to symbols of power such as parking spaces and executive washrooms. These visual representations can become status symbols with certain rules and taboos attached to them. An unambiguous symbol in the story "Scotch Settlement" are Mr. Mackenzie's boots. They are his prize possession, worn once a year to the Convention, otherwise sitting on a shelf well-oiled. They are his source of pride because nobody in their community had such boots nor is he ever seen in public without them. The family knows he puts them on only when he needs to meet people to save wear and tear, but to everybody else it seems that he wears them all the time. Even in his reduced circumstances in Canada the granddaddy would like to preserve the image of a successful farmer, and his Scotch sense of pride will be hurt if the truth were revealed. Little Davy intuitively understands the implications of this symbol and dares not touch the taboo boots, and it makes him feel sick even to think of that. Such is the power of this symbol.

Another symbol in the story is the dog which the boys want so much, though they cannot explain why. They are not aware that the dog becomes a symbol of all the love they need to bestow on some living creature, but they desire it so much that Harry eventually kidnaps a neighbour's baby which they manage to keep for two days. The scenes in which the brothers feed the baby, choose a name for it, change its wet-cloth and take all the risks to sustain it show how precious the baby is to them. Not only the dog but even the picture of a dog which Harry brought to Davy is denied them by their strict Presbyterian granddaddy who exalts usefulness above any kind of pleasure, completely ignorant of child psychology and the damage he may cause by his rigidity.

These two symbols are related because they both indicate that the granddaddy, or the system of values of a Scotch settlement which he embodies, needs to change and adjust to the new circumstances caused by the loss of parents and relocation.

Power Structures: Church, School, and Court

The Cultural Web model also involves the pockets of real power in the company or formal and informal influences known as power structures. It is basically the issue of who makes decisions in an organization. If applied to the cultural environment of a Scottish family and community, the church, school, and court are easily identified as dominant power structures. In a Presbyterian community, catechism and pedagogy are closely linked which is in the story emphasized by the same person being both the preacher and the teacher. John McIver is highly respected and given license by James Mackenzie to educate and reform his grandchildren as he finds fit within the institutions of the church and the school. The Bible and the ruler underpin the structural organization of Christian settler communities as regards the young generations.

Yet, the court session is definitely unexpected in a story about little children, whatever their sins may be. Still, in "Scotch Settlement" Neil Paterson makes an excellent use of it to ridicule the inflexibility of the pioneer pursuit of law and justice, however justified the formal rigidity of legal institutions in a community trying to establish itself as law-abiding and

civilized in Canadian wilderness. The settlers recreate a court in a store whose owner Tom Cameron becomes the judge complete with a writer, a prosecutor and an audience of local people, and the trial procedure is followed step by step to the final verdict which should be hanging for abduction of a young female. Everybody realizes the absurdity of this verdict since the culprit is eight years old and the baby is absolutely unharmed. Harry even believed that the baby was a boy and gave it the name George. Yet, his crime becomes an example of unacceptable behaviour since a Presbyterian community highly valued female purity.[ix] The female body is a contested territory that the whole community struggles to preserve as in the case of a certain Sarah, taken to the woods by Arch Foster who was then made to marry her by the court.

The purpose of the institutions of the church, school, and court is to protect the core values of the community, or in the words of Johnson and Scholes, of the cultural paradigm through their formal or informal influences. Powerful persons operating through position or history are also instrumental in maintaining order in the community which is quite obvious with Mr. Mackenzie.

Organisational Structures: How to Use Power

Power structures are complemented with organizational structures which include reporting lines, hierarchies, and the way that work flows through the business, as Johnson and Scholes explain. In Paterson's story, all hierarchies are determined by the patriarchal system of a Scotch community. However important women may be, all power structures are governed by men like John McIver, John Cameron, or Joe Cullis who organized the search for the lost baby. Their role is to reinforce stability through smooth operation of all institutions. Subordination is prerequisite, insisted upon and trained for by the institutions and individuals. For example, granddaddy Mackenzie is supposed to observe the decisions of the priest and the judge, just as his two grandsons and his wife are expected to obey his will. These are unwritten conventions which help the community and the family perform their roles and organize their life in an orderly fashion.

However, human spirit is by nature insubordinate which is well illustrated in the story. The granny herself is a powerful figure and she sometimes manages to sway her husband's decisions. She was the one who persuaded him to buy the dog after all, and she criticizes him for his harshness towards Harry and Davy. She often saves the children from his wrath though she failed to save their own estranged son. Her power is informal and subversive of her husband's authority but constructive within the family organization. Harry also undermines the authority of the granddaddy which affects the organizational structure of their family. He breaks the rules, disobeys, and refuses to tell the truth which leaves no choice to the granddaddy but also proves that cultural change is necessary. Finally, Mr. Mackenzie himself manifests similar insubordination when he shows contempt of court by publicly threatening Tom Cameron that he will shoot him. All these instances indicate the negative effect of excessive rigidity of the Presbyterian system of values, and the need to change the cultural paradigm.

Control Systems: Crimes and Punishments

The last element in Johnson and Scholes' cultural paradigm are the control systems, which they explain as the ways that the organisation is controlled including financial systems,

quality systems, and rewards. In everyday terminology, these are the processes in place to monitor what is going on. Naturally, the significance of control for a good management cannot be overstressed so it is equally important when the cultural paradigm in question is that of a Scottish settlement in Canada.

Since the individual who needs to be subjected to control is an orphaned child of eight, the control systems applied are those of the educational system and the family. In both cases, the methods are the same. Both the school teacher and the granddaddy use physical punishment for whatever transgressions the boy may have made. Whether for missing classes or stealing a baby, Harry will be beaten, sometimes till the blood comes, and kept in the woodshed without food "until he sees the error of his ways" (217). Handling the control systems is a contested issue, and Mr. Mackenzie insists on strict division of domains:

> "The boy has sinned doubly. He has been absent two days," the dominie said, and he limbered his arm. "I maun thrash him, Jim."
> "Ay," my granddaddy said, "you maun thrash him, John. This is fair an' fitten since you are his dominie, but you will thrash him in the school's time, I say, an' not in mine."
> (216)

The control systems are definitely firmly in place in a Scotch settlement because disobedience and defiance have to be eradicated in the youngest members of the community. The problem arises when control is abused and exaggerated as when Harry is taken to court with a possible death-by-hanging verdict. Common sense prevails and the alternative to that is sending him to a correction school in order to reform him. Control measures taken in Harry's case are supposed to reinforce desirable behaviours and discourage whatever was considered harmful for the community. It is evident that the elements of a cultural paradigm often overlap. As Johnson and Scholes suggest, power structures may depend on control systems, which may exploit the very rituals that generate stories, proving that a cultural web consists of tightly interwoven elements.

