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Writing Scotland's Future: Speculative Fiction and the National Imagination

Timothy C. Baker
University of Aberdeen

WRITING SCOTLAND'S FUTURE: SPECULATIVE FICTION AND THE NATIONAL IMAGINATION

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The official white paper released by the Scottish Government in the lead-up to the 2014 Independence Referendum was titled *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland*. Before encountering nearly six hundred and fifty pages of statistics, graphs, and political positions, readers were presented with an unsigned overview, stating "If we vote Yes … The door will open to a new era for our nation. Scotland's future will be in Scotland's hands." A No vote, on the contrary, would mean that "Scotland stands still."[1] Rather than opposing narratives of progress and regress, the paper implicitly argues that only a Yes vote allows narrative at all: Scotland's identity is almost wholly situated in the future. As Klaus Peter Müller argues in his introduction to *Scotland 2014 and Beyond–Coming of Age and Loss of Innocence,* a collection of papers presented and revised before the Referendum but published afterwards, the question of narrative is central to the debate over independence. For Müller, one key question for any study of modern Scotland is :

> What changes in the use of genres and media as well in the kinds of narrations employed can be detected in representations of Scottish independence, freedom, identity, and devolution throughout the centuries?[2]

Many of the articles in the Müller volume focus on the narratives espoused by the popular media and the role that literary and cultural

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[1] Scottish Government, *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2013), i.

[2] Klaus Peter Müller, "The Articles in this Book: Topics, Perspectives, Disciplines," in *Scotland 2014 and Beyond–Coming of Age and Loss of Innocence?*, ed. Müller (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 1-9 (p. 2).

criticism has played in the establishment of familiar narrative tropes.[3] The section of the volume devoted to literature itself, however, takes a different approach, offering new readings of older canonical figures such as Scott, Hogg, and Burns, among others, as a way to contextualise modern debates. Absent from this discussion is the question of the genres and narratives used to imagine Scotland's future in contemporary literature, especially in regards to the novel.

Although a tradition of Scottish science fiction goes back to George MacDonald, Naomi Mitchison, and David Lindsay, it became especially prominent in the 1980s and 90s, following the success of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*. Works as diverse as Iain M. Banks's Culture novels, as well as *The Bridge* and other works published as Iain Banks, and Edwin Morgan's *Sonnets from Scotland* radically overturn conventional ideas of the local and universal. Nevertheless, many traditional science fiction tales from the 1980s to the present, including works by Paul Johnston, Graham Dunstan Martin, Ken MacLeod, and Julie Bertagna, offer a relatively literal and localised representation of a future Scotland, often inspired directly by Gray. More recent texts, combining experimental and external approaches, suggest a more complicated relationship between literature and national identity. By comparing texts as diverse as Momus's *The Book of Scotlands*, Andrew Crumey's *Sputnik Caledonia*, A.L. Kennedy's *Doctor Who: The Drosten's Curse*, Michel Faber's *The Book of Strange New Things*, and Sarah Hall's *The Wolf Border*, a more heterogeneous perspective on Scotland's future emerges, tied not to familiar political and historic systems and ideologies, but to a realm of possibility seen best in terms of philosophical ideas of nomadism and becoming. Examining the tension between these different approaches reveals the possibility of a literary representation of Scotland's future that is not synonymous with political change, chronology, or ideas of the nation as such, but instead positions Scotland as a locus of narrative change and transformation.

For Caroline McCracken-Flesher, Scottish science fiction is inherently peripheral: Scottish novelists "focus on the possibilities

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[3] See also Leith Davis's comparison of the rhetoric of "Scotland's Future" with the political rhetoric of 1707, in her "Back to the Future: Remembering the 1707 Act of Union in the 2014 Referendum Campaign," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 41.1 (2015): 237-49: at http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol41/iss1/19/.

generated at the margins ... [and] disturb our putative futures."[4] In making the case for a distinctly Scottish science fiction, she quotes Cairns Craig's analysis of Banks's *The Crow Road*, where Craig argues that the "fundamental trajectory" of the Scottish novel is "between history and its other, between a mapmaker's map and an 'other world' where space has different dimensions.… Scotland is a space of 'turning things around.'"[5] Alan MacGillivray further makes the bold argument that in an era when Banks and MacLeod can be hailed as pre-eminent science fiction writers, as well as Scottish writers, contemporary Scottish fiction can "be more political, more analytical of society and government, in a way [it] has hardly been for several generations."[6] For McCracken-Flesher and Craig, then, Scottish fiction and science fiction have always had the possibility of alignment, insofar as both represent spaces of possibility, while for MacGillivray such a combination also represents a paradigmatic shift. For all three critics, Scottish science fiction can be used to challenge received ideologies and political commonplaces, whether in terms of direct confrontation, as in Banks's opposition to British international military involvement, or more subtly.

