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Preface

The Anglistentag 2006 assembled more than two hundred participants in Halle an der Saale from 17-20 September. It had been ten years since the annual conference of the Anglistenverband last took place in one of the new Länder, and for the first time it was held in Sachsen-Anhalt. The Martin-Luther-Universität and the city of Halle, celebrating its 1200 year Jubilee, proved to be an ideal location, not least because of their long established Anglo-German relations. The most prominent representatives of this cultural exchange are Georg Friedrich Händel, about whose integration into and influence on British music there can be no doubt, and the scientist Johann Reinhold Forster, who accompanied James Cook, together with his son Georg, on his second voyage round the world in 1772. The Dictionary of National Biography claims that "Forster should be regarded as a key figure in the reception of English culture and sensibility in eighteenth-century Germany, especially through the English influence on his prose style and approach to scientific writing". Not only can our university library boast of holding the official log of his famous voyage, we are also proud to be able to name Forster as one of our professors of natural science, working here in Halle from 1780 till his death in 1798.

The opening ceremony on Monday morning took place in the magnificent historic Aula of the university. The delegates were welcomed by the Rektor, Prof. Dr. Wulf Diepenbrock, by Staatsssekretär Dr. Valentín Granlich (who represented the Secretary of Cultural Affairs in Sachsen-Anhalt, Prof. Dr. Jan-Hendrik Obertz), by the Mayor of the city of Halle, Frau Dagmar Szabados, by Dr. Elke Ritt (for the British Council Germany), and by the local organizer, Prof. Dr. Sabine Volk-Birke; then the president of the Anglistenverband, Prof. Dr. Silvia Mergenthal, formally opened the conference. This year's Journalistenpreis for outstanding cross-cultural work, reporting on English life and letters in German, was awarded to Dr. John F. Jungclaussen, the correspondant for Great Britain of DIE ZEIT; PD Dr. Barbara Schaff gave the laudatio.

The traditional panel discussion, the Forum, this year devoted to "Chances and Problems of Interdisciplinarity", was organized and introduced by Prof. Dr. Rainer Enskat (Philosophy), the current Geschäftsführende Direktor of the Interdisciplinary Centre for European Enlightenment Studies (IZEA), thus taking up what was an important period in the history of the university and what is a special focus of interdisciplinary research at the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg at present. The participants on the panel with their wide experience in different fields were particularly well suited to elucidate many of the relevant scholarly, didactic, political and financial aspects of the topic: Prof. Dr. Aleida Assmann (Konstanz), Prof. Dr. Reinhard Brandt (Marburg), Prof. Dr. Jürgen Schlaeger (Großbritannienzentrum, Berlin) und PD Dr. Dirk Vanderbeke (Greifswald). The audience responded with a lively discussion to the presentation of very different points of view, which ranged from sceptical assessments of the general call for interdisciplinarity, warning of the possible disregard or loss of the special methodology adapted to individual disciplines, to enthusiastic praise of the chances of
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Dietmar Böhnke (Leipzig)

Brave New Scotland? National Identity and Contemporary Scottish Fiction

1. Introduction

The year 2007 marks the third centenary of the 1707 Act of Union, which merged the Scottish parliament into a British parliament, and the tenth anniversary of the Referendum which established a devolved Scottish parliament, following the British general election victory of New Labour in 1997. 2007 is itself also an election year in Scotland. The third election to the Scottish parliament is scheduled for May 2007. This seems an apt time at which to enquire as to the state of the nation.

The euphoria of the early devolution period has clearly evaporated, replaced perhaps by disillusionment, and a settling down into some sense of normality. A growing disaffection with the work of the Scottish Parliament and the country's political leaders might translate into a larger vote for the Scottish National Party, reopening debate about Scottish independence from the rest of the UK. This is however speculation, and the question of how 'brave' the new Scotland presents itself is by no means (only) a political issue: Scottish national identity has traditionally been seen as cultural rather than political, Scottish literature in particular being commonly regarded as one prime expression of the identity of a 'stateless nation.' Against this background, I shall consider a few examples of contemporary Scottish fiction from the last quarter of the century, a distinct historical period, in order to tease out their often ambiguous relationship with 'Scottishness.'

