

ABSTRACTS FOR
SPINNING SCOTLAND CONFERENCE
GLASGOW UNIVERSITY - 13th SEPTEMBER 2008

PANEL 1: ISLAND POETRY – ON THE FRINGE?**Iain MacDonald – Linden J Bicket – Emma Dymock**

9.30 – 11am

*Iain MacDonald***The Very Heart of Beyond: Gaelic Nationalism and the Work of Fionn Mac Colla.**

The work of Fionn Mac Colla (Thomas Douglas Macdonald) examines the development of religious ideas and politics on Scottish society. He was primarily concerned with the representation of Scottish Gaelic and the cultural implications for Scotland with the erosion and re-establishment of Gaelic culture and identity in the industrialising modern era. These themes are most comprehensively explored in his best-known works, *The Albannach* (1932) and *And The Cock Crew* (1945). J.L. Broom's claim that MacColla's obsession with Calvinism's influence over Scotland had 'reached such proportions as to have distorted his artistic priorities' has influenced attitudes and encouraged lazy critical reception of the writer. It is my contention that MacColla's contribution to the developing 'Scottish Literary Renaissance' of the 1920s and 30s can be described as major, even if, at times, deserved critical reception has been thwarted.

Mac Colla's work is primarily concerned with Scottish Gaelic culture, and its history. Although his fictional work concentrates on Gaelic communities in the central Highlands, Mac Colla spent 20 years living and teaching in the Hebrides. In this paper I will demonstrate that Mac Colla's work and themes are interwoven with his own experiences of the Gaelic community. I will also examine the title of this panel with reference to Fionn Mac Colla.

Linden J Bicket

The Looms of History in George Mackay Brown's Literary Landscape

In 1948, George Mackay Brown produced his first ever publication, a small guide to the Orkney Islands. Twenty-one years later the author, now indisputably a part of the 'Twentieth Century Scottish Cultural Renaissance' published his literary manifesto: *An Orkney Tapestry*. This descendant of his original guidebook is a rich fusion of poetry, prose, drama, ballad, and personal polemic, which weaves together the rich and imaginatively recreated history of the Orcadians with their relationship with the land, ancestors, and patron saint, Magnus. Fittingly, the disparate strands of Orkney's often fractured and multifaceted past are drawn together by virtue of the metaphor of spinning.

Despite the 'mingled weave' of Orcadian identity, Brown's view of the estates of Orkney as being 'stitched together in a single garment' is harmonious and all encompassing (even when speaking of the brutality of Viking raids alongside the redeeming power of St Magnus's martyrdom and sacrifice). His fascination with the seamless garment, an image from St John's gospel, permeates the work, and in fact the metaphor of weaving to produce a harmonious view of Orkney society spans several of his later works, including *The Loom of Light*, and *Time in a Red Coat*.

This paper will attempt to reappraise Brown's use of spinning metaphor to construct an Orcadian landscape as centre of his poetic and fictional world, rather than a group of islands that are marginal not just to Scotland but to Britain, too. It will question whether the metaphorical fabric that creates *An Orkney Tapestry* is innovative, or constraining.

Emma Dymock

Strands of Politics in the Poetry of Sorley MacLean:

Exploring the Symbol of the Skye Stallion in a Scottish and European Context

‘An Cuilithionn’, composed in 1939, is widely considered to be the Gaelic poet, Sorley MacLean’s most important political poem. MacLean’s vision of his poem was that it would radiate from Skye to the whole of Europe and for this reason the symbols which feature in the poem can be perceived from both a local and a universal perspective. At a time when Europe was on the cusp of WWII, poets were exploring complex issues relating to the dangers of Fascism and the symbols in the poem reflect MacLean’s fear of Fascism and his hope that Communism would provide a more positive force which would transform society. This paper seeks to explore one of the symbols in ‘An Cuilithionn’, the Skye Stallion, in relation to issues of politics, identity and myth.

I will use MacLean’s correspondence with other Scottish writers in order to provide a brief overview of his political stance in relation to European politics so that ‘An Cuilithionn’ can be placed in its correct context. I will assess the importance of the Stallion from a Gaelic and Scottish literary perspective as well as from a Communist standpoint, tracing the nature of this symbol back through literature and myth in order to show how these individual threads weave together to create a vision of hope, energy and rebirth for Scotland and beyond. It is hoped that this paper will add a new dimension to our understanding of how politics and literature interact within a Scottish and European context.

