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# After Cosmopolitanism: Imagining the Stranger in Contemporary Scottish Literature

Carla Sassi

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This essay will proceed from the premise that theory, far from being superseded, still holds a central role in the humanities. If between the 1970s and the mid-1990s 'Theory, with a capital 't', was shaped by relatively few charismatic thinkers pursuing a 'universal' approach, post-1990s (lower-case) theory has been characterised by a much more pluralistic and fluid stance. As it has been observed, 'theory after Theory' has been marked by a re-territorialisation 'back onto the lived' and a relocation 'in practical life, in *doing*',<sup>1</sup> as well as by a stronger engagement with 'real life' – the body, affects, or living systems – and by a more intense dialogue with scientific knowledge and information technologies. As a consequence, theory today may indeed be perceived as too compromised with *praxis* and thus a diminished *theoria*,<sup>2</sup> 'diluted in both intellectual substance and institutional prominence'.<sup>3</sup> And yet, as many would argue, it still vitally supports and structures our making sense of the world. As Terry Eagleton puts it, 'if theory means a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever'.<sup>4</sup> Like all major shifts, even this has entailed both a nostalgic and a forward-looking gaze – a regret for a 'golden age of theory [that] is long past'<sup>5</sup> has been counterbalanced by, and at times replaced with, a sense of the potential benefits of a more direct and pragmatic engagement with the urgent cultural and political questions of our time. Scottish literature's disciplinary history has intertwined with such shifts, sometimes problematically, but also as a potential opportunity, as the present essay will postulate and examine.

Shaped as a disciplinary field in its own right between the 1970s and 1990s, at the height of Theory, Scottish studies developed very much in tension, not

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<sup>1</sup> Claire Colebrook, 'Extinct Theory', in Jane Elliott, Derek Attridge (eds), *Theory after Theory* (London, 2011), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 62–71.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge, 'Introduction. Theory's Nine Lives', *Theory after Theory*, 1f.

<sup>4</sup> Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London, 2003), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1.

to say in open antagonism, with any universalising methodology.<sup>6</sup> Its notorious resistance against homogenising paradigms and its focus on local/national 'uniqueness' and 'exceptionality' suggested a picture of nativist isolation that was in sharp contrast with the cosmopolitan *esprit du temps*. If such insistence on a locally rooted and factual approach, focused on defining Scottish literature as an 'authentic' expression of the Scottish nation, can be seen with the benefit of hindsight as a justifiably defensive stance in the early phases of a vexed disciplinary history, it nonetheless generated a rift between Scottish studies specialists and mainstream scholars who considered their work as 'universal' and not bound to any particular society or culture.

Since the 1990s, a more theory-oriented generation of Scottish studies scholars has gradually stepped in, engaging with gender studies, postcolonialism, ecocriticism and a number of other critical approaches,<sup>7</sup> and yet, the stigma of a theory-resistant (and thus 'backward') field still lingers. Criticism and concern have often been voiced from within the field: 'why, then, has criticism of Scottish literature largely ignored theory?'<sup>8</sup> is the haunting question that opens the special issue of the *International Journal of Scottish Literature* devoted to 'Theory and Scottish Exceptionalism'. 'Side-stepping theory' may indeed be revalued as 'one of Scottish literature's enabling conditions during the period of its establishment as a semi-distinct field,' but there is no denying that, as the editors point out, disciplinary independence has been obtained at a high cost – the exclusion from 'theory's renovation of the wider discipline of English'.<sup>9</sup> More recently, and along similar lines, Juliet Shields has pointed out how, compared to other area studies, 'Scottish studies seems to have resisted the interdisciplinarity embraced by cultural studies in the 1990s,'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the development of Scottish literature as a field of studies see, among others, Cairns Craig, 'The Study of Scottish Literature', *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Vol. 1*, Ian Brown, Thomas O. Clancy, Murray Pittock, and Susan Manning (eds) (Edinburgh, 2007) 16–31, and Matthew Wickman, 'The Emergence of Scottish Studies', *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature*, Gerard Carruthers and Liam McIlvanney (eds) (Cambridge, 2012) 248–60.