Few studies of Scottish fiction, however, have examined the relation between theme and narrative form. If current critical approaches to Scotland's future hope to follow Scott Hames's argument that "the relationship between contemporary Scottish literature and contemporary Scottish politics is much more ambivalent, charged and complex" than has hitherto been realised, they must look past literal representations to the strange, experimental, or external narrative.[7] In its challenge of generic and narrative tropes, recent Scottish speculative fiction highlights the possibility of imagined futures to illuminate the relation between

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[4] Caroline McCracken-Flesher, Introduction, in *Scotland as Science Fiction*, ed. McCracken Flesher (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2012), 1-14 (p. 2.)
[5] Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 241.
[6] Alan MacGillivray, "Genres in Scottish Writing: Science Fiction," a paper presented at the Association for Scottish Literary Studies Annual Conference, 14 May, 2000: http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/scotlit/asls/AMacGillivray.html (Accessed 4 April, 2016).
[7] Scott Hames, "Introduction: Don't Feel Bought, You're Buying," in *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence*, ed. Hames (Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2012), 1-18 (p. 10).

literature and politics in unexpected ways. Comparing more traditional speculative narratives produced from the 1980s to the present with experimental texts by Momus, Crumey, Faber, Kennedy, and Hall reveals the aesthetic and political complexities of contemporary Scottish fiction, which offer new ways of considering Scotland's future.

Imagining Scotland's Future

In his article in Müller's collection, Gerard Carruthers argues that twentieth-century literary criticism in Scotland "has been overwhelmingly historicist" and given to 'over-read[ing] in politically systematic and idealistic ways."[8] This is rarely more evident than in the story told of *Lanark*, which is often held as renewing a barren intellectual and artistic landscape after the failure of the 1979 devolution referendum.[9] In this foundational myth of contemporary Scottish fiction, literature replaces political imagining and becomes the place where a future Scotland is best imagined. As much as *Lanark* is heralded as representing a rebirth of Scottish fiction, less has been said about the novels directly inspired by its dystopian portrayal of a future Scotland. Graham Dunstan Martin's *Time-Slip*, for instance, is set in Edinburgh between 2035 and 2053, after a nuclear holocaust that has destroyed much of the rest of the world; the remaining society has turned to fundamentalist Christianity. Although the buildings of Edinburgh have survived, the inhabitants now wear protective radiation suits, and fail to understand their place in the world. As one character describes their situation, they live in a "strange Scotland of the twenty-first century which by some fluke has survived alone, where England to the south of us is a wilderness full of insects, empty wind and grass."[10] Scotland is a place set apart and consequently the perfect setting for revolution. Paul Johnston's *Body Politic*, meanwhile, depicts 2020s Edinburgh as a secular republic established according to Enlightenment principles after the collapse of the United Kingdom, but run as an authoritarian police state. Like *Time-Slip*, Johnston's novel is largely concerned with the legacy of Calvinism, concluding that in "the perfect city, the only way to

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[8] Gerard Carruthers, "The Failure of Historicism in Scottish Literary Studies: A Case Study," in *Scotland 2014 and Beyond*, as in n. 2, 287-300 (pp. 287, 299).

[9] Gavin Wallace, Introduction, in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, ed. Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 1-7 (pp. 3-4).

[10] Graham Dunstan Martin, *Time-Slip* (London: Unwin, 1986), 27.

express free will was to commit murder."[11] Both novels foreground a familiar historical explanatory narrative: Deacon Brodie is discussed in both, while Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* makes an appearance in *Body Politic* and scenes in *Time-Slip* mimic Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Twenty-first-century Edinburgh is constructed from a familiar stew of Calvinism, guilt, and the Caledonian antisyzygy: it is less a world of the future than a *reductio ad absurdum* of canonical nineteenth-century Scottish texts.

This tradition is continued in the twenty-first century in Ken MacLeod's *The Night Sessions*. Like the earlier texts, the novel is grounded in a familiar Edinburgh where not only buildings but also the names of shops and pubs correspond to their real-world equivalents at the time of writing. MacLeod's novel makes similar appeals to history. Set sometime after the "Faith Wars" of the early twenty-first century, it concerns a Detective Inspector named Adam Ferguson investigating the terrorist activities of a group of Covenanters. The religious fanatics combine modern tactics, such as suicide bombing, with older inspiration, leaving behind the graffito "MAJOR WEIR LIVES."[12] MacLeod foregrounds the science fiction tropes of the novel more strongly than Martin or Johnston; the discovery that the Covenanters are robots, however, is less important than their familiar position within a dialectic of Calvinism and Enlightenment. In all three novels, the future can only be imagined as an extension of the past, specifically the vision of history codified in a literary canon that privileges Scott, Hogg, and Stevenson as the dominant voices of Scottish literature.