PANEL 2: SCOTTISH CULTURE IN MODERN MEDIA**Guillermo Iglesias – Lynne Hibberd – Coral Maturana**

9.30 – 11am

*Guillermo Iglesias*What is left in between: *Trainspotting*, from novel to film.

When comparing a filmic text with the literary source it comes from, the conclusion usually ends up by underlining the excellence and complexity of the written text as opposed to its simplification in the film adaptation. Specialists in the matter note how comparisons between both means of expression tend to focus on questions related to plot and characters. This fact favours an unfair judgement in detriment of the filmic adaptation, as in most occasions it is impossible to include in it every character and episode in the book. Accordingly, theorists propose an analysis of both cultural artefacts attending exclusively to their own idiosyncrasy as texts though, conscious as they are of the impossibility to refrain comparisons, they insist on the necessity of analysing the narrative modes and their transposition from the source text, leaving aside questions related to the contents.

The intention in my proposal is to focus on Danny Boyle's adaptation of Irvine Welsh's controversial novel *Trainspotting* and the implicit "translation" process in it, paying attention not only to what was left out of the original story –the film could have never been possible if some of the harshest episodes in the written text were to be included in the cinematographic version— but also to the discursive articulation of the film.

Lynne Hibberd

River City and BBC Scotland

As the Scottish soap, *River City* was conceived of as one of BBC Scotland's responses to devolution and was intended specifically for a Scottish audience. As well as presenting a vision of a modern urban Scotland, the programme aimed to promote the talent and skills base of the film and television industry and contribute to Scotland's creative economy. The soap was launched in 2002, when television audiences were fragmenting and the soap landscape was already highly congested. This paper examines how the programme is indicative of some of the problems that BBC Scotland faces as a non-devolved institution, and questions the future role and relevance of *River City* as a Scottish 'national' product.

Coral Calvo

Jackie Kay's representation of *The Broons*: Scotland's happy family

This paper will focus on the Scottish poet Jackie Kay and the comic strip *The Broons*. In particular, it will observe the way in which the writer refers to this comic in four of her poems: *Maw Broon Visits a Therapist* (from *Off Colour*, 1998); *Paw Broon on the Starr Report* (from *Off Colour*, 1998); *The Broons' Bairn's Black* (from *Off Colour*, 1998), and *There's Trouble for Maw Broon* (from *Life Mask*, 2005). The study will examine the poetic voices – their characterisation, language and expressions – comparing them with the protagonists' portrayal and speech in the comic strip. We will notice a contrast between the traditional Scottish family representation in *The Broons* and the transgression of those values in the poetry of Kay. We will also acknowledge the temporal contrast between the Scotland of the 1936, date in which the comic strip first appeared within the *Sunday Post* newspaper, and contemporary Scotland.

PANEL 3: MEDIEVAL VISIONS AND TRADITIONS

Kylie Murray – Sebastiaan Verweij – Chelsea Honeyman

1.30 – 3pm

Kylie Murray

Dream and Vision in *The Scotichronicon*.

Bower's *Scotichronicon* (c. 1440s) is pivotal in the evolution of Scotland's literary dream-vision tradition, and comprises approximately eighty dream and vision related episodes. Bower's emphasis upon dream is strikingly innovative, suggesting an attempt not simply to emulate English and Continental sources and analogues, but to respond to them by inflecting them in a distinctively Scottish way. This paper will discuss the contribution made by dream and vision to the *Scotichronicon*, and in particular its nationalist and political agenda in describing and prescribing Scottish identity.

Sebastiaan Verweij

From Lydgate to Sidney:

The Miscellany Manuscript of James Murray of Tibbermuir, c.1500-c.1612

On 24th May 1612, Sir James Murray of Tibbermuir, a minor landowner from Perthshire, finally made complete his defective manuscript copy of John Lydgate's *Troy Book*; a manuscript that had been imperfect perhaps for over century. In addition to completing this medieval romance, on the remainder of his blank pages Murray copied a great deal of miscellaneous verse from his own day and age, such as works by Scottish poets Alexander Montgomerie, James VI, and Alexander Hume, and English poets Thomas Campion, Edward Dyer, and Philip Sidney. In addition, Murray left a record of his library, bearing further witness to his bibliographic zeal.