Regarding national identity, there is now consensus that pursuing some elusive essence, a single identity or 'Scottishness' is unproductive – the sociologist David McCrone has referred to the "hunting of a Scottish snark" in this context (McCrone 2001, 145). Instead, attention should be paid to the variety of self-identifications essayed by the people who are the nation; and to the importance of complexity and 'relativity' of national identities, as well as the significance of (often rapid) change. This is in accord with recent general formulations regarding (cultural) identities, at times rather confusingly labelled 'postmodern', which also stress this relational and fluid element, often influenced by postcolonial thinkers (e.g. Pecora 2001; Hall 1997; Bhabha 1990). There is throughout these approaches an emphasis on the constructed nature of such identity, on the central role of cultural representations or "signifying practices" within the process of "imagining communities" (to quote a few of the fashionable terms – which have to be used with caution).

If the 'reality' of Scottishness lies in concrete representations of Scotland, in the diverse ways in which the nation is 'imagined' in various forms and media, an analysis of fictional representations should yield interesting insights into this national cons-
ciousness. It is necessary however to be aware that in such a small, semi-autonomous nation as Scotland, a 'burden of representation' can sometimes lie heavily on writers. Expectations that works will show signs of some 'Scottishness' have been particularly evident in the reception of works of art during the quarter century presently under review (the whole period of political developments leading directly to the opening of the new Scottish Parliament in 1999): what is now often called the new Scottish cultural Renaissance. Works by such literary 'pioneers' of this Renaissance as Alasdair Gray and James Kelman, as well as those of supposed 'followers', including Janice Galloway, A.L. Kennedy, Irvine Welsh and Alan Warner, have usually been interpreted in this context (cf. Craig 1999; Gifford 2002; Petrie 2004; Riach 2005). At the same time, critics like Robert Crawford have begun to call for an internationalisation of Scottish studies, and a necessary 'dedeification' of Scotland:

Scottish culture seems to have moved into a post-British phase. [...] Culturally, [Scots] have already declared independence. It seems inevitable that where the imaginers and voters have led, the politicians and the civil servants will follow. At such a juncture, having helped to define a new Scotland, it is time for artists and students of Scottish culture both in Scotland and beyond to go on with that complicating, enriching, and necessary work of 'dedeification' which will ensure that no definition of 'Scottishness' becomes oppressively monolithic and that Scotland [...] remains imaginatively and intellectually freed-up – supplied with many visions of itself as well as many ways of looking at, engaging with, and being perceived by an increasingly interested world beyond. [...] If the growing internationalization of British Studies directs more non-Scottish attention to Scotland, then it will be performing a service beneficial to Scottish Studies, in further multiplying perspectives on Scotland, enriching it by dedeinition. (Crawford 2003, 99)

Within this context I would like to approach the following examples of contemporary Scottish fiction: as representations of Scotland that both help to 'imagine the nation' and to 'dedefine' it.

2. Contemporary Scottish Fiction – A New Renaissance

Clearly thriving, contemporary Scottish fiction has been at the heart of the 'new literary Renaissance' since the early 1980s: the publication of Alasdair Gray's Lanark in 1981 is frequently cited as a starting point. Notable writers of longer standing, such as Muriel Spark, Iain Crichton Smith, William McIlvanney and George Mackay Brown were rapidly joined by a diverse group of fresh talents, mainly from or based in Glasgow, including Gray, Kelman, Galloway and Kennedy; and not long after by a 'second generation': including Welsh and Warner, Jackie Kay, Iain Banks; and also, in more clearly delineated genres, Ian Rankin, Alexander McCall Smith and J.K. Rowling. The high quality of the writing has been acknowledged by the award of several literary prizes, including Kelman's Booker in 1994; and the diversity of styles and themes is obvious. Equally obvious is the emphasis of critics on the Scottish elements in that work, so that one might even speak of a 'grand narrative' of the new Renaissance as somehow a fulfillment of the promise of the earlier Renaissance(s), reconciling opposed ways of imagining Scotland in new creative ways (cf. esp. Gifford 2002). This view stresses aspects such as use of (Scots, colloquial) language, the religious (especially Calvinist) theme, various forms of "antsisyzygy" (duality, union of opposites), the importance of the Scottish literary and historical traditions, the influence of gothic and supernatural modes, emphasis on the working-class perspective, opposition to England and English literature, and sometimes the Kailyard element. All of this is certainly justified, as the texts themselves and many comments by writers in interview show.