While Johnston, Martin, and MacLeod all present a familiar physical environment, the imagined futures presented by Matthew Fitt and Julie Bertagna are far more radical. Both authors literalise the question of peripheral space in their portrayal of a flooded Scotland after the catastrophe of global climate change. Fitt's *But n Ben A-Go-Go* depicts a Scotland in the late twenty-first century where only the Highlands, now called Drylands, remain, and the inhabitants live in floating villages, surrounding the settlement of Port:

> Port's cities, officially cried Parishes, had jowed an sweeled
> successfully hauf a century on the roch North Atlantic, thirled

[11] Paul Johnston, *Body Politic* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), 239.
[12] Ken MacLeod, *The Night Sessions* (London: Orion, 2009), 181.

> firmly at the sea flair wi seven-hunner-metre-lang alloy cables tae
> the droned burgh o Greenock.[13]

Although the physical environment of the novel is unfamiliar, it is anchored to the present through the use of familiar placenames, as well as both linguistic and thematic features: the novel's use of Scots throughout, as well as the machinations of multi-national corporations, ties it to contemporary concerns.

Bertagna's young-adult novel *Exodus* similarly depicts a flooded Scotland; the young heroine journeys by boat to a largely underwater Glasgow. Familiar placenames are now attached to individuals, with characters named Gorbals, Pollock, Broomielaw, and Candleriggs. The children of the novel must choose between learning from the remnants of Glasgow University, "a necrotten place … that brings sorrow and heartache', and the utopian 'cruel sky cities of the New World."[14] Both the old and new worlds are insular and exclusive, bound to serve particular classes. In both texts, the flooded world brings new possibilities, but the remnants of the old world just below the surface mean that characters are still limited in their actions. History—in this case, the reader's own present—cannot fully be overcome or ignored.[15]

Both Pitt's and Bertagna's novels focus on the tension between what Marie-Odile Pittin-Hedon calls, in applying Claire Larsonneur's terminology to Ewan Morrison's *Distance*, "*globalia*" and "*localia*." As Pitton-Hedon clarifies, Scotland in Morrison's novel is made globally appealing by a paradoxical emphasis on the local and clichéd: "the space of Edinburgh is therefore an impossibility, a posture, a space wedged between two contradictory drives, aiming for the global and informed by the local."[16] Every space becomes a non-place, a homogenised locale in

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[13] Matthew Fitt, *But n Ben A-Go-Go* (Edinburgh: Luath, 2000), 11.

[14] Julie Bertagna, *Exodus* (London: Young Picador, 2003), 158, 194.

[15] Fiona McCulloch, in "A New Home in the World: Scottish Devolution, Nomadic Writing, and Supranational Citizenship in Julie Bertagna's *Exodus* and *Zenith*," *Ariel* 38.4 (2007): 69-96 (p. 73), reads Bertagna's novel in light of Rosi Braidotti's concept of nomadism, as discussed below, arguing that the "novels are Bertagna's contribution to Scotland's imaginative process of nation-building as she encourages her readers actively to participate in a future Scotland that as yet stands a very good chance of surmounting narrow or stereotyping modes of national self-identification."

[16] Marie-Odile Pittin-Hedon, *The Space of Fiction: Voices from Scotland in a Post-Devolution Age* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2015), 130.

which the very features that are marketed to a global public lose their situated meaning. One character proposes privatising Scotland for corporate interests: "'I see a kind of utopia not unlike Butlins or Nike World or Disneyland but bigger, better. ScotLAND we could call it. Not even change the name, just the logo.'"[17] The local is completely interchangeable.

What Pitton-Hedon says about Morrison's *Distance* is, perhaps, no less the case in a novel like Bertagna's *Exodus*. While Bertagna's Glaswegian setting may remind readers of the final book of Gray's *Lanark*, the localised elements ultimately reinforce the story's global appeal. A flooded Scotland is anywhere and nowhere. While Fitt, in *But n Ben A-Go-Go*, is able, as Lisa Harrison argues, to age "the country beyond the aggregation of standard, tartanified visions into a world where the marketability of Scottish culture is all but irrelevant," nevertheless the persistence of generic tropes results in a narrative that is less enthralling than the language used to convey it.[18] Whether critical of the global/local nexus, as in Morrison's and Fitt's texts, or more accepting, as in Bertagna's, these novels are unable to resolve the paradox between the two approaches. *Exodus* speaks no more directly to Scotland than the imagined, but similarly flooded, landscape of Kirsty Logan's *The Gracekeepers*, or an earlier novel from outside Scotland such as J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*.