<sup>7</sup> A call for a 'heterocentric' view of Scottish literature and culture appeared in the editorial of the first issue of the *International Journal of Scottish Literature* (2006), which aimed, among other things, at a 'critical 'reevaluation' of Scottish literary debate, be it coined in post-colonial/post-nationalist currency, or otherwise'. 'Editorial: Internationalism Now?', <http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue1/editorial.htm>

<sup>8</sup> 'Editorial – Theory and Scottish Exceptionalism', *International Journal of Scottish Literature* 3 (2007) <http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue3/editorial.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Juliet Shields, 'Scottish Studies after Area Studies', *The Bottle Imp*, Supplement 1, 2014. <https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2014/03/scottish-studies-after-area-studies/>

while Matthew Wickman, discussing the uneasy relationship between Scottish studies and cultural studies, has warned us of an almost mutually exclusive relation between the two fields, with ‘the latter mark[ing] the limit condition of the former’. ‘Scottish studies after cultural studies’ Wickman observes, ‘are no longer simply ‘Scottish’ – or rather, what the field itself means evolves beyond recognition.’<sup>11</sup>

All of the above statements remind us that Scottish studies have been largely at odds with the wider theoretical horizon of mainstream scholarship, and that they are still struggling to find their *raison d'être* in a fast-moving, theory-oriented, transnational academic world. The only possible choice seems indeed to be between isolation or dissolution. But is this really the case? Or does instead the post 1990s re-positioning of theory offer us an opportunity to re-think Scottish literature as an open and interconnected field of academic investigation? To answer these questions, I will first provide a reflection on the conceptual evolution of the notion of ‘cosmopolitanism’ as well as of its antonymically related term, ‘nationalism.’ I will then focus on the (ethical) imagination of the stranger as a tool for putting into dialogue ‘home’ with ‘away’, and I will assess how different degrees/types of ‘strangeness’ can help us redefine ‘Scottish literature’.

## 1 After cosmopolitanism

The perception of nationalism and cosmopolitanism as notional opposites is very much at the heart of twentieth-century interconnected constructions of, respectively ‘EngLit’ and ‘ScotLit’ – the former conceived as ‘cosmopolitan’, the latter as ‘local’ or ‘provincial.’<sup>12</sup> Both nationalism and cosmopolitanism are in fact slippery terms, and have taken on different meanings in different times and contexts. It is worthwhile to remember here that, while they are today often regarded as mutually exclusive, they have in fact a deeply interrelated history. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries philosophers and ideologues who theorised, embraced and upheld nationalism often did so in the name of values such as freedom, equality and justice, thus simultaneously imagining and calling for a transnational ‘universal’ community, if only patriarchally- and eurocentrically-defined, as pointed out,

<sup>11</sup> Matt Wickman, ‘Have Scottish Studies Ever Involved Cultural Studies?’, *The Bottle Imp*, Supplement 1, 2014. <https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2014/03/have-scottish-studies-ever-involved-cultural-studies/>

<sup>12</sup> See Carla Sassi, ‘Focus on Scottish Studies: A New Agenda for the Field – Introduction’, *Anglistik*, 23:2 (2012), 7–16.

among others, by Dipesh Chakrabarty<sup>13</sup>.

The idea of Europe, as it was shaped in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, provides a case in point, keeping as it did a focus on individual regions/nations while foregrounding a broader, super-national community. Montesquieu, for example, theorised Europe as divided into a northern and a southern region, and centred on France as its heart and model, but he nonetheless provided a unifying vision of the 'old continent' on historical, geographical and even cultural terms.<sup>14</sup> Europe was 'une grande République,' he claimed, a nation composed of many nations.<sup>15</sup> Most Enlightenment philosophers in fact, as Daniele Conversi observes, 'not only espoused a deep appreciation of human diversity, but also, on occasions, seemed to conflate cosmopolitan and pro-nationalist attitudes.'<sup>16</sup> In Scotland, David Hume declared 'I am a Citizen of the World',<sup>17</sup> but in the same period patriotism was still regarded as a cardinal virtue. As Alexander Broadie reminds us, 'to be unpatriotic was a vice that in many eyes would bespeak untrustworthiness, a preparedness even to betray one's country.'<sup>18</sup>

