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Eric Gidal
University of Iowa

Michael Gavin
University of South Carolina

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The SSL Symposium, 2016

INTRODUCTION: SPATIAL HUMANITIES AND SCOTTISH STUDIES

Eric Gidal and Michael Gavin

A symposium dedicated to spatial humanities and Scottish literary studies ought to begin by acknowledging that both Scottish literature and Scottish studies are intrinsically spatial. By this we mean that both writers and scholars of Scottish literature have long been centrally concerned with questions of place: the texture of Scotland as a nation is inextricable from the topology of its landscapes, the history of its transformations, and the struggles over its representations. One might even claim that the spatial humanities began during the Scottish Enlightenment, when geography, history, and *belles lettres* joined through the communication networks of correspondence, surveys, education, and print to invent and imagine the modern nation of Scotland within British and increasingly global frames of reference.¹ Spatial patterns of migration, improvement, and industrialization not only shaped Scottish literature and culture, but provided the impetus for new systems of symbolic representation.² What we now think of as Scottish studies began as a profound intellectual investment in the meaning of Scotland as a space where poetry, history, nature, agriculture, and industry collided with special force.³ Insofar as

¹ See Charles Withers, *Geography, Science and National Identity: Scotland since 1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

² See Howard Wainer's recent tribute to and extension of William Playfair's innovations in data visualization, in his *Graphic Discovery: A Trout in the Milk and Other Visual Adventures* (Princeton University Press, 2013); and see also Jonathan Sachs, "Scales of Time and the Anticipation of the Future: Gibbon, Smith, Playfair," *Modern Intellectual History*, 11.3 (2014): 697-718.

³ Cairns Craig, *Intending Scotland: Explorations in Scottish Culture since the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

we understand the term “spatial humanities” broadly to include all humanistic study that explores the cultural production of space, Scottish studies has long been at the forefront of the field.

Organizing a corpus of literature around geographical boundaries is, in some respects, commensurable with classic divisions between nations and periods. As Denis Wood puts it, “maps blossom in the springtime of the state.”⁴ Phrases like “nineteenth-century British literature” posit cultural identities defined in the contours of historical spaces. Structuring history this way does not “ground” the literature in space or place so much as show how culture and space produce each other in dynamic simultaneity.⁵ In this important sense, all national literary histories contribute to the lineage of “spatial humanities.” In the case of Scottish literature and history, this contribution takes on particular dynamics given the numerous divisions of language, religion, class, and social organization that fall within the boundaries of Scotland, past and present. Scotland remained divided longer than England: the physical and cultural gaps that separated the Highlands from the Lowlands offer only the simplest and most obvious point of division. What we call “Scottish literature” contains works written in Gaelic, Scots, Latin, Norse, and English whose parameters stretch well beyond Scotland’s territorial boundaries: Gaelic bridges Scotland and Ireland; Norse extends from Scandinavia; and English, of course, is the language that both unites and divides Scotland with its southern neighbor.⁶ These internal divisions are reflected on a larger scale by the Scottish diaspora in America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as across all areas of the British Empire.⁷ Even within the boundaries of Scotland itself, Edinburgh

⁴ Denis Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 15. Benedict Anderson long ago noted the centrality of geographical instruments such as the census and the map in forming national identities in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso 1983). Ted Underwood recounts the institutionalization of historical periods as the defining paradigm of literary studies in *Why Literary Periods Mattered: Historical Contrast and the Prestige of English Studies* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁵ Doreen Massey, *for space* (London: Sage, 2005).

⁶ Gerard Carruthers presses on these divisions as constitutive of Scottish literature in his *Scottish Literature: A Critical Guide* (Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2009), 29-74.

⁷ Scottish diasporic literature has become, in many ways, its own area of study. See, for example, Douglas Mack, *Scottish Fiction and the British Empire* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Cairns Craig, *Intending Scotland*,

emerged over the course of the modern era as a major cosmopolitan city, a site, as Murray Pittock and Craig Lamont suggest in their contribution to our symposium, of heterogeneous commercial and information exchange, while Glasgow, “the Second City of the Empire,” became an entrepôt and, later, a hub of industry.⁸ Understanding Scotland not as a provincial region that sits on the periphery of London’s metropolitan center, but as an internally divided site of mobility and interconnection, suggests that Scottish literature is best approached as an Atlantic archipelagic and imperial corpus, rather than simply as the discourse of one of four nations.⁹ In short, Scottish literature is global literature.¹⁰

If this re-framing makes sense—if indeed Scotland is best understood through a global lens—it raises a host of issues surrounding “Scotland” as

“Telephonic Scotland: Periphery, Hybridity, Diaspora” 203-44; and, most recently, Juliet Shields, *Nation and Migration: The Making of British Atlantic Literature, 1765-1835* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸ See Ian Duncan, “Edinburgh, capital of the nineteenth century” in James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin, eds., *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45-64. On Glasgow, see Moira Burgess, *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction* (Argyll Publishing, 1998) and *The Glasgow Novel: A Survey and Bibliography* (Scottish Library Association, 1986); and also Brian D. Osborne and Ronald Armstrong, eds., *Mungo’s City: A Glasgow Anthology* (Birlinn, 1999).