Each of these novels, to different extents, illustrates the difficulty with looking to speculative fiction for answers to political problems. Whether presenting a Scotland defined solely in relation to established cultural reference points or placing it in the context of global catastrophe, each text remains constricted by their embrace of familiar generic paradigms. Indeed, the resolution to this paradox between global and local may itself be untenable. As Marc Augé argues, the "fantasy of a founded, ceaselessly re-founding place," such as is called for in these novels, must always remain at least semi-fantasy.[19] Augé writes:

> There is nothing to suggest that, yesterday or today, the image of
> a closed and self-sufficient world could ever … be anything other
> than a useful and necessary image: not a lie but a myth, roughly

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[17] Ewan Morrison, *Distance* (London: Vintage, 2009), 236.

[18] Lisa Harrison, "Brave New Scotland: Science Fiction without Stereotypes in Fitt and Crumey," in *Scotland as Science Fiction*, as in n. 4, 153-69 (p. 156).

[19] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2008), 38.

inscribed on the soil, fragile as the territory whose singularity it
founds (38-9).

Scotland, particularly in a novel detailing global catastrophe, cannot be a
world apart, and any imagining of its future cannot present it as fully self-
sufficient. Scotland cannot simultaneously be what it always was and
what it must be in the future.

Some of this tension is apparent in MacLeod's recent novels. At the
beginning of *Descent*, the protagonist envisions "alternative Edinburghs,"
combining "overlays of alternate pasts and possible futures with
steampunk and cyberpunk, utopia and dystopia."[20] Edinburgh is a
malleable place onto which nearly any future can be transcribed. In
Intrusion, on the contrary, the peripheries of Scotland present a very real
possibility of escape from a totalitarian regime. The island of Lewis is
presented as "'a different country. Different laws, different health and
social services and everything. They still don't have all the databases
joined up. Not by a long chalk.'"[21] Lewis is here Augé's "useful and
necessary image," a myth of distance that the protagonists require for
their survival. The solution to political turmoil lies not in envisioning a
future Scotland, but a Scotland that has stayed in the past, peripheral and
untouched. Like the Greenland of Sarah Moss's *Cold Earth*, island
geography presents a way of avoiding the narrative of the future imposed
by global threat. MacLeod's recent novels accept that an insular view of
society will always be partial and incomplete, yet also illustrate the extent
to which a foundational myth is still necessary.

Narratives of Possibility

An alternative vision of a future Scotland, however, is found in a series of
texts that resist the impulse of narrative in order to produce a Scotland
without full recourse to the past. Chief among these is Momus's
understudied *The Book of Scotlands*, which envisions 156 different
Scotlands, presented in no particular order. Entries range from single
sentences—"Scotland 70: The Scotland in which we were the ones to
invent 'the thing that comes after postmodernism'"—to several-page
narratives.[22] Many of the entries are humorous; most are impossible. The
text's success comes in its odd juxtapositions and the shifting rhythms of

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[20] Ken MacLeod, *Descent*. London: Orion, 2014), 4.

[21] Ken MacLeod, *Intrusion* (London: Orion, 2013), 184-5.

[22] "Momus" [Nicholas Currie], *The Book of Scotlands* (Berlin and New York:
Sternberg Press, 2009), 131.

its narratives. Scotland 88 details, in the first person, the experience of watching television in the Highlands in the early twenty-first century:

> The evening's viewing was a parade of beautiful, archetypical Scottish experiences being marvelled at by Scottish people as if they were foreigners in their own country. Narcissism, after all, implies both self-love and a certain alienation (66).

On the following page, after three brief Scotlands are delineated (one in which Gaelic is the official language, one in which an electric fence is placed between an oil-rich Scotland and its poorer neighbour to the south, and one in which there is a civil war between roundheads and flatheads), Scotland 127 proposes a quite different world:

> The adjective 'Scotwellian' is a somewhat charged word, combining two authors and one country: George Orwell, Edith Sitwell, Scotland.
>
>   It has effectively come to delineate the Scotland we know today, a Scotland which has been turned into a huge, crumbling aristocratic estate policed by people dressed in the costumes of the ancient Greek gods. (67)

The self-assured tone of both passages, one quotidian and one surrealist, leads the reader to approach them in a similar light. If the reader in Scotland can find echoes of their own lives in a description of Scottish television, they might also find something familiar in the latter description of a largely feudal society where most of the land is owned by the wealthy. The pairing of such different worlds suggests a way of seeing Scotland's future as simultaneously peripheral and full of possibilities.

   In this combination Momus comes close not to traditional utopian or dystopian imaginings, as in the novels discussed above, but to Jacques Rancière's formulation of a utopia that is not an elsewhere, but located in the democratic acts of walking and speaking. As Rancière writes, utopia "is an intellectual construction which brings a place in thought into conjunction with a perceived or perceptible intuitive space."[23] Realism, in this context, is not a refusal of utopia, but one way of many ways of combining the *telos* of democratic community with the singularity of the present. Moving between the dozens of possible Scotlands presented in the text forces the reader to construct an image that is not tied to any particular reality, but emerges from their impossible combination. The fractured, multiple text is the only one which can adequately reflect

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[23] Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), 15.