In the nineteenth century, in the age of European revolutions, conflation between the two concepts was equally common. Uprisings against foreign or domestic oppressors were carried out in the name of the 'people,' a key concept of Romantic nationalism – both a locally defined entity and a universal principle, unifying countries across borders. Also the ideals of democracy and self-determination went hand in hand, both tracing and transcending national borders. Giuseppe Mazzini's Giovine Italia, for example, the movement that supported the establishment of a republican government in Italy between the 1830s and 1840s, claimed in its official programme that 'all the members of a Nation are called by the law of God and Humanity to be free and equal and brothers, and only a republic can assure that this happens.'<sup>19</sup> His vision was not

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<sup>13</sup> See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2007), 19–33.

<sup>14</sup> Roberto Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham, 2007), 52–86.

<sup>15</sup> Montesquieu, *Réflexions sur la Monarchie Universelle en Europe* (1754) in Montesquieu, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 vols., ed. Roger Caillois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, 1951), vol. 11, 19–38.

<sup>16</sup> Daniele Conversi, 'Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism', in Athena S. Leouissi (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Nationalism* (Oxford, 2000), 37.

<sup>17</sup> J. Y. T. Greig (ed.), David Hume, *The Letters of David Hume* (Oxford, 2011), 470.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment. The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh, 2000), 95.

<sup>19</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, 'Il programma della Giovine Italia', Rosario Romeo and Giuseppe Talamo (eds), *Documenti Storici*, Vol 3 (Torino, 1971), 27. [My translation].

limited to Italy, however, and in 1834 he started *Giovine Europa* to encourage the spreading of such ideals throughout the continent. In Scotland, Sir Walter Scott's historical novels effectively dramatised the complex dialectic between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. In the post-script to *Waverley*, Scott alerted his readers to the 'gradual influx of wealth and the extension of commerce [that] have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers, as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth's time.'<sup>20</sup> Commerce is a central theme in Scott's novels, and commerce in the imperial age is a trans/national endeavour by definition. As Frank Osbaldistone explains in *Rob Roy*, echoing Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, trade 'connects nation with nation, relieves the wants, and contributes to the wealth of all; and is to the general commonwealth of the civilised world what the daily intercourse of ordinary life is to private society, or rather, what air and food are to our bodies'.<sup>21</sup> Nationalism is never wholly disconnected from the sense of being a citizen of the world, if only, as in this case, of being a privileged citizen, pursuing that form of 'hegemonic cosmopolitanism' which was common in the imperial age. Ian Duncan's emphasis on the 'complicated relations' existing in Scott's works between 'regional representation and a series of metropolitan and imperial horizons',<sup>22</sup> can indeed be seen as further evidence of the continuum linking the two concepts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Such complex dialectic comes to an end in the twentieth century, arguably as a consequence of the growing impact of Marxism and of its critique of the nation-state, seen as a function and expression of bourgeois interests – a critique that most post-Marxists theoretical frameworks inherit and apply dogmatically. More generally, however, it is the widespread perception that the ethnic violence unleashed in the two world wars is evidence of nationalisms' potential destructiveness<sup>23</sup> that leads to the reconceptualization of nationalism as a dark and regressive force, and of cosmopolitanism as its 'antidote' – a progressive and universal expression of modernity. Theory (with a capital 't') on the whole embraces this polarised vision, and either ignores nationalism

<sup>20</sup> Claire Lamont (ed.), Walter Scott, *Waverley, Or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (Oxford, 1998), 340.

<sup>21</sup> Ian Duncan (ed.), Walter Scott, *Rob Roy* (Oxford, 1998). 75. See, in the same volume, Ian Duncan's 'Introduction', xviii–xix.

<sup>22</sup> Ian Duncan, 'Scott's Romance of Empire: The Tales of the Crusaders', in *Scott in Carnival: Selected Papers from the Fourth International Scott Conference, 1991*, J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (eds) (Aberdeen, 1993), 371.