⁹ For Scotland’s global reach, see T.M. Devine, *Scotland’s Empire 1600-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2003) and *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland’s Global Diaspora 1750-2010* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2011). See also the essays collected in R.A. Cage, ed., *The Scots Abroad: Labour, Capital, Enterprise, 1750-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1985). In Shields’s words, “In the British context in which it originated, archipelagic criticism counters the Anglocentric tendencies that have long characterized the study of British literature by shifting our attention to sites of literary production and reception beyond metropolitan southern England, especially London” (*Nation and Migration*, 139).

¹⁰ This argument has been made forcefully by Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004); Evan Gottlieb, *Romantic Globalism: British Literature and Modern World Order, 1750-1830* (Ohio State University Press, 2014); Steve Newman, “Localizing and Globalizing Burns’s Songs from Ayrshire to Calcutta: The Limits of Romanticism and Analogies of Improvement,” and Anthony Jarrells, “We Have Never Been National: Regionalism, Romance, and the Global in Walter Scott’s Waverley Novels,” both in Evan Gottlieb, ed., *Global Romanticism: Origins, Orientations, and Engagements, 1760-1820* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2015), 57-77, 109-26.

a spatial category for organizing texts. For us, the most pressing among these involves the history of Scotland's environment. A geography of Scottish literature should account for changes to regional ecologies and their representations as a multi-causal and complex set of developments, while also attending to related disciplines (cartography, statistics, data visualization, earth sciences) that were themselves developed in Scotland over the past three centuries.¹¹ Earth and water become primary objects of study that exist in dialectical relation with the printed works that have described, influenced, and in a very real sense *produced* the land- and seascapes for which Scotland is known.¹² Such analysis must move up and down among different scales, accounting both for microhistories (of particular authors, societies, popular traditions) and the archipelagic connections that together comprised "Scotland" as such within global environmental and economic systems. These connections are

¹¹ Central to Scottish environmental history is the work of T.C. Smout. See, for example, *Nature Contested: Environmental History in Scotland and Northern England Since 1600* (Edinburgh University Press, 2000), with A.R. MacDonald and F. Watson, *A History of the Native Woodlands of Scotland, 1500-1920* (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), and *Exploring Environmental History: Selected Essays* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009). Other key resources for placing Scottish literature within environmental history include Robert A. Dodgshon, *Land and Society in Early Scotland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); T.M. Devine, *The Transformation of Rural Scotland: Social Change and the Agrarian Economy, 1660-1815* (Edinburgh University Press, 1994); Eric Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances: Agrarian Transformation and the Evictions 1746-1886* (London: Croom Helm, 1982); J. R. Coull, *The Sea Fisheries of Scotland: A Historical Geography* (Edinburgh University Press, 1996); David Turnock, *The Historical Geography of Scotland since 1707* (Cambridge University Press, 1982); and John R. Hume, *The Industrial Archaeology of Scotland* (London: Batsford, 1976-77).

¹² The constitutive role of print culture in defining and expanding the spatial range of Scottish literature has been treated in such works as Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation, 1707-1830* (Stanford University Press, 1998); Susan Manning, *Fragments of Union: Making Connections in Scottish and American Writing* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book: Scottish Authors & Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland & America* (University of Chicago Press, 2006); Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: A History of Scottish Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2009); and Louis Kirk McAuley, *Print Technology in Scotland and America, 1740-1800* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013).

conventionally figured as networks or partnerships. As Richard Sher has shown, the “London-Edinburgh axis” provided an important branch to the information network that stretched over Britain during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but Scotland was constituted differently at different periods of its history. Early modern courtly connections between Scotland and France, the “auld alliance,” were crucial to the formation of its nobility and continued to influence cultural and philosophical developments through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹³ By the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Scotland’s place near the center of the British Empire extended its reach across the globe.¹⁴

Histories of Scottish institutions, letters, and culture, then, have always engaged with what we might want to call “spatial humanities.” However, as a term of art, the phrase has a more specific application. The spatial humanities are a subset of “digital humanities” that uses geographic information systems (GIS) to study cultural data. What is GIS software? As a commercial product, digital maps are very familiar. They represent cartographic space through an interactive medium that layers various kinds of data on top of one another. In a similar way, applications of GIS for historical research employ the artificial objectivity of a geodetic model as “ground truth” upon which to stage the political and cultural contests waged to define that space.¹⁵ According to David J.

¹³ See the collection of essays in Deidre Dawson and Pierre Morère, eds., *Scotland and France in the Enlightenment* (Bucknell University Press, 2004).