Scottish identity. In Momus, a Scotland based on literary history, where Edinburgh "becomes a succession of fantastical shapes straight out of Robert Louis Stevenson," can coexist with a Scotland located only in the present, where "the now replaces the now" (113, 56). Rather than insisting on one imagined Scotland, Momus democratises the process, freeing it of traditional political ideologies, so that Scotland's future exists in the reader's own intuitive space.

The coexistence of multiple possibilities is not limited to the experimental form of *The Book of Scotlands*, however. Andrew Crumey's *Sputnik Caledonia* is divided into three unequal parts. In the first section, set in 1970s suburban Scotland, the young Robbie Coyle dreams of being an astronaut. In the second, much longer section, a slightly older Robert Coyle, living in Soviet-allied Scotland, readies himself for interstellar travel through telepathy. In the final portion of the novel, set in the present, a stranger known as RC comes to a small Scottish town, attempting to persuade a young boy to join him on some sort of adventure, which may be terrorism or interstellar travel. The protagonist's identity cannot easily be resolved. In the first part Robbie mistakenly gives his age as nineteen when he is eleven, while in the second Robert mistakenly gives his age as twelve when he is nineteen; the second part could be Robbie's elongated fantasy of his future, or he might, as is suggested at the end of the first part, have been transported to an alternate universe by "*a disembodied transcendental higher intelligence*."[24] Likewise, RC claims that he has stolen Robbie Coyle's identity after Robbie died of radiation poisoning at nineteen, yet he is recognised by Robbie's father Joe as his son. The relation between literature and science is similarly fluid: while Robbie finds Einstein's theory of relativity to be "certainly a lot better than *Kidnapped*" (89), the Installation in which Robert is trained balances its astrophysics with both politics and literature, including Kant, Marx, Engels, and Goethe.

Although such correspondences and reversals fill the text, at the same time, like all of Crumey's other novels, *Sputnik Caledonia* can be read as an example of the many worlds theory in quantum physics, where every possibility exists in a parallel universe. RC exists, Crumey writes, "in an infinite universe where anything is possible and everything is certain" (457). Each of the novel's sections is complete in itself, yet changes when juxtaposed with the others. Life in the Installation, for instance, is

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[24] Andrew Crumey, *Sputnik Caledonia* (London: Picador, 2008), 121.

presented as a "closed existence" dedicated to the "preservation of our society …, not the fate of individuals" (156, 168). It is, as one character explains, "'on no map and is referred to in no document. Right now you are in a non-existent place'" (129). At the same time, however, the late revelation that it is built on the former town of Kenzie, where the other two parts of the novel are set, makes it one possibility of many. Kenzie and the Installation are the same place and completely separate at the same time; as in Momus's text, their combination can occur only in the mind of the reader.

    What unites the three sections is not only place, but also an historical inscription. Early in the first section the Coyle family reflects on a memorial to James Deuchar, a Glasgow divinity student who lost his life in 1860 while rescuing two small children who had fallen into a river. Joe uses this moment to reflect on the futility of individual action:

> "They'd all be dead by now anyway," said Mr. Coyle. "You see, Robbie? What difference does it make in the end whether or not he decided to be a hero?" (10).

While Robbie and his mother praise Deuchar's altruism, for Joe one death has simply been replaced with another. In the second section, however, Deuchar survives, and goes on to found the Scottish Socialists. For Arthur, the father of the family with whom Robert stays, this proves the necessity of history:

> "Don't you see, Robbie, for all we know, the whole of history might have been different. But it couldn't be different, because everything happens for a reason, and if James Deuchar had thrown his life away then maybe we wouldn't be here, there'd be no Installation" (418).

    Yet this familiar paradox, a commonplace in science fiction made most famous by Ray Bradbury, where a seemingly insignificant action changes the course of history, is given a slightly new perspective in the final section, when two adolescents meet by the memorial to share their first kiss:

> "Look at that," he says.
> Jodie reads too. "That's terrible."
> "Happened so long ago."
> "It's still terrible." (474-5)

The two teenagers ponder both possibilities, that the death was meaningless and that it made possible everything in their own lives, before changing the topic. Yet the chapter ends suddenly with what may be an authorial intrusion: "If we live in an infinite universe et cetera. Which we do" (475). As in the Momus text, both possibilities necessarily

exist for the reader, and there is no need to choose between them. Deuchar dies and is saved, Scotland is socialist and capitalist, and the various sections of the novel tell the same story or different ones. It is not that history is a narrative from which Scotland is separated, but rather that all possible histories coexist through the narrative of infinite possibilities.

