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"A QUIVERING QUICK-SAND": ROMANTIC SOLWAY AESTHETICS

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Many tourists visited the Solway region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, often passing through on tours taking in the fashionable mountainous regions of the English Lakes or the Scottish Highlands. Those tourists are often *disappointed*: they are, to draw on the word's etymology, out of place, unable to perform the job of landscape appreciation. They come up against the Solway's definitive feature: its mutability. Fiona Stafford, in the most important recent account of the Solway in nineteenth-century culture, describes it as "an area in perpetual motion, where nothing rests safely."[1] All landscapes are in movement, and it is a fact that both tormented and delighted seekers after the picturesque in the late eighteenth century. But the Solway offers a special challenge to any writer seeking to frame it. The Solway is a place where we lose our bearings: cultural, historical, and natural. This article considers four attempts to deal with the Solway in texts that each mingle fact and fiction. I offer some speculations towards a Romantic Solway aesthetics, making that challenge—the region's capacity to put us out of place—the heart of what it has to offer.

How to write and think about landscapes is a pressing concern in recent work in anthropology, human geography, environmental history, literary studies, and other fields, driven in large part by the increasingly inescapable environmental crisis. Theories of mobility have long emphasized that a landscape is inherently temporal, often presenting as a counter-image the framed landscape vista of the Romantic age.[2] Literary scholars of this period have nonetheless begun to take on the ideas of assemblage, movement, and multiple agency in criticism of Romantic

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[1] Fiona Stafford, "The Roar of the Solway," in *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge*, ed. Nicholas Allen, Nick Groom, and Jos Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 48.

[2] See, for example, Peter Adey, *Mobility* (London: Routledge, 2010).

landscape writing.[3] The interacting lines of movement of insects, birds, humans, rocks, grass, microbes, and other agents bring landscapes into being. It is a fact that some landscape writing seems to obscure, but there is a growing recognition that the period's literary texts offer a set of tools that can aid this broader conversation.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing—in a study not especially interested in the literary—describes the necessary mode of critical attention as follows:

> Whether or not other organisms 'tell stories', they contribute to the overlapping tracks and traces that we grasp as history. History, then, is the record of many trajectories of world making, human and not human.[4]

As an anthropologist, Tsing is interested in the stories we tell. Her theoretical co-ordinates—drawing on thinkers like Gilles Deleuze, Jane Bennett, and Donna Haraway—emphasize the way that those stories require multiple tellers, and the fact that the stories are temporal, on the move.[5] Literary form can help us see land in these ways. A character in one of the Romantic-period texts I will consider describes the "sinuosities of the ground" on the Solway that make a single perspective on the landscape impossible.[6] The difficulty that Romantic-period writers had in writing the Solway Firth is not a problem the texts overcome so much as they incorporate these "sinuosities" into their often very disconcerting structures. That the texts of the Romantic Solway are often hard to grasp—that they are, even, disappointing—is one reason to look at them afresh.

Ann Radcliffe, one of the most important landscape writers of this era, climbed Skiddaw as part of her 1794 tour of the Lakes. With Ossian in mind, she gazes north to the border with Scotland, marked by the firth:

> Bounding the low country to the north, the wide Solway Firth, with its indented shores, looked like a gray horizon, and the double range of Scottish mountains, seen dimly through mist beyond, like

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[3] Susan Oliver provides a fine example in the Scottish context: "Trees, Rivers, and Stories: Walter Scott Writing the Land," *Yearbook of English Studies*, 47 (2017): 279-99. For an overview see Jeremy Davies, "Romantic Ecocriticism: History and Prospects," *Literature Compass*, 15.9 (2018): 1-15.

[4] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 168.

[5] Works that have influenced me here include Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Tim Ingold, *Lines, A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007); and Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

[6] Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet*, ed. G. A. M. Wood and David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 93.