Also necessary in view of a continuing London dominance of the British literary scene, and some neglect of Scottish literature in among other areas university courses and series of classics, this can however limit appreciation of the various influences and possible readings of the works and writers in question. Thus in the critical discourse some authors are favoured above others, for instance 'not-so-Scottish' ones: say, Muriel Spark, William Boyd or Alan Massie. Elements at first sight apparently alien to the Scottish tradition, such as postmodern experiments, the postcolonial context or global cultural trends, can also sometimes be neglected in criticism. In what follows I shall try to combine some of these more 'international' themes with the Scottish perspective, concentrating first on the more established Gray and Kelman, then commenting more briefly on younger writers and later trends.

3. Alasdair Gray

Gray could be called the grand old man of the new Scottish literary Renaissance, his influence on the revival being almost universally acknowledged (e.g. Gifford 2002). When Gray published his first novel Lanark: A Life in Four Books in 1981, a work of some decades, it created an immediate sensation. Hailed as one of the best Scottish novels of the century, it was compared to such literary landmarks as MacDiarmid's A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle (1926) and Grassie Gibbon's Sunset Song (1932). After Lanark, Gray published another four novels (of which 1982, Janine and Poor Things are the most important), several novellas and collections of short stories, and a weighty volume of collected literary prefaces. Gray is a pretty openly 'Scottish' writer, not only because he has always lived in Glasgow but also because he has frequently campaigned for Scottish autonomy or even independence (cf. his 1997 pamphlet "Why Scots Should Rule Scotland"). Most of his fiction is set in Scotland, usually Glasgow, and significantly 'imagines' the city (and thus the nation?), as this famous exchange from Lanark illustrates:

"Glasgow is a magnificent city," said McAlpin. "Why do we hardly ever notice that?" "Because nobody imagines living here," said Thaw. McAlpin lit a cigarette and said, "If you want to explain that I'll certainly listen."... "Then think of Florence, Paris, London, New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he's already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films. But if a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively". (Alasdair Gray, Lanark, 243)

1 Even today, the status of Scottish works among the 'classics' of literature in English is precarious. The recently completed 'Everyman Millennium Project', in which sets of 250 books from Everyman's hardback classic series have been donated to every secondary school in the United Kingdom, included only four books by Scottish authors (one Hogg, one Scott, two Stevenson) (cf. Sutherland 2001).
His work is a prime example of the creative fusion of realism and fantasy that is often taken as typical for Scottish literature, clearly influenced by Stevenson and Scott as well as Scott. Dualities and doubles abound, most clearly in *Lanark* and *Poor Things*, the Calvinist conscience troubles most of his characters (Duncan Thaw and Lanark, Jock McLeish, Kelvin Walker etc.), and Scottish history is an obvious inspiration (esp. in *Poor Things* and *A History Maker*). He is also acutely concerned about the "state of the nation", so that most of his fiction is political (perhaps most obviously in *Lanark*).