Conclusion: Change of Paradigm

Another significant researcher in the field of corporate strategy, Edgar H. Schein (2010), describes culture in different terms, but like Johnson and Scholes maintains that cultural change creates high levels of anxiety. In his theory, when change happens different forms of resistance are manifested, of which trying to maintain the status quo is most prominent. In Paterson's story James Mackenzie is the dominant individual backed up by the whole Cultural Web practiced in their Scotch settlement, who believes that by resisting change he can preserve the core values of their community. Changes inevitably happen: his son and daughter-in-law both died, the family moved to Canada, little Harry grows… but the granddaddy remains strict and harsh as if his personal resistance could stop the course of nature. Believing that the status quo should be preserved at all costs he punishes Harry (and Davy), and allows the teacher to also punish him at school.

However, when Harry is taken to court and threatened by being sent away to a reform school, Mr. Mackenzie defies the system and induces a change of verdict. This act of subversion indicates a shift in his system of values in the sense that the rigid rules which up to that moment he applied to all and sundry got relaxed. Crime should not necessarily be followed by punishment. Instead, kindness and support may take the place of hardness and

unconcern. At that moment finally the granddaddy did not see a criminal in front of him but his own grandson who needed some understanding and love. The turning point in Mr. Mackenzie's transformation happened on the night he discovered the stolen baby when little Davy cracked, convinced their furious granddaddy would eat it:

> I clawed at his leg, but his leg was movin' and I fell.
> "It's ourn," I said. "Ourn."
> My grandaddy pushed open the door and went in the house, and I fell on the step and was too tired and sad to git up. I jest lay screamin.' "Don't eat it, Grandaddy," I said. "Tain't fitten. Please, please don't eat it."
>
> (220)

In an instant, the granddaddy understood the fears and needs of his little boys, their tender years, motherless childhood, and their misunderstanding of the words the grown-ups so carelessly say before children. Paterson does not elaborate on this at all because it would be structurally unconvincing, the story being told by Davy. Instead, he ends the story with Mr. Mackenzie selling his precious boots and ordering a red setter dog for his grandsons. The whole family is engaged in this decisive act of writing the letter which rounds up the leitmotif of who is on whose side in the family. The brothers compare the relationships in other families with theirs and believe that the granny and the granddaddy always support each other while nobody's on the side of the children. They obviously feel unloved and abandoned, so the best thing Mr. Mackenzie could have done to bring the family together was to buy them a dog and show them they are all on the same side. In the last paragraph of the story Davy says: "I stood close up with my chin on the table, watchin'. I was mighty content, not only on account of the dawg, but on account of I now knew ours was a good family, not like some. In our family we was all on the same side" (226).

This is how Davy validates that change may be good for the cultural paradigm of the community. Family cohesion is re-established, the bonds are strengthened, and no harmful compromise has been made. When Mr. Mackenzie sold his boots and walked home barefoot, his wife was worried that people saw him disgraced, but he self-confidently replies: "They are clean […] My good name is in God's hands and my pride does not rest in ornaments" (226). This summarises several elements of the Scotch ethos, such as cleanliness, faith in God, repudiation of ornaments, personal and national pride. It is evident that these values are reaffirmed even though change has been effected. Taboos are broken down, rules are violated, and principles betrayed to the benefit of individuals and paradoxically for the preservation of the whole cultural web of Scotch Settlement. Neil Paterson consequently emerges as an author of relevance even today when Scotland considers serious shifts of its cultural and historical paradigm.

Notes:

[i] This research was supported by the project 178014 granted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

[ii] Letter by David Burns written June 23, 1873, published in The Stonehaven Journal July 31, 1873 describes the first experiences of immigrants during the crossing and in the colony: "Meantime, assuring my friends that the Colony is a success, everything in a thriving state, although all the

colonists are not equally advanced, there being some working in groups who have great clearings made, crops sown and planted, while those working singly are not making so great progress, but all are doing well. Live stock is being daily added to the colony and thriving well as far as can be seen."

[iii] *A Very Fine Class of Immigrants: Prince Edward Island's Scottish Pioneers, 1770-1850 (2001); An Unstoppable Force: The Scottish Exodus to Canada (2008); With Axe and Bible: The Scottish Pioneers of New Brunswick, 1784-1874 (2007); Les Écossais: The Pioneer Scots of Lower Canada, 1763-1855 (2006); The Scottish Pioneers of Upper Canada, 1784-1855: Glengarry and Beyond (2005); After the Hector: The Scottish Pioneers of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, 1773-1852 (2004); The Silver Chief: Lord Selkirk and the Scottish Pioneers of Belfast, Baldoon and Red River (2003); Fast Sailing and Copper-Bottomed: Aberdeen Sailing Ships and the Emigrant Scots They Carried to Canada, 1774-1855 (2002).*

[iv] It is interesting that today there are four communities (or at least geographical locations) bearing the name of Scotch Settlement and one Scotch Lake in the area of New Brunswick, and one Scotch Settlement in Ontario.

[v] Little Dave is the narrator in the story and this is how he perceives his granddaddy: "My grandaddy was death on sin. He had eyes sharp as a woodcock for wrong-doin', and when he saw a sin he raised his voice to Heaven and said so, and if it was us had done the sins he took us into the wood-shed and beat us. Once he beat Harry justly till he bled. My grandaddy was a just and terrible man" (202).

[vi] Dave describes the local preacher as equally terrible: "That man was Mister McIver the preacher, and he was the dominie too. He was a true Christian like my grandaddy, he was fierce as a wolf, and his beard was red" (215).

[vii] David Morgan in his book *Protestants & Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture and the Age of American Mass Production* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) describes the paradox of the rise of these images, regardless of doctrinal expectations.

[viii] "Lord," Harry said, "Father chart hum hum bout to receive hum hum blessed portion hum hum hum umhum day and night. Amen" (204).

[ix] The judge, Tom Cameron, uses this opportunity to say: "Sex crimes too. Our women rate high with us in this community and, rightly, a woman's purity is a hangin' matter. It was time we showed the wild elements that this is so, and a man tampers with women-folk gits his just deserts" (222).

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Reconfiguring the Body of Scotland

Jean Berton

Abstract

Issue 35 of New Writing Scotland (2017) is titled SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID, and co-edited by Diana Hendry and Susie Maguire. This study concentrates on the 24 texts of prose short fiction arranged in the alphabetical order of the authors' second names. However, this selection by the editors follows the main idea as expressed in my title. This anthology is viewed as a literary correspondence of T. Devine's "Being Scottish" (2002), which enables us to apply a text-context approach. This collection of pieces of short fiction introduces single individuals, couples and parents & children, more loosely connected characters through love and friendship, and characters belonging to folklore and legends — all being connected with Scotland. The tales lead us to open the whole collection of short fiction to interpretation: the family, or body, of Scotland, the broad community of the UK, and the broader society of men of Britain, Europe and America.

Key words: "Being Scottish", the body of Scotland, New Writing Scotland.