> lines of dark clouds above it. The Solway appeared surprisingly near us, though at fifty miles distance, and the guide said, that, on a bright day, its shipping could be plainly discerned.[7]

The Solway looms in and out of focus as Radcliffe gazes at it. Radcliffe is looking for Scottishness of a particular kind; she is disappointed. And yet the scene comes to life as she writes about it. Radcliffe is slightly put out by the fact that the Solway is a busy shipping channel: not just a border to "the north," but also a gateway to international trade. Whitehaven, for example, was in this period crucial to the colonial and tobacco trades, and north-west Cumberland held a large coal-mining industry, led by William Wordsworth's patrons, the Lowthers. Radcliffe also encounters a scene that—in its grayness—cannot be grasped outside of its weather, a temporal matter that keeps it moving. The landscape that seems "surprisingly near" has something of the quality of an optical illusion, a deceptive glimmering.

The Solway presented Romantic-era writers with a scene that ought to have provided them with an opportunity for writing, or for taking out a Claude glass and sketching. But these kinds of experiences—pre-planned, pre-plotted—prove unworkable. In his history of the Solway, Brian Blake reminds readers that "the Solway changes daily, and as much as man makes his route, so the route tells him where to make it."[8] This interaction between viewer and scene is crucial. The Solway seems to offer epistemological clarity: walking across the Annan wath to Bowness leads you from Scotland to England, from one coast to the other. But the ground under one's feet is notoriously unstable: there is a path only at low tide (at high tide you'd be walking through several metres of water), mists are common and thick, the tidal bore sweeps in quicker than a person might run. The history of the region is flecked with sudden disappearances such as the collapsing into the sea of the town of Skinburnness in 1304, the soldiers swallowed up in the bog at the battle of Solway Moss in 1542, or the spectacular eruption of Solway Moss discussed in this issue by Alex Deans. Categorizing the place proves difficult too. Radcliffe's attempt to frame it in Ossianic terms seems justified by the landscape's wild instability, but this cannot square with a place that was, in the Romantic period, very much a scene of improvement, with trade booming, coal being mined, and ships connecting imperial routes of exploitation and destruction.

This is not a scene that can be neatly isolated as a touristic experience of the picturesque kind. Radcliffe's disappointment—her sense of being out of place—begins with her keenness of perception. By noticing, she

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[7] Ann Radcliffe, *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794*, 2 vols (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), II: 337.

[8] Brian Blake, *The Solway Firth* (London: Robert Hale, 1955), 13.

starts to adapt her methods. Dorothy McMillan argues that Radcliffe's 1794 travel writing is an important juncture in her writing career, her landscapes ceasing to be a psychologically saturated backdrop, becoming instead a living environment in which characters interact.[9] More than that, one might say that Radcliffe starts to recognize the non-human elements of the landscape as moving agents who also tell the story that is a particular place. Radcliffe is one of several writers in this era—so fascinated by defining and describing place—whose writing is prompted into new life by this unusually mobile landscape. Their writing shapes the Solway: it gives the place a form that can be seen and imagined by readers. And that writing is shaped by the Solway: the way that they imagine place is driven into unexpected forms by the oddities of the moving landscape the writers inhabit. The Solway changes, and with it their writing.

John S. Marriner's *Scenes on Solway*, printed for the author in Carlisle in 1834, is a strange book.[10] The book sets itself up as a historical guide to the region from the Romans up to the 1830s, when the rage of improvement is such that Solway towns expand at a rate surpassed only by "the mushroom rise of American towns" (225). The book's value lies not in the facts it gives us, but in its tonal shifts and structural oddities. It is a book that takes a sly pleasure in diverting its readers off course. The text is a curious compendium of elements that fail to cohere: alongside interruptions by poems comparing the Solway to lands "Where lucious [*sic*] guavas, spontaneous grow" (33), Marriner also copies out the full charter granted to Annan by James VI, or drops in a song celebrating the 1707 Union set to the Jacobite tune "All the Blue Bonnets."[11] Marriner's willingness to let his creative juices bubble over seems apt given how hard it is to give a clear and stable picture of the landscape he describes. This comes to a head on page 73 (the book is just over 200 pages long). We take a little pause for some local detail: two women in Whitehaven chat as they hang up the washing. This sets off a sea adventure whose geographical limits are the traditional limits of the Solway Firth, St Bees Head and the

