Scottish Literature, Periodization, and the Liberal Arts Curriculum

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In this article we discuss our past, present, and imagined future pedagogical approaches to Scottish literature, given recent discussions on the effectiveness of literary periodization in general and more specifically as it relates to teaching Scottish literature. Our approach to this question is complicated by the sort of post-secondary institutions at which we teach: a liberal arts college in the United States and a liberal arts university in Canada that have their own particular curricular challenges. English faculty in such educational settings are often required to teach survey courses in two or even three different historical periods while also offering special topics courses to majors, academic research and writing service courses, and first-year interdisciplinary courses on critical texts or issues. It is difficult to develop any sort of curricular emphasis, or even a small cluster of courses, on Scottish literature in such environments, so the pedagogy and politics of periodization are not the only, and perhaps not even the most important, issues faced when integrating Scottish writings into the liberal arts curriculum.

We have, however, thus far adopted three different approaches to finding a place for Scottish literature in the curriculum: including Scottish imaginative works in regular course offerings; teaching an independent study or hiring a graduate or undergraduate student for a research project centered on Scottish literature; and designing a course solely on Scottish literature, since liberal arts colleges and universities typically have special topic courses that can be taught intermittently. We have worked to take the first approach as much as possible, as it involves the least curricular difficulty. In first-year courses on the novel, James Hogg's *Confessions* is taught as a critical text in the evolution of the genre, especially in light of its proto-postmodern narrative strategies. Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* is taught as a vital text in a course on the cultural representation of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in Britain. In courses on Renaissance literature, Elizabeth Melville's "Ane Godlie Dreame" is held up as one of the clearest and

committed poetic expressions of Calvinist belief in a period of deep religious tensions in Britain. In an eighteenth-century drama class, Allan Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* is used to introduce students to pastoral comedy. In a children's literature class, the work of George MacDonald and J.M. Barrie are taught as important precursors to J. K. Rowling's fiction. In an upcoming course on British detective fiction, Scottish writers, from Arthur Conan Doyle to the Irish-Scot James McLevy and Ian Rankin, will have a strong presence. Rendering visible the culture that these works reflect as distinctly Scottish in terms of form and substance helps students understand the cross-border complexity involved in developing a genre or establishing a national literature. Students are encouraged not only to engage with Scottish literature, but to re-read English literature as constantly in conversation with Scottish culture. For instance, in courses on Romantic poetry, the class begins with selections from Robert Burns and ends with James Hogg's *The Queen's Wake*. This framing strategy, along with the inclusion of women poets and writers of color, ensures that students are aware of the broader aesthetic context in which the "big six" Romantic poets are writing. It also disturbs, to a degree, anglicized periodization. Students who engage with Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* recognize that some of his ideas are derived from the work of Burns.

This approach has not only allowed us to identify Scottish works as central to existing literary traditions and histories, and to disturb conventional categories of English literature, but has also provided us with the opportunity to point students towards the field of Scottish Studies, providing them with reading lists if they wish to research further on their own. And yet, this first approach to the inclusion of Scottish literature in the curriculum is limited. In such curricular contexts, Scottish works can still appear to students to serve as supplements to English literature and, much of the time, still operate within conventional categories of periodization.

We have also adopted the second approach (teaching an independent study or hiring a graduate or undergraduate student for a research project on Scottish literature) by drawing on internal college funding to take two undergraduate students to the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, one in 2007 and one in 2015, to carry out comprehensive research on the life and writings of James Hogg. The first helped with archival research for an article on Hogg's short story "The Pongos," later published in an edited collection on Hogg, while the second helped to transcribe many of Hogg's works for an upcoming edition of his uncollected writings. These are critical educational experiences that give students expertise in working directly with original Scottish manuscripts, in participating on a project from conception to completion, and in acquiring in-depth knowledge of a particular period of Scottish literature. In this immersive learning context,

the student gains substantial knowledge of Scottish literature published over a ten to twenty year period.

It was critical that both students had some exposure to Scottish literature before the trip so they understood the broader historical and cultural contexts of the works under study in the archives and learned how they were typically located in current models of periodization. The student assisting with the first project, Beth Frieden, had completed a course on Scottish Literature after 1707. She was able to negotiate skillfully the complexities of Scottish manuscripts and periodicals in the National Library of Scotland because she had acquired a solid understanding of many of the central issues addressed in Scottish literature after the Union. Beth later moved to Scotland, undertook further studies, is now fluent in Gaelic, and is actively involved in Scottish theater. That is certainly a successful outcome. The second student had successfully completed a course in Romantic literature with a section on Scottish Romanticism prior to undertaking the research project, and thus had a firm understanding of the direction and concerns of Scottish literature in this period.