As Crumey immediately makes clear, this has significant political importance. In the next chapter Joe Coyle listens to a "posh bloke" on the radio programme *Any Questions* who argues that "'*Truth means different things to different people and in an integrated, multicultural society we need to respect that*'", while another speaker similarly argues in favour of "'*individual rather than collective truths*'" (478). Joe immediately dismisses this familiar argument as "utter gibberish":

> Were there weapons of mass destruction in Iraq or weren't there? Not a difficult question, yes or no would do. But all you could get from these political jobsworths was evasive guff about everybody being right in their own way (479).

Living in an infinite universe does not negate an idea of truth. Rather, each universe is complete in itself: the emergent possibilities can be constructed only in the reader's imagination. The central difference between Fitt's and Bertagna's novels and Momus's and Crumey's, then, is that the latter two make the space of possibility not the world, but the text. As N. Katherine Hayles writes:

> Embedding ideas and artifacts in the situated specificities of narrative, the literary texts give these ideas and artifacts a local habitation and a name through discursive formulations whose effects are specific to that textual body.[25]

Rather than presenting a traditionally-structured narrative of a different world, as in earlier science fiction novels, Momus and Crumey make the text itself the site of possibility. Speculative fiction in this sense is not simply a description of an unfamiliar world but requires a new approach to narrative itself. By presenting texts that reject linear or causal narratives in favour of radical multiplicity, both authors disrupt readers' notions of stable representation to highlight the way multiple identities and narratives work and interrelate. The text, rather than the nation, becomes paramount.

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[25] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 22.

Creaturely Possibilities

The notion of the text as a space of infinite possibility can be illustrated clearly in three very different recent texts, by A.L. Kennedy, Michel Faber, and Sarah Hall, each of which challenge generic and national norms. *Doctor Who: The Drosten's Curse* might seem a departure for Kennedy, following a familiar formula and geared towards a younger audience. While *Doctor Who* certainly makes appearances elsewhere in Scottish writing—not least in *Sputnik Caledonia*, where RC is repeatedly compared to the Doctor—little, besides the setting in Arbroath, appears to relate to the situation of Scotland, present or future. The convoluted plot centres on an ancient telepathic creature, the Bah-Sokhar, causing anarchy in a small Scottish town. Kennedy repeatedly emphasises the incongruity of the precise geographical and historical setting (2-6 June, 1978, the month before passage of the Scotland Act 1978 in the lead-up to the devolution referendum) for such a story in order to articulate the effects of intergalactic struggle on everyday life:

> In Arbroath's West Port, the pavement was lined with surprised people. Shouting across the road at each other were, among others, Jimmy Findlay, Susan Findlay, Hughie Paterson, Gus Palmer, Brian Waters, Amanda Walter, Melissa Brown, Paul Cluny, Martha Cluny, Paul Jnr Cluny, a man called Clive Hughes who had intended to deliver Chinese food to number 15, and twenty or so others.
>
> None of them had intended to yell at each other.…
>
> And yet they were yelling—yelling because their brains hurt, yelling because they felt bullied and scared, yelling because they felt they were being spied on, yelling because they understood horribly clearly all the lazy and dull and selfish and nasty and uninspiring and greedy thoughts that everyone else who was yelling were having right at that moment.[26]

None of these characters are mentioned elsewhere in the novel; it is the mundanity of their lives that is central. This is certainly a recurrent theme in Kennedy's writing; the title story of her first collection *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains*, for instance, highlights the narrator's discovery that "contrary to popular belief, people, many people, almost all the people, live their lives in the best way they can with generally

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[26] A.L. Kennedy, *Doctor Who: The Drosten's Curse* (London: BBC Books, 2015), 237.

good intentions and still leave absolutely nothing behind."[27] Here, however, access to a different consciousness transforms individuals into a community, both awake and asleep. At night, for instance, all of Fife has strange dreams: "In Montrose, a dream involving carnivorous trees was immensely widespread. Carnoustie dreamed of Spanish dogs, burning hats and a long journey across water" (289). Encounter with the alien allows these characters to be something other than themselves at the same time that they remain linked to a particular place and identity. As the Bah-Sokhar itself says, in bold capitals (270):

I CHANGE
WE CHANGE
I AM I
WE ARE WE
WE BE CHANGE
I BE CHANGE

The creature disrupts individual and communal identities to create a process of continual change and possibility.