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[9] Dorothy McMillan, "The Secrets of Ann Radcliffe's English Travels," in *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel, 1775-1844*, ed. Amanda Gilroy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 51-67

[10] John S. Marriner, *Scenes on Solway, and Historical Sketches of the West Borders, from the Building of the Roman Wall, to the Navigation of the Solway by Steam in the Nineteenth Century* (Carlisle: John Cockburn, 1834)

[11] The song was made popular in Scott's *The Monastery* (1820). Its provenance is not entirely secure, and its political associations are varied. It appears in James Hogg's *Jacobite Relics* (1819) as "Lesley's March to Scotland," a song of the Civil War, and later became associated with the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion. See Walter Scott, *The Monastery* ed. Penny Fielding (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 230.

Mull of Galloway. But the story itself confounds our expectations of its formal limitations. What should be a brief creative excursion does not end until the final pages of the book. At that point Marriner abruptly turns to the present and the great strides that industrial improvement is taking. To call the story itself (which occupies the majority of the book) picaresque would be to ascribe to it a clarity it does not preserve. The story's mobility is not simply geographical: characters suddenly appear and disappear, one chapter picks the story up in verse before returning abruptly to prose, we get disquisitions of a vaguely anthropological kind on the fairies, the historical setting is hard to place securely or consistently, though the "frolic" of "smuggling and smashing" (163)—a practice increased by the 1707 Union and the introduction of new customs duties– is a particular appeal. People are frequently swallowed up by the Solway quicksand—a common theme in accounts of this treacherous landscape, but one that seems especially appropriate in a book that swallows itself up and reappears unexpectedly, slightly transformed, a little further down the coast.

This is, perhaps, a generous account of a book that might simply be dismissed as ephemera. But its themes and its methods have, in fact, a striking degree of commonality with Marriner's fellow writers of "scenes on Solway." No writer of the period was quite as committed to the Solway as Allan Cunningham.[12] Cunningham's writing across his career—in narrative and lyric verse, imitation ballad, historical romance, drama, short fiction, biography and other forms—returns constantly to the Solway and constitutes a decades-long attempt to come to terms with the region he was born in. His writing shares a formal and tonal unevenness with *Scenes on Solway* that derives in part from the same effort to track a place that keeps moving.

The point is made well by Cunningham's bizarre extravaganza of a novel, *Sir Michael Scott* (1828).[13] Cunningham's plot is so convoluted as to resist description. It involves the titular medieval Border wizard and polymath plucking a near-dead James IV from the carnage of Flodden Field and taking him on a wild tour in which the coordinates of time and space are thoroughly muddled. It is an attempt (perhaps) to write a global history of Scotland. But one wonders if Cunningham is teasing his readers when he claims that the novel will draw on history and ancient superstitions "unit[ing] them into one consistent narrative" (1: v). Titling

[12] See Gerard Lee McKeever, "John Paul Jones and the Curse of Home," *Philological Quarterly*, 99.1 (2020), 95-117 for an account of Cunningham that emphasizes his complicated interest in locality.

[13] Allan Cunningham, *Sir Michael Scott, A Romance*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1828).

the book "A Romance"—a title he gave all his longer prose fictions—allows Cunningham some leeway but does not hide what a strange generic mixture the book is. *Sir Michael Scott* delights in its incoherence, formally, temporally, and geographically. It is hard to be sure what one is reading, or where the plot might go next in a book that involves encounters with Homer, Nelson, and a witch who has converted to Islam, and that involves travels to Arabia, the north pole, and Lochmaben, as well as an allegorical bog and a valley of spectres.