Murray's manuscript (now Cambridge University Library MS Kk.5.30) irreverently transcends national and period boundaries combining English and Scots medieval and early modern modes of writing within the confines of one miscellany manuscript. Within the space of two pages, the reader is taken from Lydgate's classically inspired medieval romance to an early modern three-sonnet sequence. The first sonnet, by Alexander Craig, takes its cue from Trojan history, but reworks this theme into amatory concerns. Love for an earthly woman is promptly deconstructed in the sonnet to follow, by Scots minister James Melville. The theme of divine love is finally reworked in a sonnet by Philip Sidney.

My paper will investigate Murray's intriguing but highly understudied manuscript, mostly from a book historical perspective, and focusing on the sonnets as a case-study. Whereas earlier critics have only ever extracted from MS Kk.5.30 what they needed without much regard for context, I will argue for the necessity of a holistic approach: one that takes into account the entire manuscript from cover to cover, and makes meaning not only from the 'famous' poems, but from the entire content.

Chelsea Honeyman

Literary and Political Governance in the Scottish Reception of Chaucer:

A Study of the *Kingis Quair*

The *Kingis Quair* (c. 1424), a dream-vision traditionally attributed to Scotland's James I, is at its core a study of what it means to rule and be ruled. Previous scholarship has noted that James' royal status provides a useful political lens through which to view the *Quair*'s advocacy of its lover-narrator's personal self-governance. The *Quair*'s focus on governance, however, extends beyond the narrative of the poem itself to propose a valuable interpretive paradigm for fifteenth-century Scottish reception of English literary sources, particularly Chaucer. The late-medieval Scottish tendency to incorporate powerful foreign cultural influences as a means of reinforcing its own national fabric finds parallels both in James' own Lancastrian-influenced style of rule and in the *Quair*'s use of Chaucerian works such as the *Knight's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. The *Quair*

responds neither passively nor subversively to these poems' treatment of the power of Love and Fortune, but rather reinterprets Chaucer's works to advance a vision of governance in which judicious deference to external authority empowers rather than enslaves the 'subject,' whether that subject is a lover, a poet or a king. The *Quair* thus expresses in both its narrative and its relationship with Chaucerian sources a philosophy of personal, political and poetic self-governance that provides a model for interpreting later medieval Scottish responses to Chaucer. The poem's image of the 'free thrall' thus becomes more than a courtly paradox; it represents the potential for Scottish literature to assert its autonomy in the face of a powerful English poetic forebear.

PANEL 4: DIASPORA AND DIFFERENT DESTINATIONS**Christy di Frances – Jennifer Orr – Lila Matsumoto**

1.30 – 3pm

*Christy di Frances*Visions of Adventure in the Work of Robert Louis Stevenson

Although the writing of Robert Louis Stevenson has inevitably been associated with a strong concept of ‘adventure,’ the author’s actual definition of this term and the aesthetic implications of it for his work remain both problematic and under-explored. Close reading, however, prompts further questions as it reveals Stevenson positioning himself to re-imagine the traditional role and function of adventure within the context of the romance genre. Does Stevenson exploit the dualities of human nature so prevalent in his work to posit a complex notion of adventure existing within a thoroughly paradoxical framework? Certainly, as Northrop Frye points out in his ‘Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths,’ the adventure-rich landscape of romance has long maintained ‘socially a curiously paradoxical role,’ within this essentially ‘dialectical’ genre. In this paper, therefore, I will examine whether Stevenson is heightening the narrative conversation of his era by advocating that all true adventure—lived and literary—can only exist within a series of dichotomies, such as those represented by the ideas of journey/home, body/psyche, and life/art. Building on the early work of my PhD thesis, I will seek to offer some glimpse into a scholarly formulation of Stevenson’s multifaceted characterization of adventure.

Jennifer Orr“Poetry, Pikes and Politics: Negotiating a Place for the Ulster Scot in Scottish Literature”

Samuel Thomson came to public attention as a frequent contributor of verse to the *Belfast News-Letter* and *Northern Star* newspapers during the 1790’s. A Presbyterian hedge-

school master in rural Co. Antrim, Thomson was a well-educated member of his community and shared his literary passions with other local poets, some of whom had connections with the United Irish movement. Alongside James Orr, Thomson has been identified as the most important Ulster poet of his generation, one of the ‘Rhyming Weavers’, rescued from obscurity by John Hewitt who argued that these poets constituted a unique movement within the context of Ulster poetry. Yet in the process of anthology, this significant group of poets has been difficult to classify.