This 'nationalism' is however far from unambiguous, and narrow readings which forget that are usually unsatisfactory. Gray is very much also an international and experimental writer, witness the 'postmodern' writing techniques for which he is primarily known outside Scotland. Curiously, this element of Gray's fiction has sometimes been neglected, and even denied in Scottish criticism, as recently in Gavin Miller's *Alasdair Gray: The Fiction of Communion*, which concludes that "Gray's work is not postmodern in a recognised sense" and "has little to do with postmodern or post-structural ideas" (Miller 2005, 132). Superficially convincing, not least because Gray himself has frequently rejected the postmodern label for his own work, this claim - I have tried to show in my *Shades of Gray* - is based on a somewhat narrow and hostile understanding of postmodernism, and cannot withstand closer analysis. Not only does Gray clearly relish the opportunities of 'postmodern' writing, using metafictional techniques, mixing genres such as science fiction, magic realism, (auto)biography or historiographic metafiction, and indulging in intertextual references to a variety of literatures and cultural contexts; his work is also in tune with many of the theoretical premises of postmodernism, especially the 'deconstructive' impulse, the need to constantly question, undermine and contradict hegemonic discourses. His political views, furthermore, could be summarised as (anti-Thatcherite/ New Labour) democratic socialist as well as Scottish nationalist, and in their turn need to be challenged (cf. the role of the 'publisher' in *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland*). In other words, Gray is as much a Scottish writer as a universal one, the ideology of whose writing I find apostrophised in the phrase "shades of Gray": abhorrence of dogmatic and black-and-white representations of the world, including crude nationalism, and deeply ethical awareness of grey zones, of difference, diversity and contradiction.

4. **James Kelman**

Kelman is often regarded as the second most important figure in the new Scottish Renaissance. His first novel, *The Busconductor Hines*, published 1984, received considerable critical attention in respect of its mode of rendering the urban working-class speech of Glasgow. His subsequent five novels and short story collections have won several prizes, most notably the Booker for his 1994 novel *How Late It Was, How Late*. This triggered controversy concerning his use of language and the frequency of the *f*-word. At first sight and compared to Gray's, Kelman's is a more problematic position in the Scottish national context. Indeed, he is often seen as rejecting the national issue as subject or background of his fiction in favour of concerns with class. He even hesitates to use the term 'nation' in connection with Scotland, e.g. when he talks about the problems for a writer in wanting "to address a 'truly serious' matter, i.e. one that somehow isn't merely political but concerns the nation as a whole (given the idea that we can refer to Scotland as a nation)". Yet I want to argue that even for him the Scottish nation is a frame of reference which makes his work truly Scottish.

One aspect of Kelman's 'nationalism' is his place in the tradition of Scottish literature. He has denied particular influences, but he is aware of the tradition:

"I see myself very much as part of a tradition, and the idea of being regarded as an 'original' writer I actually find embarrassing. I'm only involved in tradition, through prose, maybe through Scotland, in a way that people are perhaps not used to. It's been going on for 120, 140 years, since, say, James Hogg - earlier."  

Consciously working within a literary tradition so preoccupied with the national identity as the Scottish one can indeed seem an act of 'nationalism'. Carl MacDougall has pointed out possible reasons for this unusually strong Scottish concern:

Scottishness and the reality of Scotland has been a constant theme in our fiction, and perhaps it is our status as a small nation, or a culturally occupied territory, that has led us to be so very aware of what our country is, or what it might be. [...] James Kelman [and] J.M. Barrie seem to speak from utterly different communities, and yet they all describe a Scotland which is, in one aspect or another, more than recognisably to most of us. (MacDougall 1989, 3)

Kelman has indeed become so much a part of this tradition that some already see in Scottish literature a "danger of 'political correctness' which encourages social narrowing in favour of a working-class, left-wing, vernacular authorship" and thus "denies the full identity of the country". Underlying Kelman's use of subject matter, narrative voice and language, are his sometimes radical views regarding political and cultural imperialism and his concern for ordinary people, or the dispossessed. He not only asserts his Scottishness by arguing strongly against the English, their literature and cultural imperialism, he also enacts his views in his choice of subject matter (the details and drama of everyday life, his characters, the Glasgow setting), in his narrative technique (obliterating the narrator to achieve absolute immediacy and authenticity) and above all in his language. The use of language is indeed central to the search for a Scottish national identity and to Kelman's 'nationalism'. He uses an urban variety of Scots and tries to imitate the cadences and rhythms of working-class speech in Glasgow (which is the reason for his use of 'impure' language). But is he also con-