If the novel can be said to have a centre it is the Solway, not so much because the action returns there as because it, as so often in Cunningham's work, is the shaping force of the book's unstable momentum. At one point Brunelfin (a kind of brownie who acts as Sir Michael's elfin page) puzzles a band of priests and kings who chase Sir Michael with visions of their wrongdoings. Quite why this is happening at all is a question the reader might ask, but where it is happening is just as hard to grasp.[14] Brunelfin leads them on and delivers them into "a quivering quick-sand" (3: 242): "they beheld the foaming tide coming with the speed of a race-horse three feet deep abreast" (3: 243). The group are far from Scotland at this point, but this is, surely, the Solway Firth. The features sound like the quicksand and tidal bore for which the firth is famous; indeed, the phrasing may allude specifically to Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet*, published four years earlier.[15] Cunningham is a writer intensely attached to the particularities of localities, especially his native Nithsdale. The Solway's influence on his work is not quite—or not only—the dense local investigation found elsewhere in Romantic accounts of place.[16] The Solway is a quieter, stranger actor in the narrative's structure, reappearing in unexpected times and places to make insecure the location of the landscape the narrative inhabits. At any moment, the features may shift, and we realize where we thought we were was also, bafflingly, somewhere else. Rather than an understanding of place as something fixable, Cunningham's Solway is so mobile we might find it in Arabia or the North Pole. Ann Radcliffe had a similar moment of disorientation when she realized that this wild place on the margins was also at the heart of networks of trade and empire, something Marriner also registers in his (otherwise bizarre) comparisons of

[14] Earlier they entered the gates of a "great city" (3: 207): perhaps Rome given they encounter the Pope. Cunningham's wearyingly insistent anti-Catholicism is a marked feature of a novel written in the shadow of the Catholic Emancipation debates.

[15] A character notes that "The sky threatens a blast that will bring in the waves three foot a-breast": Scott, *Redgauntlet*, 21.

[16] See Fiona Stafford *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and compare McKeever, "John Paul Jones."

Annan with the West Indies.[17] The Solway region to which Cunningham returns so consistently in his poetry, prose and fiction became a character in its own right, one that produces the often baffling dislocations that mark his work.

Walter Scott's novels have often been taken as providing accounts of place that, by contrast with Marriner and Cunningham, provide a secure anchoring in history that is plotted in predictable and progressive ways. This view of Scott has been challenged of late, and the image of a consistently playful and contradictory writer has begun to be formed.[18] The Solway exerted a particular pull on his imagination. His two major accounts of the region, *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *Redgauntlet* (1824), include sly portraits (mirrors at once for the author and the reader) of young tourists arriving in a new land in search of the picturesque. They hope for an experience: something akin to what their guidebooks had taught them to expect that can in turn inspire a watercolour or a poem. But the encounter with place proves considerably less stable, and the effect is felt not only in the comic deflation of the characters' expectations, but also at the level of plot, as the dense mesh of encounters that the place embodies takes over the narrative threads.

The most important of these encounters is *Redgauntlet* (1824), a historical novel about an event—a late Jacobite rising—that never happened.[19] It is the 1760s. We meet the young, romantic law student Darsie Latimer, one of Scott's many drifting young men with an uncertain history and an unmapped future. He escapes Edinburgh to seek adventure, knowing that he is forbidden by a mysterious family edict to cross the border into England, the land of his birth. Of course, he goes straight to the limit of the forbidden territory, the borderline marked by the Solway Firth. Darsie's descriptions come in letters to his friend Alan Fairford, back in Edinburgh diligently studying law. Darsie's first encounter with the Solway mirrors Radcliffe's in some respects, even as it lacks her depth of vision. He is a young person informed by the eighteenth-century discourse of landscape aesthetics, excited by the arrival at a national boundary.