As he does not fit the romantic nationalist paradigm, Thomson has not been anthologised in any major Irish anthologies. Likewise, by attachment to the ‘Bardolatory’ cult of Burns, Thomson’s Scottish poems have been dismissed as mere imitation. Scottish cultural critics have been less willing to embrace cultural affinities with the Ulster Scots than vice versa and so it is not surprising that Thomson is rarely anthologised here.

In this paper I will discuss the merit of a new approach to national poetry, discussing the influence that he enjoyed over a wide body of Ulster poets, both literary and political. I will discuss his pastoral political poetry, drawing attention to the skill and coded language employed after the failure of the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and his wider Augustan heritage.

Lila Matsumoto

Collective Memory, Collective Myth: Regional Negotiations of
National Scottish Identity in the Works of Neil Gunn and Nan Shepherd

My paper examines how the idea of Scottish national identity is challenged and re-envisaged in the works of Neil Gunn and Nan Shepherd through regional identity, as conceived through collective memory, landscape, and gendered and familial spheres of power. The prevalent model of national identity is an essentialist one, producing a static and generalized definition of identity wherein the individual is reduced to a mere recipient of the nation's values and mores. Gunn's and Shepherd's regional novels

illustrate that group identity, borne from collective memory, is dynamic and imaginative, always engaged with change (such as the Highland Clearances and World War I) and imbued with disparate narratives of how the members of particular communities experience this change. Storytelling and myth-making are thus crucial processes by which communities in Gunn's and Shepherd's novels remember. The protagonists of Gunn's *The Silver Darlings*, for example, are all storytellers, and their collective bank of stories about their environs provides a metaphysical map from which the members glean both knowledge and pride. Pierre Nora noted that a group's 'realm of memory' is 'defined by its identity and summed up by its name, but at the same time open to an infinite possible other meanings.' In this paper I will suggest that these 'infinite possible other meanings' provided by the regional narratives of Gunn and Shepherd contributes an alternative to the monolithic model of the identity offered by the nation.

PANEL 5: MODERN WRITERS / MODERN IDEAS

John McKay – Darren Brooks – Martyn J Colebrook

3.30 – 5pm

John McKay

The Banal Daily Drudge: Ali Smith and the Local

My paper is concerned with how the local is used in Ali Smith's work and concentrates on how issues of setting and place are dealt with in her fiction.

I will begin by discussing her narrative style in an attempt to show how her adoption of a third person narrative leads to a more focussed examination of the local. This will lead into a brief discussion of James Kelman's influence on Smith's narrative technique and I will show how she embraces a number of literary conventions as a means of exploring the local and ordinary. I will also look at how she exploits the page layout and typography to achieve this goal.

My paper will look at how writing from a local perspective can lead to a heightened sense of identity. Furthermore, by concentrating on the local, Smith's fiction leans towards a representation of the everyday that in turn results in a narrative that places its emphasis on storytelling and an oral tradition.

I will draw upon existing Scottish criticism while exploring more international theories of the local in order to demonstrate that Scottish writing is fundamentally linked to an oral tradition, and that any account of the local or everyday is dependent on the reader or listener of the stories.

Darren Brooks

Lang Spoons and Buried Streets:
Detective Inspector John Rebus presents 'Excavating Edinburgh'

Ian Rankin is an accidental crime writer. In creating Detective Inspector John Rebus however, he alighted upon a genre – crime fiction – through which he could explore the mores of modern Scottish society. The genre has been adopted by numerous crime writers across the globe in order to understand their chosen cities; to excavate its secrets, its truths and untruths, to explore the inherent cultural singularities that humanises its inhabitants. In Scotland, never has this been better articulated than in Rankin's Edinburgh-based Rebus novels.

This paper will seek to examine the ways in which Rankin's Edinburgh is reflected in the pages of his serial crime novels, and the barriers that his detective must dismantle in order to uncover the truth of his city. One such barrier – crucial in terms of crime fiction – is the cultural reticence so often associated with Edinburgh's citizenry. Rebus finds this idiosyncrasy replicated within society at large, and indeed within the bureaucracy of his profession, thus reflecting the cultural landscape with which he is bound by duty to negotiate.