¹⁴ In addition to Devine, *Scotland’s Empire* and *To the Ends of the Earth*, see Martha McLaren, *British India & British Scotland, 1780-1830: Career Building, Empire Building, and a Scottish School of Thought on Indian Governance* (Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Practitioners in the humanities and in geography are careful to emphasize that this notion of “ground truth” should never be confused with a pure, unmediated representation of reality as such. For example, writing of *The Valley of the Shadow* project (<http://valley.lib.virginia.edu>), Todd Presner and David Shepard remark, “Rather than presenting a global view with pretensions to objectivity, *The Valley of the Shadow* acts as a rudimentary form of what we have come to call a ‘thick map,’ a map that exposes a variety of sources that can be brought together to tell any number of smaller stories.” “Mapping the Geospatial Turn,” in *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 206. Such pretensions to objectivity were targeted for critique in an influential collection of essays, *Ground Truth: The Social Implications of Geographic Information Systems*, ed. John Pickles (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995). This critique has largely been absorbed by the

Bodenhamer, one of the spatial humanities' most vocal proponents, "this convergence of technologies has the potential to revolutionize the role of space and place in the humanities by allowing us to move far beyond the static map, to shift from two dimensions to multidimensional representations, to develop interactive systems, and to explore space and place dynamically—in effect, to create virtual worlds embodying what we know about space and place."¹⁶ For some scholars, these virtual worlds take the form of multimodal geospatial databases, called "deep maps" or "thick maps," that combine different forms of evidence within a single geographic frame: GIS datasets can include texts, images, and even video and audio files to create archives that reflect complex histories of spaces.¹⁷ Phil Ethington's "ghost map" of Los Angeles layers centuries of records over the region we now think of as "Southern California" to show how political, agricultural, and economic forces gave shape to the land.¹⁸ In *The Valley of the Shadow* project, spearheaded by Edward L. Ayers, newspapers, letters, and diaries from the American Civil War are gathered and georeferenced to their locations on the border of the Confederacy.¹⁹ These and similar archives share the ambition of building geospatially organized datasets of historical records, allowing scholars and students to identify new lines of geographical inquiry. Once the archives are complete, they can be analyzed using statistical methods

spatial humanities, which attempts to use GIS software in ways that are commensurate with postmodern theories of geography. For a collection of essays in this vein, see *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, ed. David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor Harris (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

¹⁶ David J. Bodenhamer, "The Potential of Spatial Humanities," in *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship*, ed. David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor Harris (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 24.

¹⁷ In this context, the terms "deep map" and "thick map" are largely synonymous. See Bodenhamer, Corrigan, and Harris, *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*; and Todd Presner, David Shepard, and Yoh Kawano, *Hypercities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

¹⁸ Philip J. Ethington and Nobuko Toyosawa, "Inscribing the Past: Depth as Narrative in Historical Spacetime" in *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, 72-101; and Philip Ethington, "Los Angeles Ghost Maps," in *Hypercities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities* (Harvard University Press, 2014), 66-73.

¹⁹ *Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War*, University of Virginia Library (<http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/govdoc/popcensus.html>).

borrowed from geography, a practice Ian N. Gregory, Paul S. Ell, and Alistair Geddes call “historical GIS.”²⁰

Even when we understand “spatial humanities” as a discrete set of methods and tools, the connection to Scottish literature and histories is profound. Sir John Sinclair’s massive twenty-one volume *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-99), a parish-by-parish census of natural, political, and cultural geography, may be taken as an early foray into Scottish spatial humanities, a “deep map” of Scotland meant to collate natural history, ecclesiastical divisions, political structures, agricultural and industrial productions, and antiquarian inquiries. His contemporary William Playfair’s *Commercial, Political, and Parliamentary Atlas* (1786) developed innovative systems of data visualization capable of synthesizing and communicating patterns across large quantities of information and displaying them as spatial relations. Alexander Deans and Nigel Leask’s report on the *Curious Travelers* project underscores how Thomas Pennant laid important groundwork for both Playfair and Sinclair as he utilized complex information networks among his correspondents and collaborators in a “trans-peripheral” construction of Scotland in his published tours of 1769 and 1772 as well as his subsequent map, published in 1777. Christopher Donaldson’s report on the Deep Map of the English Lake District recasts Walter Scott’s novels as a reflexive and elusive version of these earlier projects, aligning literature and location even as they also underscore the provisional and uncertain status of empirical inquiry in the reading and writing of place.

These genealogies are important, for they remind us that the challenge of identifying points of commensurability across historical spatial systems has been at the root of Scottish studies from at least the eighteenth century. They also suggest that imaginative and innovative projects like Sinclair’s and Playfair’s may well be considered part of a “spatial turn” in late Enlightenment thought. They were attempts to untangle “the dense coil of memory, artifact, and experience that exists in a particular space,” to again borrow David Bodenhamer’s words.²¹ Like the digital “deep maps” of historical GIS, they were also experiments in

²⁰ See Ian N. Gregory and Alistair Geddes, ed., *Historical GIS and Spatial History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014); and Ian. N. Gregory and Paul S. Ell, *Historical GIS: Technologies, Methodologies, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²¹ Bodenhamer, “Narrating Space and Place,” in *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, 10.

the mobile and distributive media of an increasingly hyperconnected terrain. Approaching Scottish literature through the range of methodologies enabled by GIS and other digital tools allows us to explore the idiosyncratic logics involved in eighteenth-century translations of localized knowledge.

*University of Iowa
and University of South Carolina*