This approach complicates periodization by making visible micro-shifts within a decade or even within a year. When students return to broader categories of time, they do so with a stronger understanding of the artificiality of periods and of the ebb and flow within them. Given limited funding, however, this type of research opportunity is only available to a few students.

The third approach to integrating Scottish literature into the curriculum—dedicating special topics courses to Scottish literature—is rewarding, but, given other pedagogical responsibilities, such courses can only be offered periodically. An early course dedicated to Scottish literature offered in 2004 (the one taken by Beth) focused on Anglo-Scottish relations in literature composed between the early eighteenth-century and the early years of the twenty-first century. The texts taught were John Arbuthnot's John Bull Pamphlets, selections from the Ossianic works and from the work of Burns, Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, Walter Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Muriel Spark's *Jean Brodie*, selections from Hugh MacDiarmid, and Andrew Greig's striking novel, *When They Lay Bare*. This course surveyed Scottish literature produced over more than three centuries; it did, therefore, foreground shifts in Scottish culture, but because it was designed with an eye to Anglo-Scottish relations, paradigms of Scottish periodization were not fully employed. The course, therefore, tended toward replicating, in Juliet Shield's terms, "categories of periodization derived from English literature for studying Scottish literature," although beginning in 1707 does, to a degree, mark out a period that is most significant to Scotland, as it is a moment at which political

authority is replaced by different forms of authority (of the kirk, legal system, and culture).

Although this course did not present categories of Scottish literature apart from the context of Britishness, on occasion there were moments where the class found itself solely focused on Scottish matters. One of the most effective assignments in that regard was a project that required students to design a tourist brochure based purely on the literary works read in the course. Students were welcome to conflate concepts across time. A fascinating collection of pamphlets was produced in which the traditional tartanry of Scottish tourist literature was replaced by quirky, twisted humor, gothic dourness, a vivid awareness of social class and divisions, and an emphasis on orality. It was a moment in which Scottish literary tradition, rather than consumerism or English periods, shaped Scottish identity.

In order to avoid the limitations of the first special topics course, and its constant reference to Scottish literature in a British context, two other courses were developed to narrow the focus to the Scottish literary imagination in its own right. The first of the two, Before *Trainspotting*: The Rise of the Scottish Novel (2009), emphasized genre, permitting the class to examine the influence of Scottish literature across time without being limited by English temporal periods. Smollett and Scott were taught alongside Hogg's *Confessions*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde,* Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, Muriel Spark's *Jean Brodie*, and, of course, the final work was Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*. Scottish history, socio-political matters, and cultural trends served as the interpretive frameworks through which the novels were encountered. This course design allowed for a more focused exploration of Scottish literary influence within a specific genre, though, if the course were taught again, more Scottish female novelists, sadly missing from the original syllabus, would be introduced. Teaching this sort of Scottish survey course placed the focus primarily on how the ruptures and conflicts within Scotland are inscribed in the novels. When England was addressed, it was generally in terms of Scottish cultural representations of 'South Britain' (e.g., *Jekyll and Hyde*'s London), rather than the inverse, and we often came across intersections between Scotland and other nations, such as the Netherlands or Italy.

The third special topics course, on Scottish Romanticism (2013), was inspired by two essay collections, *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (2004), edited by Ian Duncan, Leith Davis, and Janet Sorensen, and *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism* (2011), edited by Murray Pittock. The reading list included Joanna Baillie's *Plays on the Passions,* Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (for context for Scott)*,* Walter Scott's *Waverley*, James Hogg's *Queen's Wake* and *Confessions*, John Galt's *Annals of the Parish*, and selected

poems from a variety of Scottish writers. Although most of the work studied was from the nineteenth century, we began by discussing earlier Scottish writings, particularly the work of David Hume, Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith, given the identification of the period between Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* and Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution* as the time when Scotland "became one of the generative centers of European and North Atlantic literary culture."[1] Of course, even relying on the term "Romanticism" could involve imposing English frameworks on Scottish culture. However, this course, which allowed for the intense study of a particular historical period in Scottish literature across genres, was more successful in crafting an understanding of Scottish literature in its own right. Provided with definitions of English Romanticism at the beginning of the course, students spent most of the semester trying to formulate the distinct nature of Scottish Romanticism, positioning themselves in the debate between Murray Pittock and Ian Duncan about the role the Enlightenment played in Scottish literature of the era.[2] Requiring students to devise literary periods helped them to recognize the manufactured and limiting nature of such categories.

Given our limited experience working with and negotiating around English periodization when teaching Scottish literature, and in light of recent discussions on periodization by Ted Underwood, Joanna Kopaczyk, Lawrence Besserman, and Mairi Cowan (among others), what possibilities might we imagine for the future integration of Scottish literature in the classroom, other than simply repeating what we have done in the past with minor variations?[3] In contemplating the future of Scottish Studies in the undergraduate classroom, there are two main options if we abandon the categories of English periodization. The first is to embrace and revamp periodization, creating new categories that emerge from Scottish literature

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[1] Ian Duncan, Leith Davis, and Janet Sorensen, eds., *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2.