New Writing Scotland is an ASLS yearly publication of a collection of pieces of short fiction selected from a bulk of submissions by Scottish men and women with a feeling for literature. *New Writing Scotland 35* is titled *SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID*[i] after one of the twenty-five prose pieces of short fiction. This paper will leave aside all the poems included in this anthology presented by Diana Hendry and Susie Maguire, co-editors — their general introduction to the collection of short fiction gives no clue about their aims and intentions in their choices among the fair amount of submitted texts. The decision of presenting the texts in an alphabetical order of authors' second names clearly shows that every reader can pick a story to read on the bus or associate them at will.

Those writings can hardly be labelled short stories for they are shorter pieces of fiction, approximately between 1,000 and 1,900 words, whereas a short story usually ranges from 1,600 to 20,000 words. They can also be qualified as "quick read" for most of the narratives are about a fragment of life, or dream, sometimes serving an epiphany. One could be tempted to call them "new kailyard" pieces of literature with a broader scope than eastern rural Scotland for they are encompassing the whole of Scotland, the larger cities as well as rural places in the west, the north, and the east of the nation. In each piece of prose short fiction, the key elements of short stories can be identified — the characters are limited in numbers; the settings vary from a section of a bus to a district on some island; the conflicts are limited to one; the plots can be restricted to some minor events highlighting a social issue or an international connection; and the themes can appear dissimilar, yet they are aspects of the main topic of the Scots as a large group of people in their environment, or body showing through minor events which are merely introduced, or rapidly sketched when they deserve developing.

Those pieces of short fiction are anecdotes for they are belonging to the oxymoronic class of realistic fiction since the stories can actually happen and be true to real life. However the anecdotes may be real or fictional, such as SIRLOIN (42)[ii], the short text in which the young boy is eventually enjoying the sirloin steak his mother has just shoplifted — the event of running away with food is true to life. Still, those anecdotes aim to reveal a truth more general than what the tales show. The anecdotes of *New Writing Scotland 35* convey the idea

of the Scots in their present-day environment. Indeed, ASLS editors claim that *New Writing Scotland* is to offer their readers sketches or synopses of narratives to allow new writers to be known and encouraged to improve their skills. The editors' intention differs from that of Short Edition, for example — a French publisher in Grenoble selling short texts to people about to travel on the bus across the town: their aim is to favour reading, inviting people to enjoy a "short piece of fiction for the day".

As it is, one can notice a correspondence between this anthology of literary texts and T. Devine's collection of opinions in *Being Scottish*. The obvious issue is the sketching of the ever-changing body of the complex nation — body, here, should be understood as "an organized group of people with a common purpose or function", according to the Oxford English Dictionary. This justifies the text-context approach chosen to serve the aim of this paper which is to assess the underlying point common to all the pieces of short fiction in this anthology. It implies that, unlike Devine's selection of debatably spontaneous papers, each of all the narratives is conveying an intention. They depict, as they are, the intimate relationships within a family to be extended to the community of Scotland thus highlighting the necessary contrast of freedom and ties leading to conflicts between generations and sexes. Also inevitable are the causes of frustration, longing and anxiety and the unsettled limit between beliefs, dream and reality — a gate opening to the fantastic.

Since the editors, in their brief introduction, give no indication of a central theme to the collection of short texts, we need, first of all, to introduce them in order to find out the common theme underlying the selection. What's more, since the texts are printed in the alphabetical order of the authors' second names, this bars any attempt at an obvious global thematic view. And what we are left with is a puzzle to build. In order to tackle all the twenty-five different narratives, some methodology needs to be devised — two angles of view can help us figure out the body of modern Scotland from these pieces of short fiction: first, the characters, and second, the conflicts. This is drawn from a basic questioning of the title printed on the cover page:

SHE SAID
HE SAID
I SAID

It is borrowed from the text by Sylvia Dow titled SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID (31). The colons are the only punctuation marks linking the three sentences. Because the characters are introduced as "Well, she said." Or "I said. Yes.", and because now and then the dialogue is interrupted by undeveloped sentences in italics, such as "*Darkness. Quiet. Car passing.*" (33), we can state that the corresponding text is a play script. And this unveils some intention to stage the characters.

Out of the twenty-five narratives in this anthology, some of them are of singled out, though not isolated, individuals — RAIN (11), ROAD ENDING (75), ON AN EARTH UNIFORMLY COVERED BY SEA (114), INK (169), MA WEE BUIK O GENESIS (171) —, others of characters set within close family ties — PERFORMANCE (1), BAD ELEMENTS (17), MUM AND I (37), SIRLOIN (42), AUNTIE (71), HORRIBLE SUNSHINE (94), WET LIKE JELLY (130), SHE WASN'T PRETTY (146) —, others of human beings connected by friendship or hatred — THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STONE (22), SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID (31), A GOOD LISTENER (54), CHECKING OUT THE CZECHS WITH JACKSON (80), OWLETS (87), HITTING THE TOWN (92), THE SNOWS OF BEN NEVIS (104), A NOTE OF INTEREST (142), THE ARCHAEOLOGIST OF AKROTIRI (152) —, and others of wo/men in this world encountering the other world —

STALKING DEER (61), MY MEMORIES OF SEAL CLUBBING (110), THE STRANGER (125). Naturally, the narrators must be granted a special status.

The themes can be broadly grouped under the following headings — love and family ties and couples; humour; folklore and the fantastic; Scotland and legitimacy; nature and environment; violence; community and solidarity. The narratives are organised around conflicts — mother and daughter conflicting relationships: 3 instances; crude reality, or nature and culture: 3 instances; reality and the fantastic: 6 instances; love and hate causing acts of revenge: 2 instances; man versus nature: 4 instances; Scotland contrasted with the world: 2 instances; comedy from clash between men and women: 2 instances; the present and the past: 2 instances; and, life and death, solidarity: 1 instance.

All those conflicts are common to all nations; however, likely blatant conflicts between Scotland and England are absent, which may not betray a form of preterition. Still the political context of the years 2016 (with the Brexit vote) and 2017 and of previous generations can be referred to in order to make capital out of any hermeneutic approach. Indeed, the tales open the collection of pieces of short fiction to free interpretation in which the family of Scotland (AUNTIE (71); SHE WASN'T PRETTY (146)…), the broader community of the UK (A NOTE OF INTEREST (142); THE STRANGER (125)…), and the broader society of not only the English-speaking countries (WET LIKE JELLY (130); PERFORMANCE (1)…) but also the European Union THE ARCHAEOLOGIST OF AKROTIRI (152)…) can be involved. Nevertheless, in each narrative the body of Scotland is implicated to some degree and the readers' role is to update their views and understanding of the nation.

Snapshots of the changing body of Scotland

In this part, the twenty-five pieces of short fiction will be discussed as snapshots of the changing body of Scotland, meaning that the narratives will be connected with the actual context of either pre-devolution or post-devolution times.