This process of change can be seen alongside Rosi Braidotti's concept of nomadic subjectivity, a fluid process of continual becoming. As she summarises her work, nomadic subjectivity creates an "alternative space of becoming that would fall not between the mobile/immobile, the resident/the foreigner distinction, but within all these categories."[28] Such a process, Braidotti argues, transforms the status of the marginal or alien other and political interaction more broadly. Nomadic thinking is not utopian, nor based on the elimination of boundaries, but rather illustrates that boundaries are not as fixed as official or patriarchal discourse might insist. In this light, the figure of the monster "points out the major epistemological function played by anomalies [and] abnormalities" (234). This is very much the case with Kennedy's novel: the monster, by working from within people's minds, highlights the fluidity and abnormality at the centre of everyday life. Rather than positing an alternative world according to strict guidelines—even those of a fifty-year-old popular formula—Kennedy illustrates the way science fiction can create a narrative of continuous possibility.

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[27] A.L. Kennedy, *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (London: Vintage, 2004), 34.

[28] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, second ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 7.

Such possibilities are also presented in Michael Faber's *The Book of Strange New Things*, which chronicles a missionary's voyage to a strange new world while his wife witnesses the horrors of an increasingly dystopian present on Earth. Like both Crumey's and Kennedy's novels, the tension between the individual and community is central; here, however, the community in question is not only the one the astronauts have established on another planet, nor that of the alien Oasans to whom Peter Leigh, the missionary, ministers, but the smaller community of husband and wife.

Early in the novel, Peter discusses with one of his colleagues the question of whether the Oasans are "people":

> How about we agree to use the term "people" in its extended sense of "inhabitants"?… Of course, we could use "creature" instead, but there are problems with that, don't you think? I mean, personally, I'd love to use "creature", if we could just take it back to its Latin origins: *creatura*: "created thing." Because we're all created things, aren't we?[29]

When Peter finally meets an Oasan, however, he finds that he cannot wholly understand it, or even see it clearly:

> try as he might, Peter couldn't decode [the Oasan's face] on its own terms; he could only compare it to something he knew. He *had* to see it as a grotesque pair of foetuses perched on someone's shoulder, half-shrouded in a cowl (121).

The fluidity of creaturely life cannot easily be assimilated into conventional narratives. As much as Peter attempts to bridge the divide between the resident and the foreigner, or between the person and the creature, he is unable to do so. Similarly, his immense physical distance from his wife occasions a similar emotional distance, where he becomes unable to understand her suffering. Although more conventionally told than Crumey's novel, Faber nevertheless presents multiple worlds that ultimately cannot be bridged, despite the characters' sincere longing to do so. Each of these three novels highlights the failure of explanatory narratives, instead highlighting the transformational possibility of the unexplained and the paradoxical. As such, they suggest a way of thinking of politics and the future that is based not on received and historical ideas of political life, but is instead fluid, nomadic, and democratic.

Looking at speculative fiction in this light might suggest a degree of utopian idealism, or simply distance from the immediate concerns of

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[29] Michel Faber, *The Book of Strange New Things* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2014), 104.

present-day life. Yet it is worth noting that many of the most interesting speculative fictions to emerge from Scotland in recent years foreground the possibility of multiple worlds, and multiple becomings, as an alternative to the paradoxical relation of global and local, or the familiar rhetoric of the national. While earlier texts posit a twenty-first century Scotland wholly indebted to earlier religious and political ideologies, these later novels suggest a way of approaching the present and future that is not limited by commonplace definitions of Scottish identity. As José Esteban Muñoz argues: "Utopia is always about the not-quite-here or the notion that something is missing.… Utopia is not about simply achieving happiness or freedom; utopia is in fact a casting of a picture of potentiality and possibility."[30] Whether or not these novels can be considered utopian, they emphasise the missing, the abnormal, and the failure, all as a way to reach towards potential and possibility.

The clearest example of how this might be related to Scotland's future comes, surprisingly, from a text that is neither speculative nor Scottish, Sarah Hall's *The Wolf Border*. The novel concerns Rachel Caine's attempt to introduce wolves into the Lake District at the behest of a Conservative MP. Here the creaturely is not an ancient telepathic consciousness, or an indescribable alien, but an animal that, as Gary Marvin writes, has "more than any other … been emblematic of the wild and particularly the dangerous and threatening qualities of the wild."[31] The wolf is, initially, both mythic and familiar: "The god of all dogs. It is a creature so fine, she can hardly comprehend it. But it recognises her. It has seen and smelled animals like her for two million years."[32] Yet Caine spends much of the novel worrying about the more practical necessities of rewilding, from building appropriate fences to swaying popular opinion. The creature becomes, if not domesticated, at least integrated into everyday human politics.

Despite the novel's apparent realism, however, the reader soon notices something awry. The novel opens in 2014, as Scotland heads towards the referendum, and much of the description seems familiar:

> The First Minister is goaded, accused of being racist, an economic dunce, but he maintains optimism. Scotland was, is, and will be a beacon of social enlightenment. He quotes one of the country's

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[30] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 118, 125.

[31] Gary Marvin, *Wolf* (London: Reaktion, 2012), 7.