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2 In a personal letter to me, Gray replied to the question how important it was for him to be seen as a Scottish writer as follows: "As important as it is for Goethe to be seen as a German, Frisch as a Swiss, Jesus as a Jew, Hokusai as a Japanese. Everyone has to work with the material they find in their own corner of the human race. But good work is international to those who know some history & geography".

3 Quoted from a political pamphlet by Kelman (1990, 8).


5 Douglas Dunn in Wallace/Stevenson (1993, 149-169; 150).

6 "In an interview, Kelman once said: 'I mean the mainstream writers, it's total rubbish. Just look at the stuff that's been produced, take the great contemporary English writers of say the last forty years - they're all fucking hopeless! - I mean they're embarrassing, people like Golding and that, they're total second-raters, Waugh and Graham Greene and all them, they're fucking second rate, you know. You'd be laughed out of world literature if you were to put forward things like Philip Larkin and all that; it's junk, total second rate junk!'" (McLean 1985, 68).
cerned for the nation as a whole while portraying this – admittedly important – part of it? His answer is that people are the nation, that it is the individual that counts: "What do we actually mean when we talk about the interests of the country as a whole?" At what point do the interests of the individual citizens who actually live there enter the argument?" The language of the people is their identity, what they are left with, having been dispossessed in almost any other sense. But in their own terms they are just as articulate and their lives are just as valid as anybody's. This is maybe Kelman's strongest 'nationalist' statement and his most accurate portrayal of Scottish national identity.

However, it is also here that a connection becomes apparent that transcends the Scottish context. Kelman feels a clear affinity with other oppressed or colonised cultures, as he stressed in his Booker Prize acceptance speech in 1994:

There is a literary tradition to which I hope my own work belongs. I see it as part of a much wider process, or movement towards decolonisation and self-determination: it is a tradition that assumes two things, 1) the validity of indigenous culture, and 2) the right to defend it in the face of attack. It is a tradition premised on a rejection of the cultural values of imperial or colonial authority, offering a defence against cultural assimilation. Unfortunately, when people assert their right to cultural or linguistic freedom, they are accused of being ungracious, parochial, insular, xenophobic, racist. As I see it, it's an argument based solely on behalf of validity, that my culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that right. They may have the power to dismiss that right, but the authority lies in the power and I demand the right to resist it. (quoted in Chadwick, 1995: 10)

The postcolonial context with its interest in power structures and ways and possibilities of promoting voices from the margin is clearly congenial to Kelman's writings, witness also his more recent Translated Accounts (2001), set in an unspecified country (or countries) suffering under tyrannical rule. This is not however the only illuminating broader perspective on the work of this contemporary Scottish writer; other fruitful approaches would include the modernist or existentialist literary tradition (Kafka, Beckett, nouveau roman) or comparisons with other innovative approaches to the problem of the narrator's vs. the character's voice in fiction.