[2] Murray Pittock, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to English Romanticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 6-7.

[3] For extensive discussions of periodization, see: Lawrence Besserman, ed. *The Challenge of Periodization: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Ted Underwood, *Why Literary Periods Mattered: Historical Contrast and the Prestige of English Studies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Joanna Kopaczyk, "Rethinking the Traditional Periodisation of the Scots Language," in Janet Cruickshank and Robert McColl Millar, eds. *After the Storm: Papers from the Forum for Research on the Languages of Scotland and Ulster Triennial Meeting* (Aberdeen: Forum for Research on the Languages of Scotland and Ireland, 2012); Mairi Cowan, "In the Borderlands of Periodization with 'the blythnes that hes bein': The Medieval/Early Modern Boundary in Scottish History," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association,* 23, no. 2 (2012): 142-75.

over time. The second is to eschew periodization altogether, creating new methods through which to organize and study Scottish literature.[4]

To do either effectively, Scottish literature scholars teaching elsewhere would benefit from having easier access to a fuller range of Scottish imaginative works. Over the last two decades, access for those of us in North America has increased significantly, not only through digital databases, when our institutions can afford them, but also through the production of a range of anthologies, from the *Mercat Anthology of Early Scottish Literature 1375-1707* (1998) to Catherine Kerrigan's *Anthology of Scottish Women Poets* (1991) and Robert Irvine's two-volume *Edinburgh Anthology of Scottish Literature* (2009, 2011).

We also have an array of invaluable secondary sources that map out Scottish literature across time, making visible much of the forgotten literature and marginalized writers of the period. These resources include Robert Crawford's S*cotland's Books* (2009); the three-volume *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* (2007), edited by Ian Brown, Thomas Owen Clancy, Susan Manning, and Murray Pittock; Gerard Carruthers's *Scottish Literature* (2009); and Gerard Carruthers and Liam McIlvanney's edited collection *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literatur*e (2012).

However, if we truly wish to rethink Scottish periodization, it is important to have open access to a curated, peer-reviewed digital database or archive of Scottish writing across time to which we could all contribute lightly-edited works, and through which we could, from the ground up, determine appropriate periods for Scottish culture or find alternative patterns that might help us organize Scottish Studies in the classroom. Such a database would need to be as inclusive as possible, though it would likely only contain works in the public domain. As Thomas Clancy has argued, the discipline of "Scottish literature" must involve the "study of the literature of the geographic and political unit that is now Scotland, in all its languages and its chronological depth, and despite the cultural and political realignment of that territory over time."[5] However, if we elected to use our imaginary (at the moment) database to devise new periods, we would want to do so in full recognition of the problems with periodization in general. In an article on periodizing modern American poetry, Helen Vendler schematizes a number of ways in which literary periods can be established—by, for example, monarchical reigns (e.g., the Victorian

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[4] A third choice, which we do not have space to explore here, is to examine the literature of three nations (Ireland, Wales, and Scotland) and to determine whether culture from peripheral nations follow similar patterns.

[5] Thomas Clancy, "Scottish Literature before Scottish Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature*, ed. Gerard Carruthers and Liam McIlvanney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13-26 (14-15).

period), leading genres (e.g., the rise of the novel), dominant ideas (e.g., Romanticism), and crucial historical events (e.g., pre-union/post-union). However, she also adds that we might want to historicize the concept of periodization before deploying it, given that the "philosophical idea behind periodization—that there is a *Zeitgeist*—is in itself a Romantic one."[6]

Working to discern Scottish periods from the bottom up, from the literature itself, in all its messy fullness rather than relying on external figures, forms, or events, might address Vendler's concerns. We would strive to discover major trends by searching through the literature on the database itself, looking for shifts in dominant genre, an increase or decline of certain key terms or word clusters, a change in literary production in certain regions, the expansion or decline of particular publication networks, and so on. Something as basic as developing word clouds from one or more texts in a database might help to reveal previously invisible patterns and thus new insights, as Voyant tools demonstrate (https://voyant-tools.org/).The Stanford Literary Lab, founded by Franco Moretti, is working on a number of projects that explore shifts in literary products and practices over time (https://litlab.stanford.edu/ projects/) that could serve as models. The creation of an inclusive, searchable digital database of Scottish literature that could be organized into a range of categories might lead to conferences dedicated to new possibilities for periodization. What we are likely to discover, as the research of Morretti and others suggest, is not sweeping shifts and rapid changes in forms, styles, subjects, and perspectives in Scottish literature but overlapping tendencies, clusters of emergent or residual genres or ideas/themes, and nodes and networks of connection. Nevertheless, such findings would allow us not only to determine the fluidity of Scottish literature over time, but also to theorize new paradigms for periodization.