[17] In the first pages of Scott's *Redgauntlet*, which I discuss next, Darsie Latimer imagines himself to be the "son of some India Director" (2).

[18] E.g., Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Alison Lumsden, *Walter Scott and the Limits of Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[19] For two excellent discussions of *Redgauntlet*'s Solway geography, see Stafford, "The Roar of the Solway," and Christopher Donaldson, Sally Bushell, Ian Gregory, Paul Rayson, and Joanna Taylor, "Digital Literary Geography and the Difficulties of Locating 'Redgauntlet Country,'" *SSL*, 42.2 (2016): 174-83.

Rather than Ossianic Scotland, his hope is to see the equally literary "merry England" (16).

Darsie's first sight of the Solway seems simple enough: "I turned my steps towards the sea, or rather the Solway Frith, which here separates the two sister kingdoms, and which lay at about a mile's distance, by a pleasant walk over sandy knolls, covered with short herbage, which you call Links, and we English, Downs" (19). The language of place is linked to identity. One wonders, though, who Darsie thinks he is. He might know he is English, but he did not learn to speak there: it is not in this sense "natural" for him to call links "Downs," no more natural indeed than using the word "links" or the fussy "herbage." What he sees is the sea; or, checking himself, "rather" it is the "Solway Frith" ("firth" in English being a word of Scots origin, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, with "frith" a variation). This capricious mix of land, sea, river and sky acts as a border between two countries united by treaty. It is a treaty that maintains each nation's independent legal systems, a fact crucial to Darsie's movements in this scene: he is ordered to "refrain from visiting England until [his] twenty-fifth year expires" (2). As the novel progresses the sharp separation of legal codes is itself a matter resolved in mobile, even comic discussion, incorporating a dispute over fishing rights between the modern methods of the Quaker Joshua Geddes and the locals who insist on their traditional rights, as well as the complexities of the "Peebles vs. Plainstanes" case that mutates as it moves from Edinburgh across the border. The moment of encounter with the Solway is one in which ontological questions are raised rather than settled.

In his next letter to Alan, Darsie turns poetical in an attempt to grasp the Solway, enthusing over the sun setting on the firth "like a warrior prepared for defence, over a huge battlemented and turreted wall of crimson and black clouds, which appeared like an immense Gothic fortress" (20). The picturesque scene gains local colour by the sight of men hunting salmon on horseback with long spears. But Darsie's reverie is broken by a man who tells him that he is in danger of his life:

> He that dreams on the bed of the Solway, may wake in the next world. The sky threatens a blast that will bring in the waves three foot a-breast (21).

Rather than being on the shore, he is in fact on the bed of the estuary; or, rather, what is now the shore will shortly become the bed. Words have real meanings, but the relationship shifts as the weather and the tide changes. Darsie's lack of local knowledge means he quickly gets lost again, heading towards the quicksands. He is swept up on horseback by a gruff man: rescued and brought into new kinds of danger.

One thing he has to learn is that the setting sun is not just pretty: it is linked to the changes in the landscape such as the weather and the tide.

Similarly, the men hunting salmon are not just picturesque: the novel goes on to detail the complicated political networks that give the act meaning, and that soon lead to conflict. Joshua Geddes's sister Rachel explains to Darsie that such men play fast and loose with the truth, a practice quite abhorrent to a Quaker:

> The truth is not in them—most of them participate in the unlawful trade betwixt these parts and the neighbouring shore of England; and they are familiar with every species of falsehood and deceit (60).