Carl MacDougall, in *Writing Scotland*, subtitled as "How Scotland's writers shaped the nation", writes in his preface: "Our range of voices, sense of place and the mythologies we've created continue to tell the world who we are and what made us this way. They have maintained our identity in the face of indifference and defeat, and have made our concerns universal." The notion of sense of place, which is so powerful in Scottish literature, pervades the short fiction narratives under study.

The picture of England William Shakespeare provided in a few strokes of his poetic brush is voiced by the character of John of Gaunt, in his *King Richard II* (Act II Sc.1, from line 40):

> This royal throne of Kings, this scept'red isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise,
> This fortress built by Nature for herself
> Against infection and the hand of war,
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea,
> Which serves it in the office of a wall,
> Or as a moat defensive to a house,

> Against the envy of less happier lands;
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
> This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
> Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth, […]

This purple patch by Shakespeare is parodied by Liz Lochhead in the first chapter, equivalent to a prologue, of her famous play, *Mary Queen of Scots Got her Head Chopped Off*. Here the picture of Scotland is voiced by: "The chorus, LA CORBIE. *An interesting, ragged, ambiguous creature in her cold spotlight*":

> CORBIE. Country: Scotland. What like is it?
> It's a peat bog, it's a daurk forest.
> It's a cauldron o lye, a saltpan or a coal mine.
> If you're gey lucky it's a bonnie, bricht bere meadow or a park o kye.
> Or mibbe… it's a field o stanes.
> It's a tenement or a merchant's ha.
> It's a hure hoose or a humble cot. Princes street or Paddy's Merkit.
> It's a fistfu o fish or a pickle o oatmeal.
> It's a queen's banquet o roast meats and junkets.
> It depends. It depends …
> Ah dinna ken whit like *your* Scotland is. Here's mines.
> National flower: the thisle.
> National pastime: nostalgia.
> National weather: smirr, haar drizzle, snaw!
> National bird: the crow, the corbie, la corbeille, le corbeau[iii], moi!
>
> (Lochhead 1989: 5)

In both plays by Shakespeare and Lochhead, details can be interpreted as references to historical events, whether domestic or international, grounded on political decisions. Even though the twenty-five texts selected from *New Writing Scotland 35* do not refer to Lochhead's picture of Scotland, they can be considered as twenty-five aspects of Scottishness.

Ever since the failed referendum of 1979, Scottish historians — T. Devine and T. C. Smout among so many others — have dedicated a lot of energy rediscovering and reassessing the past of Scotland, and Scottish writers have endeavoured to revive Scotland's literature — A. Gray, J. Galloway are but two names on a long list. Still, both historians and writers have been assuming the dark events, characters, and heroes brought to the surface. Even Kailyard writers' works have been reassessed. The collection of short fiction pieces in *New Writing Scotland 35*, through such texts as MUM AND I, or AUNTIE, or ROAD ENDING, reminds us of popular collections of sketches about what may pass as minor incidents, such as James M. Barrie's *A Window in Thrums*. Another example of comparable texts would be found in Iain Crichton Smith's *The Village* offering snapshots of life in a Lewis village. And over the thirty-five years of *New Writing Scotland*, the younger generation of authors have been expected to grow and become major writers.

While reviewing the literature of Scotland, MacDougall lays stress on "[the Scots'] sense of place [which] is so strong it's difficult to tell if [they] inhabit the landscape or if it inhabits [them]" (MacDougall 2004: 1). All those notions of belonging, of identity, and of guilt can be subsumed under the concept of Scottishness born with the Renaissance in the wake of the First World War.

The study of the composition of the pieces of short fiction in the anthology of *New Writing Scotland 35* reveals some degree of realism paired with a second major notion: for example, SIRLOIN (42) is based on realism and the handling of guilt; THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STONE (22), on realism and tale telling; BAD ELEMENTS (17), on realism and the consequences of rape; A GOOD LISTENER (54), on realism and the effects of attraction; STALKING DEER (61), on realism and animal killing; OWLETS (87), on realism and superstition; MY MEMORIES OF SEAL CLUBBING (110), on realism and fantasy; WET LIKE JELLY (130), on realism and legitimacy through acknowledging fatherhood; THE ARCHAEOLOGIST OF AKROTIRI (152), on realism and Scotland's prehistoric past as a worldwide value; and INK (169), on realism and the need to be in tune with the nation's history.

Wondering whether there is such a thing as a voice common to Scotland is a spurious question since the Scots have rarely spoken in a single voice. The nation means a wide range of voices because, first of all, it is a self-declared multilingual country, with a bulk of native languages — Scottish Gaelic (a Celtic language) and English and Scots (Germanic languages) and Latin and French (Roman languages)... and more recently imported languages such as Urdu, Polish, etc. *New Writing Scotland* welcomes texts written in Gaelic (the language was modernised in the 1980s), Scots and English. The case of Scots versus English in Scotland has a long history: since the eighteenth century, and quite a few generations before, when London's English endeavoured to phagocytise Scots on the grounds that both tongues had a common origin and that Scots was a corrupt form of English — Burns, the poet, propounded the native tongue against the language of trading, and Adam Smith, the philosopher, among others, took action to teach proper English to educated Scots… In prose fiction, today, writers are free to enjoy all forms in the continuum of the language of the Angles[iv] — standard English, Highland English, Standard Scottish English, standard Scots, and any form of broad Scots… All Scottish writers, and the editors of *New Writing Scotland*, agree that the body of Scotland has many tongues and that it is no handicap but a national treasure. Cairns Craig, in his *The Modern Scottish Novel*, published in 1999, goes so far as to state: "[…] Scots displaces English into being the supplementary language because it remains the origin of the nation's literary culture, though it can do so only by allowing Gaelic in turn to assert its founding claim upon the nation's 'throat'" (Craig 1999: 76).

In *New Writing Scotland 35*, the twenty-five pieces of short fiction put forward the many different voices in tongues we can hear in the nation — the voices of friendship and of hate, those of loneliness and of pain, those of dream and of nature… not to mention the case of male and female writers' voices.

Millions of cells in the body of Scotland

In the introduction of his collection of *Personal Reflections on Scottish Identity Today* listed in the alphabetical order of the second names of authors, Devine writes that "*Being Scottish* […] offers an opportunity to penetrate behind the statistical surveys and explore the rich complexity of changing identity from a varied range of opinion" (Devine 2002: ix). Obviously no two answers can be exactly identical. Similarly, if one asks a thousand authors to produce a piece of fiction, the outcome will be remarkably varied. Still, the amount of effort to produce a piece of fiction equates what is required to voice one's opinion: "It is surprisingly difficult to explain something so profound and innate as a sense of belonging to a

particular country" (Devine 202: 171). *Being Scottish* is also a cultural end result of countless centuries:

> For me, being Scottish is an unenviable mixture of conditioning and characteristics set in motion eras ago and influenced by the variables of the weather, the diet, Celtic chromosomes and who made it to the shores from other gene pools to cheer us up or make us fiercer, taller, blue eyed, better engineers, more artistic, more soulful.
>
> (Devine 2002: 4)

This is developed further by this other interviewee: "Being Scottish for me is being proud of our heritage, our landscape, our friendliness — which is second to none — our traditions, music and language, although I personally know not one word of Gaelic, and our dancing …" (Devine 2002: 13).