5. Janice Galloway and A.L. Kennedy

In parallel with and following Gray and Kelman, other writers have helped make the new Renaissance an enduring phenomenon, enhancing the diversity of contemporary Scottish fiction. Among names already mentioned, I shall focus briefly on two women writers who seem to symbolise this development: Janice Galloway and A.L. Kennedy. The breakthrough for these writers came with their respective first novels in the late 1980s/early 1990s: The Trick is to Keep Breathing (1989) and Looking for the Possible Dance (1993). Their prominence has been maintained to the present by several novels and short story collections from both, most recently Galloway's Clara (2002) and Kennedy's Paradise (2004). The two are united by their undogmatically feminist concerns, an acute sense of the absurd and grotesque, and the recurring themes of guilt and trauma. While both can be seen to be working in a recognisably Scottish tradition which they at the same time transcend, their individual contributions to contemporary Scottish literature cannot justly be described so summarily. Whereas Galloway's Trick evokes both Kelman's (interior monologue) style of writing, and Gray's treatment of psychological crises and his typographic experiments (cf. Lanark, or 1982, Janine), she achieves a singular (if often bleak) vision of female identity in contemporary Scotland that is all her own, challenging patriarchal and (male-dominated) nationalistic views of the country. While she thus critically imagines a neglected but vital component of the nation, she has also gone beyond the boundaries of Scotland in search for her material in the significantly named Foreign Parts (1994), set mostly in France, and especially in her fictional biography of Clara Schumann. She is also clearly an experimental, perhaps postmodernist, writer, especially in her use of narrative voice and form, and minimalist style. Galloway's work opened the way for yet other Scottish women novelists (some were of course active before her, such as the late, great Muriel Spark). Kennedy is if anything even more the stylist. Her stories and novels are meticulously crafted observations of (female) urban experience in the West of Scotland, of the lives, tensions and obsessions of the 'silent majority', portrayed with melancholic understatement. In So I Am Glad (1995), the fine line between the psychological and the supernatural – a manifestation of Cyrano de Bergerac appears in present-day Glasgow – is reminiscent of James Hogg's Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824) and allows the treatment of themes such as isolation, guilt, loss and despair as well as tenderness and memory, in her individual, inimitable way. Also a strongly political writer, Kennedy's comments in this and her other novels allow an interpretation that draws parallels to a Scotland slowly emerging from a traumatised past – even though the future might be far from bright. On the other hand, her work has been linked to the international movement of magic realism (to which critics have also connected Gray), and the Scottish context seems more distant in her latest works, particularly Everything You Need (1999) and Paradise (2004). She has also written non-fiction texts on such diverse topics as bullfighting and cinema (e.g. the Powell/Pressburger film The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, perhaps a quintessentially 'English' film). While both Galloway and Kennedy thus clearly belong to a Scottish tradition of writing, like so many Scottish writers before them they also enhance and perhaps transcend it. If an expression of contemporary Scottish identity, this seems indeed much less concerned with regressive 'Scotch myths' than might be supposed from more political and journalistic discussions of that theme.

6. Welsh, Warner and Rankin

Through the past decade or so, the internationally most visible literary representations of Scottishness have come from writers working to some extent in more popular genres, frequently enhanced by successful film versions of their works, such as Irvine Welsh, Alan Warner or Ian Rankin. These three all had their breakthroughs in the mid-1990s and have become bestselling authors. It is significant that they write from and about parts of Scotland, other than the Glasgow, of the authors previously considered: Edinburgh (Welsh and Rankin) and the Highlands/Oban (Warner). These settings are highly significant for all their works, and place them in the Scottish literary tradition,
but there is more: Welsh's representation of the language and mindset of an Edinburgh underworld (c.g. in *Trainspotting* 1993) has debts to Kelman's ground-breaking, while his surreal fantasies (*Marabou Stork Nightmares* 1995, also partly in his 'detective' novels starting with *Filth* 1998) can be linked to the work of both Gray and Kennedy. Ian Rankin's detective novels and their portrayal of a divided Edinburgh connect with the influence of Robert Louis Stevenson (*Hide and Seek* 1990) and perhaps again Hogg, while Rankin's detective John Rebus affords more than hints of a Calvinist conscience, and has a literary ancestor in William McIlvanney's Laidlaw. While Welsh and Rankin both continue (and undermine) a tradition of 'hard men' in Scottish literature, Warner has become known for his intimate portrayal of female protagonists (*Morvern Callar* 1995; *The Sopranos* 1998). Although the Highland setting is important, his central topics are closer to Welsh's than to those of such earlier 'Highland' writers as Iain Crichton Smith or George Mackay Brown: Warner's topic is the culture and interests of disaffected youth growing up on such towns as Oban, revolving around club, music and drug cultures rather than romanticised Celtic or rural traditions and lifestyles. Perhaps this emphasis has consolidated the worldwide success of these authors and facilitated the successful transition of some of their works to the screen (*Trainspotting* 1996; Welsh's *The Acid House* 1998 [short stories 1994]; *Morvern Callar* 2002; several TV adaptations of Rankin's novels; film project of Warner's *The Man Who Walks* [novel 2002] to be directed by Welsh). Rankin's novels, moreover, owe at least as much to American hard-boiled detective fiction (Raymond Chandler, say, or James Ellroy) as to Scottish models. If such global appeal is less grounded in the Scottish context, it does nevertheless transport diverse representations of contemporary Scotland to the wider world.