She refers not simply to their habits of smuggling and—for her and her brother—illegal fishing practices, but also to the Jacobitism they share with their Laird, Redgauntlet. They are "unlawful" acts only according to some lights, revealing the complex intermeshing of the laws that operate in the area, a complexity at odds with the Quaker sense of truth, but a real (or true) complexity for all that. Geddes's use of tidal stake-nets to catch the salmon is complained of "as an innovation" by the men who "pretend to a right to remove and destroy them by the strong hand" (61).[20] Custom, precedent, and force can trump other forms of law, and these men do not in any case recognize the Hanoverian establishment that might back up the prevailing legal system with the soldiers stationed at Dumfries (a use of force quite contrary to the religious law as judged by Quakers). Each of these forms of law co-exist and play off against each other, a fact the Quakers at once deny and acknowledge. Landscapes are not only objects to be looked at, Scott suggests: they have living histories brought into being by the weather, the animals and the humans who interact in them, with their systems of imagining place that interlock and combine unpredictably.

Alan's riposte to Darsie is that he is akin to the "the first moon-calf who earliest discovered the Pandemonium of Milton in an expiring wood-fire," or a tourist who uses a Claude glass which "spreads its own particular hue over the whole landscape which you see through it" (33). Alan is right, but this is liable to give the reader an ill-won confidence and sense of superiority. The Solway's role in the novel is not the firm ground of reality to be ranged against the simplistic fantasies of giddy young men who read too much and occupy no useful role in society. Scott—like Darsie, in fact—is too knowing for that. Scott's point is more subtle. That the Solway will not stay still means Darsie gets into trouble. It also means that any writing about it is necessarily incomplete. The Solway *is* picturesque: but this way of seeing leaves other ways of seeing out, something true of any perspective, but especially true in such a mutable location. As soon as the observer thinks he has grasped the Solway, it

[20] The practice was a subject of real legal controversy in the 1760s; the use of stake-nets on the Solway was not legalized fully until 1804.

moves on, just as Darsie was confronted by the stable and yet fluid signification of the "bed" and "shore" of the firth (or frith). That includes those who claim that there is a Solway reality that offers a bedrock of truth over which Darsie's Romantic fantasies flit. *Redgauntlet* is marked by a cacophony of voices: local landowner, classically educated smuggler, middle-class man on the rise, Quaker, teasing labouring-class boy, blind fiddler. Each of the novel's characters present a claim to truth about the Solway, but none of them can see it with entire accuracy. That the land itself changes so rapidly, and is so palpably present in the story—from the "the distant roar of the tide" (156) that a kidnapped Darsie hears, to the salmon speared by Redgauntlet's men, to the swell and salty air that later in the novel make Alan seasick—suggests that it too has a story to tell.

It is a point that Scott's novel encodes formally. *Redgauntlet* jumps not just between narrators but also narrative modes (epistolary novel, retrospective third-person narration, journal entries, in-set short fiction). The novel's ending is notoriously unsatisfactory. Part of the reason for that is that it is hard to tell where the novel's centre of gravity lies, and therefore which parts of the plot merit being brought to a satisfactory conclusion.[21] Midway through the novel Alan attempts to insist that the law is a fiction that provides a stable truth. Demanding that witnesses are brought forth by the Provost of Dumfries following the destruction of Geddes's stake-nets by Redgauntlet's men, Alan finds that laws too must adapt to the local weather:

> they are a kind of amphibious deevils, neither land nor water beasts—neither English nor Scots—neither county nor stewartry, as we say—they are dispersed like so much quicksilver. You may as well try to whistle a sealgh out of the Solway, as to get hold of one of them (208).

It feels like an account of the book and the landscape that shaped it. Scott's broader fascination with truth and fiction—the systems of knowledge that give shape to a living history—finds an important testing ground in the Solway. *Redgauntlet*'s Solway aesthetics emerge from this recognition that truth is on the move. Its narrative is structured not by one plot but by a succession of unpredictable interactions between a wide range of agents.

[21] The difficulty in tying the threads of the plot together could also be made of Scott's other great Solway novel, *Guy Mannering*; the eponymous hero begins the novel by getting lost while attempting to sketch the landscape, but he is in fact relatively peripheral to the Galwegian story that develops. On unsatisfactory endings in Scott's 1820s fiction, see Penny Fielding, "'Earth and Stone': Improvement, Entailment and Geographical Futures in the Novel of the 1820s," in Alex Benchimol and Gerard Lee McKeever, eds, *Cultures of Improvement in Scottish Romanticism, 1707-1840* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 153; and Lumsden, *Walter Scott and the Limits of Language*, 151.