Thus we could read some five million personal reflections highlighting the specific traditions in the culture of Scotland to be confirmed by a definite sense of place where the three native languages are competing. About Scots, one reads: "I stand alone with the many hundreds of thousands who use Scots as their first language, yet see it given scant recognition from our major institutions" (Devine 2002: 112), and about Gaelic: "Gaelic is understood by only 1.4 per cent of the population, so presumably 98.6 per cent of Scots think they can find their soul that way" (Devine 2002: 23).

This brief review of Devine and Logue's collection of reflections shows how close using fiction can be to voicing one's opinion — the reader being aware of the use of 'mirrors' in fiction: in SIRLOIN (42), a lone mother steals some sirloin steak to feed her 10-year-old son who "knows she tries her best to make sure he always has enough to eat" (42), yet the boy feels sick with fear. Eventually, the boy has a revelation on discovering how good sirloin steak is. Beyond the sociological fact of stealing food to eat, the reader catches the notion that guilt is a relative feeling. This leads to the idea of freedom from imposed moral restraint. SNOWS OF BEN NEVIS (104) merely relates a climber being rescued. This documentary fiction shows the value of solidarity, which is the antonym of the credo of competition. This reminds us of how Cairns Craig connects fiction (being the product of one's ability to create pictures in one's mind) and real life, in his *The Modern Scottish Novel*: "A national imagination is the means by which individuals relate the personal shape of their lives, both retrospective and prospective, to the larger trajectory of the life of the community from which they draw their significance" (Craig 1999: 10). And in THE ARCHAEOLOGIST OF AKROTIRI (152), a teenager's last family summer holiday on the island of Santorini brings together the Scottish teenager and Phaedra, the dedicated twelve-year-old daughter of the leader of the group of archaeologists. Years later, the Scottish boy has become an archaeologist "spending his life searching for lost worlds" (160). This narrative not only connects Scotland and Greece and their pre-historic cultures, but also exposes the worldwide network of archaeologists which the reader is free to think it is a possible parallel to the diaspora of Scots round the world.

Craig also refers to Allan Massie (Craig 1999: 206):

> […] in his introductory chapter he pointed to two different traditions of the novel which shaped the nature of contemporary writing in Britain: on the one hand is 'naturalism' whose 'ambition seems to be to hold up a mirror to nature' and 'such novelists may indeed be said to be at the mercy of their material'; on the other,

> we find novelists […] whose novels seem first of all to be conceived as objects. We are aware of the author standing at an angle to his work. Their novels convince not by challenging comparison with "real life" but by offering us something which is as clearly a part of real life as a piece of furniture; and may be said to stand in the same relation to it. Something has been created to enhance and quicken our sense of being.
>
> (Massie 1979: 8-9)

This sense of being is the core of INK (169) where the narrator is visiting a tattoo parlour (169). Throughout the whole experience of being tattooed the narrator and the artist talk sharing memories of places they had visited separately. Eventually, the narrator — and patron — concludes: "She had fulfilled one of my ambitions, […] She had made one of my dreams come true. I'd had an itch, and she scratched it" (170). The unanswered question is about the itch, and the first notion — however debatable — that springs to mind is the urge to connect one's life to that of the Picts. The narrator of MUM AND I (37) is a nine-year-old girl who never knew her father. Her point of view on her Mum and the men she seduces is rather distant until her Mum meets Paul. The last scene is taking place at the café for breakfast: "Then it was just the three of us, and I liked that" (40). This concluding remark reveals that she has found the proper position within the new family unit she had been tacitly hoping for. At a symbolical level, is Caledonia, the 'mother' of all Scots, expected to find a suitable match to replace the unsuited John Bull?

The body of Scotland acknowledged by her tradition

New Writing Scotland has published short texts of prose and verse, in English, Scots and Gaelic, for some thirty-five years, thus creating a tradition of its own. Craig tackles the notion of narrative — that of individuals, that of characters, and that of the nation. Is the nation of Scotland an imagined community springing from imagined characters — like those we find in each piece of short fiction — however different they can be from real people? Then Craig refers to Hobsbawm's *The Invention of Tradition*, particularly to the concept of 'Invented tradition' developed in his introduction:

> 'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.
>
> (Craig 1999: 12)

Still, this continuity respecting tradition is open to innovation. This is what Craig introduces:

> As form, the novel is a force of modernisation, an outcome of the print capitalism which Benedict Anderson has identified as one of the driving forces of modernity; in its contents, however, what it does is to render the process of modernisation explicable by turning the welter of events in which humanity is caught up into the orderly trajectory of narrative, a narrative which tames the threat of the future by binding it back as the necessary outcome of the known order of the past, and which renders the past significant by making it the foundation of the values of the present.
>
> (Craig 1999: 11)

The narrative of SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID (31) offers a highly traditional scenario: two female friends fighting for the one man who betrayed SHE by being seduced by I — "pretty young girls have wiles" (31). SHE is going to murder I who tries to defend her life and accidentally kills SHE. The form is innovative since it mixes a dramatic text and a novel form:

> And you and I, girl, we know that to be true. Don't we? she said.
> Don't we?
> I said. Yes.
> Look, I said. Listen.
> I'm sorry, I said.
> I never meant to harm you.
> To be honest I said I never thought about you.

The dialogue includes the environment of the scene, and the typography requires the reader's interpretation. This piece of fiction, dramatised fiction, connects the past to the present as well as the dramatic genre (tragedy) to the epic (prose) form, whether classic novels or present-day detective novels.

The body of Scotland is prodded, analysed, contemplated by historians, sociologists and politicians. Still, it wants a new life to be breathed into it by narrative artists whose imagination is indispensable. The countless metaphors they use blend reality, realism and tale telling into an oxymoronic sense of belonging. The pot-pourri of pieces of fiction found in *New Writing Scotland 35* seems to meet what this interviewee declares in *Being Scottish*: "If we Scots have anything to offer to the international community, it is that 'mankind touch', the instinct, impulse, compulsion even, to touch, embrace and join with common humanity whenever we encounter it" (Devine 2002: 97).