7. Conclusion

After this brief look at how 'Scottish' and 'non-Scottish' elements interact in the new literary Renaissance, it should be obvious that contemporary Scottish fiction is questioning and undermining received notions of 'Scottishness', while invoking and using them at the same time. I would suggest that for most of my examples the non-Scottish, European and/or international context has at least the importance and relevance of the Scottish one. Given that art does not usually adhere to any fixed set of national characteristics, this might not be surprising. If it is true, and we take into account the close links of literature and culture with the national consciousness, what then does that mean for Scottish national identity today? It would be nice to think that these cultural developments might be indicative of or exemplary for an emerging new Scottish identity: outward-looking and open to external influences while still suffused with national cultural traditions (in this sense, then, affording real prospects for a brave new Scotland). This would also chime well with some more recent theories of (not only Scottish) nationalism and national identity, which stress the fluidity and adaptability of the latter, and emphasize hybridity and cross-cultural exchange, sometimes using terms such as neo- or post-nationalism, as David McCrone summarises:

Just as political sovereignty in the modern world is both layered and shared such that powers and responsibilities operate at different levels for different purposes – Scottish for some, British and European for others – so people appear quite content to attach identity to these levels as and when it suits them. The issue is not which one you are, but which one you choose in different contexts and for different purposes. [...] It is as much cultural distinctiveness which generates nationalism, as nationalism which shapes cultural distinctiveness. [...] Neo-nationalism does seem to have its own dynamic. It seems to stress civic rather than ethnic features – demos rather than ethnics; it has an adaptable political ideology, appealing to Right and Left as circumstances require, and building in features of neo-liberalism as well as social democracy. While Scotland has a quite different social and political history from Catalonia and Quebec, for example, they all seem to confront opportunities and constraints of 'niché' nationalism at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In that sense, they take on the character of progressive rather than reactionary movements. (McCrone 2001, 192f)

It is this inclusive and pluralistic vision of "Scotland's" or Scottish identities (plural) that we have found in the works of the writers discussed here. It is also against the background of these writers' investigations of Scottish identity that Eleanor Bell writes:

There is [...] a growing opinion that national traditions should no longer be treated as unproblematically organic. Whereas Scottish cultural and literary critics have often tended to perpetuate this myth, Scottish writers have, ironically, tended to eschew this urge for homogeneity as an inadequate means of reflecting lived cultural reality. Where Scottish critics have often tended to reduce the nation to an unhelpful way, recent writers of fiction have, alternatively, encouraged concerns with estrangement and the need for the recognition of greater diversity. (Bell 2001, 46)

It remains however to be seen how far this cultural vision can be translated into political and social reality in the years following the symbolic 2007. I thus hope it is not overly optimistic to envisage a country whose identity is shaped more by its artists and thinkers than by its politicians and perhaps journalists (i.e. stressing complexity and ambiguity rather than black-and-white certainties), as it has certainly been before, if we think of the Scottish Enlightenment or the (first) Scottish Renaissance of the interwar years. The recent political revival itself was certainly helped if not occasioned by the literary and cultural Renaissance, and today's Scottish political class could do worse than look for inspiration to the diverse and deeply committed range of works that comprise contemporary Scottish fiction.

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