[32] Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border* (London: Faber, 2015), 6.

> premier writers: *work as if in the early days of a better nation*.
> Optimism is all well and good but will not keep the lights on, the
> Prime Minister retorts. (101-2)

The rhetoric on display here, and even the slight misquote of Alasdair
Gray (itself an appropriation of a line by the Canadian poet Dennis Lee),
are true to life. Yet while twentieth-century politicians are known by their
actual, historical names, Alex Salmond and David Cameron are given
alternate identities. The rationale for this disruption becomes clear when
the referendum passes, and Scotland becomes independent. What
appeared to be a novel of the everyday is now a novel of possible worlds,
and it is into this imagined future that the wolves escape. At first the
wolves are figured as immigrants, 'refugees seeking asylum in the newest
European nation' (413). Yet all political concerns, human and animal, are
dismissed as the wolves enter Scotland:

> They run in formation, arrow-shaped, the three juveniles keeping
> pace beautifully, strong now, and sleek. The helicopter flies above
> and then alongside them, and the animals disperse, each lighting
> out on an averse route. Separated, they run on across the moor,
> eyes ahead, grey fire across the border. There's no meridian to
> mark the international crossing, no checkpoint, for all the rhetoric
> of the past year, just a smatter of whin and rowan, barren slopes
> and cuttings. The unspectacular lowlands stretch ahead, taupe and
> tan, and just below the helicopter, painted on the gable of a lone
> croft dwelling, in welcome or defiance, is a blue and white
> Saltire. (418)

The wolves demonstrate the fragility of borders, not only between nations
but also between the human and the creaturely. Both individuals and a
community, they embody the nomadic becoming for which Braidotti
argues. Even the Saltire, the lone remnant of human politics in this
passage, is unreadable. It is not only that, as George Monbiot argues, that
the "one part of Britain which has all the characteristics required" for the
reintroduction of wolves to the wild is the Scottish Highlands, but that
this newly independent Scotland, as potential or possibility, enables not
the erection of borders, but their elimination.[33] The novel becomes the
proper location of a possible Scotland, and presents a new form of
political thinking based not on parties and policies, but on a rejection of
categorisations.

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[33] George Monbiot, *Feral: Rewilding the Land, Sea and Human Life*. London:
Penguin, 2014), 116.

As with Kennedy, Crumey, or Faber, the assertion of a fluid identity should not be considered wholly as a rejection of the here and now. As Braidotti writes,

> To be nomadic or in transition … does not place the thinking subject outside history or time. Thinking may not be topologically bound, especially in the age of the global economy and telematic networks, but this does not make it ungrounded.… A location is an embedded and embodied memory: it is a set of countermemories, which are activated by the resisting thinker against the grain of the dominant representations of subjectivity.[34]

Positing Scotland as a possible world or worlds is not a rejection of history, but a development beyond ideas of history as reified or static. Scotland's future cannot be thought of only in terms of geography or concepts of the nation, but is here envisioned as a textually-located, fluid, and essentially democratic. In positing location (whether geographical or, in this case, the location of postmodernity) as simultaneously embodied memory and countermemory, Braidotti suggests a way in which difference can be seen as the founding principle of politics. This difference can be represented as the simultaneous emergence of possible worlds, each equal to the other, mediated not by the author but the reader. These worlds are not the utopia of "nowhere," nor the dystopia of a relentless historical imagining, but rather the collective potentiality for imagining a politics predicated on the creaturely, the abnormal, and the in-between.

If, as stated above, the relation between Scottish literature and Scottish politics is more complex than is often thought, it is precisely due to this openness to possibility and the eradication of borders; rather than simply commenting on current political situations, much contemporary Scottish fiction offers a rethinking of politics entirely. In her keynote for the session of the Edinburgh World Writers' Conference held in Trinidad in 2013, the Jamaican-born, Canadian resident Olive Senior argues that literature is inherently political "because we the creators are political animals;" writing of and through politics is a necessary part of being in the world.[35] At the same time, however, Senior claims that literature "enables us to see reality both reflected and refracted" (150). This process

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[34] Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 29.

[35] Olive Senior, "The big 'P' and the little 'p,'" in *The 21ˢᵗ-Century Novel: Notes from the Edinburgh World Writers' Conference*, ed. Jonathan Bastable and Hannah McGill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 147-50 (p. 148).

of reflection and refraction, without eliding concerns of the present, is central to the texts by Momus, Kennedy, Crumey, Faber, and Hall discussed above. By demonstrating the extent to which Scotland's future is not, and cannot be, confined to a single narrative, they create a new space for discussion and consideration. Looking beyond both generic and national categorical models, these novels suggest that any writing of Scotland's future must move beyond individual narratives into an embrace of the novel as a form of unlimited possibility.

University of Aberdeen