The value of Scottishness appears in several pieces calling for interpretation. In RAIN the sense of Gàidhealtachd is powerful: the imaginative girl enjoys going to the spring every morning to fill the tin pail, especially when it rains. The family is bilingual, her father "used to say that Gaelic is the language for all things to do with the earth" (11). That morning she spots two golden eagles feeding on some lamb offal on the beach. Then comes a buzzard but the couple of golden eagles take off to attack the intruder and kill it in the loch. On coming back home she sees that a little brother has just been born, mewing like a buzzard. She thinks: "Was this *draoidheachd* – enchantment?" (15). The character is blurring reality into dream. The senses of place, of nature, and of bilingualism all together belong to reality, whereas the girl's dream brings fantasy into the narrative. The reader is then free to discuss the possible interpretation of the killing first of the lambs (a biblical reference?), then of the intruder by the native couple of golden eagles — a fable on the national motto, "Nemo me impune lacessit"? The narrative thus blends realism, culture, and latent or frustrated desire.

The title of ON AN EARTH UNIFORMLY COVERED BY SEA (114) is enigmatic until we read it is about tide theory. Is it a reference to the origin of our sea-covered planet or to the Flood meaning either or both the birth and the rebirth of Scotland and of Man into real life? The narrative is about a student, Callum, visiting his uncle and aunt in northern Scotland for two weeks to revise for his reset exams; but Callum helps his uncle, Uisdean, repair the roof of the byre. In the evenings, Callum is too tired to revise and he is most likely to fail. But the heart of the narrative is a tale within the tale about the moth which "spent the whole night fluttering at that lamp" (118) of the creel boat. Then, back at the university, on opening his

pen case, he finds a dead moth, "bringing him north, further north till the traffic shrank back and the moor began, the air rippling the lochans and a dreamlike floating as grasses and reeds whipped by" (119). To put it in a nutshell, the call of nature is fighting against bookish learning. The reader can discuss the urge to combine nature and learning.

The narrative of SHE WASN'T PRETTY (146) is about a young couple, Jeb and Edwina, who are going to spend their first night in their new house in the Highlands. Edwina is so nervous that she keeps squabbling about petty things, so much so that she thinks of divorcing. But deer are coming into their field at night: "Red deer, tall and rangy. Half a dozen hinds, in the patch field about to become their garden" (150). They then hear stags belling: "Somehow she'd never thought of deer as wild animals – rough, smelly and slightly unnerving. Not at all how they looked from a distance. Maybe it was the same with love. Prettier from a distance" (151). And the short story ends with: "She could feel her heart reconfigure itself around this new knowledge, as if molecules of love had been added or taken away. She wasn't sure which. She wanted a man to love and here he was" (151). The fable could end with the moral: connecting thinking wo/man and nature to discover the truth about love within a couple, a family, and a nation, or with the notion of the imperative requirement for the young couple to reconfigure their commitment.

Those twenty-five short stories — which read as attempts to regenerate Scottish fiction — blend metaphors and similes into realistic narratives and lead the reader to come to the conclusion that the body needs fiction in the guise of dreams, fantasy, or fear.

Measuring the twenty-five pieces of short fiction in *New Writing Scotland 35* against the hundred texts listed in *Being Scottish* shows that, beyond the fact that writing fiction with no set theme to work on is hardly comparable to writing down one's opinion about a set topic, the result can be felt as puzzling. Those pieces of short fiction selected by editors of *New Writing Scotland* convey an implied sense of belonging to Scotland. And those hundred selected elaborate opinions on being Scottish, often including memories and other narratives, voice, even if critically, a similar propensity without a liberal use of metaphors. Hence, this strong impression that the palpable body of Scotland is not only far from falling to pieces but also benefiting from continuous intake of elusive air blown from unreal areas. The collection of short fiction texts, in *New Writing Scotland 35* sounds as an illustration of the following quote by Shakespeare: "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (*The Tempest*, IV.1.154-156).

These lines seem to be illustrated by this interviewee —

> On a very personal level, being Scottish has given me a sense of belonging to something greater than myself — a sense of belonging to both a history and a future, as much as I belong in the present. […] the sound of the distant Highland pipes and drums […] mixing with Bach's organ music (inside Westminster Abbey), which created a magnificent new sound, at once strange yet hauntingly familiar — a new music with distinctive Scottish notes, reflecting and symbolising a reconfigured United Kingdom.
>
> (Devine 2002: 144-145)

— leading to another debate on the sense of solidarity, a major topic in Scotland.

[i] The italics are mine, and so are the colons. The general title of New Writing Scotland 35, printed vertically, is borrowed from the title of the short story on pages 31 to 36 which includes colons. In this paper the title of the book must be differentiated from that of the short story. All quotations from this collection of pieces of short fiction will be indicated only by the page number in parentheses.

[ii] The titles of the narratives in this collection will be given in block letters followed by the page number between parentheses.

We can inquire, though, into the separate voices of authors and of editors and publisher: actually, in this anthology the titles of the texts are in upper-case letters, whereas the first and second names of authors are indicated in lower-case letters, with the initials in block letters — e.g. "David McVey / MY MEMORIES OF SEAL CLUBBING". Knowing that one must be very careful about the spelling of names and surnames, how far is it meaningful? Do we have to understand that the texts are more important than the writers? Is it no more than a typography gimmick, since, in the CONTENTS, the titles are printed in lower-case letters?

[iii] "Le corbeau" is a French word meaning 'the crow', gone into Scots as 'corbie'.

[iv] About tongue and language, although most linguists are adamant on the fact that English and Scots are two separate languages, Cairns Craig, remarks, in his The Modern Scottish Novel, p. 167, that "the courtesy that the Scottish writer requests for deforming the standard written language of English is asked not of the written language but of the tongue, a tongue, of course, which itself transforms the written language in every act of pronunciation."

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Lynsey Calderwood. Bad Elements, 17.
Linda Cracknell. The Other Side of the Stone, p. 22.
Sylvia Dow. She said: he said: I said, p. 31.
Louise Farqhar. Mum and I, p. 37.
Gordon Gibson. Sirloin, p. 42.
Brian Hamil. A Good Listener, p. 54.
Sarah Isaac. Stalking Deer, p. 61.
Nadine Aisha Jassat. Auntie, p. 71.
Lis Lee. Road Ending, p. 75.
Robin Lloyd-Jones. Checking Out the Czechs with Jackson, p. 80.
Rose McDonagh. Owlets, p. 87.
Alan Macfarlane. Hitting the Town, p. 92.
Rachael McGill. Horrible Sunshine, p. 94.
Roddie McKenzie. The Snows of Ben Nevis, p. 104.
David McVey. My Memories of Seal Clubbing, p. 110.
Laura Morgan. On an Earth Uniformly Covered by Sea, p. 114.
Catherine Ogston. The Stranger, p. 125.