It is my intention to consider in particular the 1994 Rebus novel *Mortal Causes*, buffeted by references to supporting novels from the series – at the heart of which are plots that see Rebus chip away at Edinburgh's diffidence so as to reveal its verity and thus develop an alternative analysis of life in modern Scotland. At what cost however? And does the exposure of one layer of the city only reveal another?

Martyn J Colebrook

Some Recent Stories - Attacks Political and Cultural:

James Kelman and the Hell of Ordinary Life.

The highly politicised oeuvre of James Kelman has come to represent a dynamic catalyst and fulcrum upon which the genre of contemporary working class fictions rests. His position as vox populi for the Glasgow communities and controversial, outspoken standpoint has earned him recognition through major awards and a highly contentious relationship with reviewers and the Literary Establishment alike. Not so much an authorial propagandist as the Socialist writer William McIlvanney but a perceptive chronicler and respondent to the existing conditions and consequences of late Capitalism, Kelman's work leaves an indelible mark on the landscape of contemporary literature.

In the light of Scottish devolution in 1999, Kelman's later work has moved from the inward focus of Scotland to a more global vista, evidenced by the distinctly North American focus of *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free* (2004) and the authoritarian anonymity of the location in *Translated Accounts* (2001), offering different responses to the growing global hegemonic ambitions that he perceives in different countries and their respective regimes.

Focusing on his notorious Booker Prize winning text, *How Late is Was How Late* (1994), this paper will examine Kelman's notable response to social dispossession and disenfranchisement, contrasting the highly specific regional interiority of his outlook with the European and North American influences in his work. This paper will examine Kelman's role as a demotic articulator speaking from within the Scottish canon when he may well be content to remain without, looking inwards.

PANEL 6: FOREFATHERS OF SCOTTISH LITERATURE

Yuko Yoshino – Alexander J. Cuthbert – Ainsley McIntosh

3.30 – 5pm

Yuko Yoshino

Faeries & the Quest for National Identity in Sir Walter Scott's *The Monastery*

[no abstract available]

Alexander J. Cuthbert

'Reforming Rhetoric: The Immodest Proposals of David Lyndsay'

In *A Modest Proposal* (1729), Jonathan Swift's concern for 'the public good' sees him deliver an ironic and unsettlingly macabre political parody, satirizing the mercantile and dehumanizing attitudes being openly expressed regarding the validity of preserving an impoverished underclass. Swift develops the suggested 'modesty' of the pamphlet's proposal - to let the Irish farm their children as a cash crop - into a potent rhetorical conceit, displaying the literary prowess of a satirist who is capable of redefining a genre while attempting to bring about social reform.

Like Swift, David Lyndsay (c.1486-1555) was a satirist whose concern for the 'commounweill' is articulated through the employment of an array of tropes, genre forms and conventions. This paper will explore how Lyndsay uses the modesty topos to more than merely literary ends, allowing his proposals for social reform to find a receptive audience in king, cleric and commoner alike. Belying Lyndsay's rhetorically playful addresses to his reader are the vehement complaints of a humanist reformer, with the repeated

calls to 'lait us haif the bukis necessare/To commoun weill and our salvioun' articulating the desire to hear the word of God restored into the language of the people.

Ainsley McIntosh

'Alive within the tomb': narrative closure, enclosure and disclosure in *Marmion*.

Walter Scott's novels are a masterful weave of narrative strategies and voices that explore various narratological issues, including, as recent criticism has recognised, shifting tensions between orality and literacy. This aspect of Scott's interest in narratology is also evident in his poems, which can be understood as polyvalent and polyvocal texts that allow Scott the means to challenge the authority of the single-author text, and thus, the isolationist aesthetic of print culture in the Romantic era. *Marmion* in particular, with its interplay of varying narrative forms such as epistle, song, ballad, history and romance, can be understood as a text that exists at the borders of orality and literacy. Scott threads past and present, oral and literary culture tightly together. My recent work in preparing a scholarly edition of the text has demonstrated how the processes of its creative evolution also resist closure. In my paper I wish to consider the ways in which the dialogic nature of both the creation of the text and the narrative structures it contains complement each other. I will argue, therefore, that in *Marmion*, as in his later fictions, narrative authority is constantly shifting and being challenged allowing Scott to raise questions about where such authority lies and explore various means whereby it can be acquired and resisted.