Such a database could also transform classes on Scottish literature as it would entail both close and distant reading, the latter involving the application of "computational criticism, in all its forms, to the study of literature."[7] An inclusive digital database on Scottish literature would,

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[6] Helen Vendler, "Periodizing Modern American Poetry," in *The Challenge of Periodization: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives,* ed. Lawrence Besserman (New York: Garland, 1996), 233.

[7] "About," *Stanford Literary Lab.* https://litlab.stanford.edu/ (accessed 28 Nov. 2016). In his essay "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review,* 1 (Jan-Feb 2000): 54-68, Franco Moretti defines "distant reading" in this way: "Distant reading: where distance … is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes— or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing

therefore, not only provide an archive of possible texts for the university classroom, but also demand that students "think digitally": affirming process over end results, affirming failure and multiple iterations over a polished final product, and conceiving of the professor as a co-learner who is open to discovery throughout the course.[8] A course designed with an extensive digital database of Scottish literature at its core might be called, for example, Discovering/Inventing Scottish Literature. A major objective of the course would be to define viable periods of study or alternate networks of study based on different literary trends discovered through both close reading and data analytics. Two or three literary works could be assigned to all students, along with some articles on periodization and its discontents, but the remaining works in the course could be selected by individual students or by groups who would upload a detailed summary including the key ideas in, crucial quotations from, and formal features of the works only read by them to a digital annotated bibliography for the class. To facilitate knowledge transmission, faculty and students would also contribute the course syllabus, annotated bibliography, and their findings to relevant paratextual sections of the (proposed) database of Scottish literature.

Such a course, which would inevitably lead both students and faculty to unexpected discoveries, would move away from the traditional model of the entire class reading all of the same books at the same time, though students would still close read a few together and decipher, as a group, where those works fit into both Scottish and global networks. Students would discover in the process that while the works under study fit into networks in one way because, for example, of their genre, they fit into them quite another way in terms of subject matter. They would also be asked to determine how a particular period might be (re)imagined if each of the works analyzed were located at its centre. Students would thereby be inspired to organize and reorganize the material through a variety of spatial, temporal, cultural, social, political, economic and religious connections that would compel them to devise more flexible and sophisticated periods through which to categorize the works studied or to resolve that periodization is not the best or most effective way to make sense of Scottish literature.

In the meantime, while we are working with existing anthologies and general literature databases, we suggest taking a two-pronged approach to

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something. We always pay a price for theoretical knowledge: reality is infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it's precisely this 'poverty' that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know. This is why less is actually more" (57-58).

[8] "Thinking digitally" and "inquiry-based learning" have much in common.

teaching Scottish literature in the classroom at liberal arts institutions. Where our department curricular design requires teaching British literature in traditional English periods, we recommend foregrounding Scottish works, making sure to include texts originally composed in Latin and Gaelic, to demonstrate their distinct and significant influence on the culture of the period. At the same time, where possible, in order to diminish the role of existing English temporal periods in the curriculum, we would suggest continuing to work around them through a range of special topics courses on Scottish literature. Some could focus on topics, themes, and genres that have a particular resonance in Scottish culture (the Scottish Gothic; Scottish crime fiction; the Scottish historical novel; urban realism in Scots fiction, for example). Others could operate within periods classified as uniquely Scottish (the literature of and about the Covenanters, the literature of the Highland Clearances, etc.). Still others could be organized with a *spatial* rather than *temporal* emphasis in mind, representing literature from certain Scottish regions rather than from temporal periods of any sort, or looking at intersections between Scottish literature and global literature. One of our institutions offers Travel Studies, so there may be opportunities to take students to Scotland, allowing them to talk to scholars in Scottish universities, to read literary works in the locations in which they were composed, to visit libraries to access original manuscripts and/or early printed editions, and to tour sites relevant to the Scottish works read.

There is no better time to craft and adopt fundamentally new perspectives on and approaches to Scottish literature given that we currently live in a period of renewal and renovation in Scottish Studies. In her invigorating study of the life and works of James Hogg, Meiko O'Halloran describes Hogg's literary style and works as kaleidoscopic.[9] This trope might aptly be applied to renovating the field of Scottish literature more generally, as it will require breaking down old epistemological categories into small units of understanding and then reassembling them in myriad new configurations, allowing us to consider the unexpected beauty and creative force of the new patterns that emerge.

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[9] Meiko O'Halloran, *James Hogg and British Romanticism: A Kaleidoscopic Art* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).