Heather Parry. Wet Like Jelly, p. 130.
Julie Robertson. A Note of Interest, p. 142.
Cynthia Rogerson. She wasn't Pretty, p. 146.
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Absurdities and Epiphanies: "The Kilt" from my *Slavonic Dances*

Tom Hubbard

Abstract

"It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature", wrote Henry James; his own fiction demonstrates that he knew instinctively that a great deal of history can affect the course of "little" lives. Tom Hubbard refers to his own story "The Kilt" from his book Slavonic Dances (2017): this concerns a Scottish student who falls in love with a Czech counterpart: their private comedy is shattered by public tragedy. Hubbard sets his work in the context of other Scottish writers who have responded to the Prague Spring and the invasion, notably a poet of an earlier generation and longer historical reach, Sorley MacLean (1911-96). His essay begins with a striking reminiscence of 1968 by the Edinburgh-born journalist Neal Ascherson, who witnessed and reported on many of the key events in late twentieth-century east-central Europe. Hubbard compares the ways in which the "little" story and the "little" poem attempt to deal with the "great" issues in life.

Key words: absurdities, epiphanies, Slavonic Dance.

Fifty years ago, in 1968, the Scottish journalist Neal Ascherson was witnessing and reporting on events in east-central Europe, including what was then Czechoslovakia. When he was interviewed on Radio Praha some thirty-six years later, in 2004, he spoke of his memories of the Prague Spring, when there was hope that Stalinism could be successfully challenged by the "socialism with a human face" championed by the new First Secretary Alexander Dubček and by his supporters and allies in government and in the population.

Neal Ascherson recalled how, in 1968, he attended a reception in Hradčany Castle. Here is part of his account:

> We all poured in, western journalists, everybody wandering around. And I looked around and there was this little guy on a chair up against the wall, rather away from the crowd, with a plate on his knee and it was Dubček. And you could just walk up to him and say "hello...listen...Sasha" [at this point Ascherson laughed], you could ask him a question.
>
> It was all absolutely open; an extraordinary informality, which actually was Czech, it was very Czech - I loved it.
>
> (Ascherson 2004)

There is still a vogue for what have been called short short stories – stories that consist of only one paragraph. It's a form that has been deployed by Scottish writers such as James Kelman ("Acid", in Kelman 1989: 115), John Herdman (Herdman 1979) and James Robertson (Robertson 2014). I would say that Neal Ascherson's brief account has the quality of a short short story – the content has vast historical significance, but the form is concise. It's not fiction of course; Ascherson is remembering something that actually happened; but his reportage of other real events is just like that: he has the gift for the significant detail that illuminates a major historical moment. Another good example of this is his sketch of another Communist leader, a very different one who was to prove an adversary of Dubček; this was the Polish Party boss Władysław Gomułka: "Gomułka was a harsh intolerant personality with a violent temper. His grim, bony skull, eyes peering at the world through steel-rimmed spectacles, encouraged his opponents to regard him as a pitiless Marxist fanatic" (Ascherson

1987: 141). (Ascherson goes on to explain that in fact Gomułka was not a slavish follower of Moscow's line. In 1956 his Polish nationalistic brand of communism made him popular; by 1968, however, he had squandered all hopes at home and abroad, and dutifully answered Brezhnev's call by contributing his own Polish tanks to the invasion of Czechoslovakia.)

The vivid sketches in Ascherson's reportage would appear to follow the criteria laid down by Edgar Allan Poe in his famous account of the short story's ideal aesthetic:

> A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents - he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel.
>
> (Poe 1965: 108)

That utterance, first published in 1842, seems to me to be tacitly supplemented by Robert Louis Stevenson's insistence, forty-two years later, that similar criteria could be applied to the novel, which he maintains is "a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity" (Stevenson 1924: 142).

Returning to Ascherson, we may note the comedy of the encounter with Dubček – the everyday, mundane detail of this apparently ordinary guy with a plate on his knee; moreover, there is Ascherson's feeling that he could address him as "Sasha" rather than the formal "Alexander**"** or "Mr First Secretary". The comedy is all the more poignant for our knowledge of what was to come in August, when the forces of the Warsaw Pact, led by the Soviet Union, invaded Czechoslovakia.

I have been interested in the way that deeply *tragic* convulsions can be illuminated by the *comic* treatment of events leading up to these convulsions. In 1968 I was a schoolboy; I was studying history as well as English and French literature, so I was aware of the historical drama of world events in that year, but I lacked the maturity to understand what was happening. However, some years later, during the 1970s, I was a student at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, and had become interested in east-central Europe. In the University Library I found an extremely disgusting book, a propaganda book published in Moscow and which defended the invasion. In this book there were some strange photographs of Prague during and after the invasion, but the most bizarre of all was a picture of a Prague street and a guy walking along that street and wearing what seemed to be a woman's skirt. I looked more closely at the photograph and the skirt appeared to be a Scottish kilt – the garment resembling a skirt and which is worn by men.

So I thought, what's a Scotsman wearing a kilt doing in Prague during late August of 1968? Forty-eight years later, in 2016, I found myself wanting to write *Slavonic Dances* – a book of three short stories or novellas which would have as their common theme a Scottish character having a relationship with someone from eastern and east-central Europe, or otherwise discovering some aspect of the culture of one of the countries in that broad geographical region. I could see the comic possibilities in a Scottish person's

misunderstandings, in his or her blunders, as that person tried to make sense of new experiences. Out of these comedies would come, almost inevitably, absurdities.

However, I wanted the themes of these stories to be ultimately very serious ones; it became necessary for the absurdities to be somehow transformed into *epiphanies* - meaning those intense moments of sudden revelation, as in the stories comprising James Joyce's *Dubliners*: such moments might be erotic in nature, and / or political, and / or spiritual. That is when the possibilities of *tragedy* came in. The tragedy, if you like, lurking behind the comedy.

The first of the three stories concerns a working-class Scottish woman at a dance, meeting an exiled Polish soldier based in Scotland – there were many of these gentlemen in our country during the war and Scottish girls were attracted to them. My heroine loves her exotic husband but he has a dark secret. So, early in their relationship the Polish guy is trying to teach his Scottish girl to dance the *krakowiak* but she is too clumsy and makes a complete mess of it. Much later, she learns of the bitter sadness of his past life.

The third story is about a Scottish poet and singer who discovers the songs of the Russian composer Mussorgsky: they have their roots in Russian and Ukrainian folklore, and as a result he is led to appreciate the folklore of his own country, Scotland. He feels something about Russia, Ukraine and Scotland that is melancholy, haunting, and which breaks the heart. He reaches that point, however, after various experiences that show him up as a vain, well-meaning and intelligent idiot. In other words, the lyrical grows out of the ludicrous.

Each of these three stories is self-contained but they are linked to each other by certain symbols, leitmotifs, allusions and echoes.

The second story, the central story, is what concerns me now. It's called "The Kilt" and this is where I take as my rather daft initial inspiration that photograph of the Scotsman in a kilt walking down a Prague street after the tanks have clattered their way into the city.