The Jacobite plot that seems to be what the novel is "about" fizzles out, the state authorities not willing to give it the dignity of recognition. "Plot," with its associations with landscape design, indicates something enclosed by limits that have been pre-established, but the novel's miscellaneity and its hurried ending cannot be squared with these expectations of plottedness. It is a novel that gives us one way of thinking through Tsing's conception of landscape history as "the record of many trajectories of world making." Marriner, Cunningham and Scott all present histories of a kind in a period fascinated by the theorization of history writing. In each case, though, what makes a history looks increasingly complicated.

In his *Sonnets from Scotland* (1984) Edwin Morgan sends a postcard from a Ballardian future of a drowned world. In "The Solway Canal," the narrator heads west by hydrofoil from the Cheviots, looking north to the "island of the Scots" at Carter Bar.[22] It is a future that has seemed increasingly possible since Morgan first published the sonnet. It seems apt that the Solway's brackish waters provide the impetus for this imagined future. Yesterday's climate fiction threatens to become today's fact, though Morgan's vision bears traces of the past too. The "wizard with a falcon on his wrist" might be Sir Michael Scott, and the "drowned borderers' graves" glimpsed by looking down into the Solway Canal suggest that history is not a one-way waterway: readers might recall Scott's Old Mortality, the Caerlaverock-born figure who keeps the graves of the Covenanters legible in *The Tale of Old Mortality* (1816). As in J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962), Morgan suggests that time is uncanny, not plotted: what has drowned has not gone away, and the future might be glimpsed in past speculations that await their time.

Timothy Baker cites Ballard and Morgan briefly in an insightful discussion of contemporary Scottish literature that pushes beyond "the paradoxical relation of global and local, or the familiar rhetoric of the national" in attempts to narrate the future, focusing instead on "the possibility of multiple worlds, and multiple becomings."[23] The view has more in common with Romantic-period writing than might be anticipated. Morgan's vision of a Solway future could itself be seen as an old idea that finally found its moment. Following the completion in 1822 of Solway native Thomas Telford's Caledonian Canal, a Solway Canal linking Carlisle and Newcastle was postulated.[24] This is part of the difficulty the

[22] Edwin Morgan, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), 455.

[23] Timothy C. Baker "Writing Scotland's Future: Speculative Fiction and the National Imagination," *SSL*, 42.2 (2016): 263.

[24] It was never truly begun, but a canal was completed in 1823 between Fisher's Cross (renamed Port Carlisle) and Carlisle. Brian Blake notes that the first ship to reach Carlisle was the *Robert Burns* (166).

Solway presents to those who would read it securely: it seems remote, and yet connected; deeply historical, and yet curiously futuristic. Those who view it in terms of the Scottish Enlightenment's "stages" of historical development find themselves confronted with several stages at once. The Solway invites the kind of landscape appreciation that sees a wild landscape as "natural" but cannot help showing us a landscape formed by human and non-human interactions (not always positively). Each of the texts I have looked at is shaped by this difficulty. They are, in turn, "difficult" texts: texts that foreground and teasingly point to the difficulties they have in framing their subjects, or in being framed (as romance, history, novel, travel writing, fantasy). They consider landscapes as historical, but each of them develops forms of writing that discourage a view of history as progress, or of land as a museum deposit in which stable truths might be found. They seem to give up their narration to the unstable region that is always more than—even as it is also—a picturesque backdrop. Morgan's vision of the Solway hydrofoil "vibrating quietly through the wet rock walls / and scarves of dim half-sparkling April mist" could be a distorted echo of Romantic Solway aesthetics.

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