In my story, the Scotsman is called Angus Cooper and he is a young university student who is on a visiting scholarship at the Charles University. He arrives in Prague in the autumn of 1967, at a time when political changes seem to be on the horizon, but he's cautious. He has packed his kilt in his luggage but is afraid to wear it in public in case he is arrested – the police might think the kilt is an example of western decadence: the idea of a man wearing a skirt might seem too subversive. However, at the Charles University, he meets a Czech girl, a fellow-student called Hana Jandová, whom he considers the sexiest woman he has ever met. They begin an affair and Hana succeeds in persuading him to be brave and wear his kilt – she thinks he has a nice posterior and if he wears his kilt he too will be sexy. (A Scotsman who wants to wear a kilt needs to have a sexy arse and sexy legs.)

The Prague Spring of 1968 arrives and the university students are excited at the prospect of new political freedoms. It's a great time to be young; it's a great time to be young and in love. Angus loves Hana for her beauty, her bright personality, her sense of humour. She is very funny and loves to tease him. It makes her irresistible to him.

As the spring becomes summer and the weather gets even better, it's time for the lovers to leave the big city for a holiday in the country. Hana's family home is in Zlonice, a small town to the north-west of Prague. It's where Dvořák spent much of his youth. Hana introduces Angus to her mother Mrs Jandová and to her young brother Pavel who is an accomplished pianist: his playing of the Czech composers adds to the romantic atmosphere of the holiday. The two lovers, Angus and Hana, the Scot and the Czech, enjoy a brief idyll in a

lovely part of the country, and here we come to the centre-point of the story, indeed the centre-point of the whole book:

> "As you are our special guest," grinned Hana, "[Pavel] is going to play you Smetana's *Macbeth and the Witches* and Dvořák's *Scottish Dances*. He is a villain, he wants to make you homesick."
> Pavel performed many more pieces than these; and in Angus's ears there lingered such alternations of the playful and the lyrical that, in long memory, would mingle with his explorations of the serene environs of Zlonice, in the company of his young lady. They took the trails through the woods, Hana clutching his arm at a sudden instance of bird-song, or the slightly distant church bells carrying their melody over the fields, that the sun-dappling of the branches seemed like a ballet of pure light, the Slavonic dances of nature itself.
> They made love by a stream – at the burnside, as Angus expressed it, that language might share in their intertwinings. In turn, Hana translated for him a one-liner which she'd seen chalked on a wall at the university: *I would like to increase our population but I have no apartment.*
> "Here," she added, "is no apartment. Of course, this is not my time for increasing the population."
> "But if it was –"
> "Then the child, our child, would inherit two cultures."
> August arrived. On the greens behind the Jandová home, Angus's kilt, duly washed and pegged to the clothes-line, flapped like a banner in the breeze of its hosting.
>
> (Hubbard 2017: 59-60)

It's too good to last. The lovers return to Prague and during the night of August 20-21, 1968 the tanks are on the move: the invasion has begun. Angus and Hana join a demonstration against the occupation; the police move in; the lovers are separated in the confusion; arrests are made; Angus doesn't know what has happened to Hana; he realises that he will have to return to Scotland and that he will never see his Czech girlfriend again. At least he believes he will never see her again…

The public tragedy has begun, and it has created private tragedies. Put it another way: private comedy is shattered by public tragedy. In August 1968, it all seems hopeless. At the time, it *seems* hopeless.

The American expatriate novelist and short story writer Henry James once wrote that "It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature" (James 1879: 3). His own fiction demonstrates that he knew instinctively that a great deal of history can affect the course of "little" lives, can affect you and me, the "ordinary" people.

For a long time, I had wondered what to do with the material that eventually became my story, "The Kilt". I had contemplated writing a novel which would encompass the history of the Austro-Hungarian empire and its successor states of the twentieth century. Then I thought, no: that idea would be too solemn and longwinded, to say the least. I went on to edit a book of essays on the French writer Flaubert: one of his works is *Trois contes* – three tales, a set of three longish short stories or novellas – and that seemed to me to be a model for what I should attempt to write. *Slavonic Dances* is the result.

I love Flaubert for his very French aesthetic of firm structure, concision, and irony. Irony goes well with the concision advocated by Poe and Stevenson, as quoted above; irony can enable you to say one thing and mean its opposite, simultaneously. Irony is also a possible meeting point of comedy and tragedy, irony enables you to be funny and serious at

the same time. I would add to that a cogent statement by the English writer Christopher Hitchens: “The struggle for a free intelligence has always been a struggle between the ironic and the literal mind” (Hitchens 1989). That has been well understood by Czech writers, for example by Milan Kundera.

Sometimes a poem possesses the quality of a short story, if we can detect in that poem a narrative structure, and also if we get a sense of a large context within which we can situate the small text. At least two Scottish poets have responded to the sacrifice made by Jan Palach when he immolated himself in Wenceslas Square in protest at the invasion and its repressive aftermath. Sorley MacLean, who wrote in the ancient Gaelic language of Scotland, was born in 1911 and belonged to a generation of socialists who regarded the Red Army of the 1940s as liberators of Europe from fascism; he became disillusioned with the Soviet system and in 1969 his poem about Palach marks the Red Army as no longer liberators but oppressors, and he links the violation of Czechoslovakia with the oppression of people in the west as well as in the east. (“Palach”, in MacLean 1990: 244-247) A later Scottish poet, George Gunn, was born in 1956 – another year of enormous significance in the history of east-central Europe, notably in Poland and Hungary. Gunn’s poem was written some twenty years after MacLean’s, and the younger poet places Palach’s sacrifice in the context of future events; MacLean had placed it in the context of past events. Gunn’s poem relates Palach’s altruistic suicide to the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and to “the expectant lips of a regenerated people” (“Hello, Jan Palach”, in Gunn 1991: 38-39). So: here we have two Scottish poets, of different generations, both honouring Jan Palach but with different perspectives on his death in 1969. Here we have two Scottish poets, in brief texts, giving us a sense of the expansive forces of history beyond the verbal confines of these texts.

In conclusion, I would cite the strong influence of Franz Kafka on two contemporary Scottish novelists and short story writers, Alasdair Gray and James Kelman. Kafka, who was born in Prague, was initially translated into English by a Scottish husband-and-wife team, Edwin and Willa Muir. Alasdair Gray’s 1983 short story, “Five Letters from an Eastern Empire” is a very Kafkaesque tale, and a strongly ironic one, set in an authoritarian, totalitarian state which masks its cruelties with rhetoric and euphemism. As for Kelman, as well as the pervasiveness of Kafka-like scenarios in his fiction, he is the author of a long essay on the Czech writer, and he wrote this in the same year as Gray’s story, 1983. At the beginning of this text Kelman comments on Kafka’s short story “The Great Wall of China”, which also evokes the claustrophobic, closed system of an eastern regime. And again, both writers are only too aware that lies and propaganda are as readily deployed by the powerful and the privileged in the western world.

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