<sup>23</sup> See for example John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, 'Introduction', *Nationalism* (Oxford, 1994), 9–10.

as a thing of the past, or stigmatises it as a threat to the present. Raymond Williams's entry on 'nationalist' in his *Keywords* (1983) effectively testifies to this deeply-ingrained prejudice by laconically describing nationalism as focused on 'race' or 'language', and by presenting it as a 'selfish pursuit of a nation's interests as against others,' as opposed to internationalism's aspiration to 'co-operation between nations.'<sup>24</sup> Williams's orientation largely fits in the wider wave of theoretical interest in the nation and nationalism that characterises the 1980s and 1990s. Anthony D. Smith, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Michael Billig and Benedict Anderson, among others, helped us understand the complexities of nationalism as an ideology, but mainly to alert us to its potential dangers – closure, exclusion, racial/ethnic discrimination. And while in the same decades 'nationalism' was scrutinised and brought into question, its 'antonym' – cosmopolitanism – did not receive the same, and no doubt much needed, critical attention. It may be regarded as meaningful, in this respect, that Williams's *Keywords* did not include an explicative entry for it (or for 'internationalism'), as its meaning was on the whole taken for granted. Thus, in Craig Calhoun's words, the notion of cosmopolitanism becomes 'an enormously popular rhetorical vehicle for claiming at once to be global and to have the highest ethical aspirations for what globalisation can offer.'<sup>25</sup> Cosmopolitanism, vaguely and inadequately understood as a negation of the value of the local, becomes then a mere 'fashion', misleading us 'about the qualities built into ostensibly universalist projects,'<sup>26</sup> or a hegemonic discourse, as in current European debates about immigration, where 'cosmopolitanism becomes, ironically, the language of rejection of immigrants who are inadequately cosmopolitan.'<sup>27</sup>

In the past decade or so, both terms have undergone a gradual reappraisal and their historical interconnectedness has once more been brought to the fore. Chakrabarty, for example, has used the lens of Tagore's philosophy as well as the perspective of cultural life in colonial Calcutta to highlight their inextricable nexus between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan Bengali literary modernism, Chakrabarty observes, were 'given a self-consciously nationalist home' in twentieth-century Calcutta.<sup>28</sup> Recent

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London, 1983), 213–14.

<sup>25</sup> Craig Calhoun, 'Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism', in William Schinkel (ed.), *Globalization and the State: Sociological Perspectives on the State of the State* (New York, 2009), 209.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>28</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 210.

re-conceptualisations seem to suggest that moral virtues can be claimed for both sides, but only if both sides build on each other's strengths and mitigate each other's weaknesses. These include Homi Bhabha's 'vernacular cosmopolitanism', Anthony Appiah's 'rooted cosmopolitanism', James Clifford's 'discrepant cosmopolitanism', Paul Gilroy's 'cosmopolitanism from below', Lilie Chouliaraki's 'affective cosmopolitanism' and Patrick Hanafin's 'cosmopolitanism of singularities'.<sup>29</sup> All these 'hybrid' concepts go in the direction of rescuing cosmopolitanism from its elitist (in geo-political or class terms) universalism by linking it to specific locations and spaces, and to the rooted subjects that experience it.

We live therefore in a post-national as much as in a post-cosmopolitan age – one characterised by a '*yearning for or longing after* a cosmopolitan ideal' but also 'one that takes into account the political and social reality of our world'.<sup>30</sup> It is within this paradigmatic shift that the study of Scottish literature can be reconsidered under a more fruitful angle – as nationally/locally grounded and yet open to planetary dialogue.

## 2 For an 'ethics of strangers': re-thinking Scottish Literature

A strained dialectic between polarised concepts of nationalism and cosmopolitanism is still visibly at work in the UK literary debate, both at an academic and at a popular level. It is reflected, for example, in a controversial article, which appeared in the *Spectator* while I was writing the present essay, where Scottish composer James MacMillan laments, among other things, that in present-day Scotland 'Alasdair Gray is greater than James Joyce', and supports his statement by quoting Scottish writer Alan Bisset, whose declared preference for Gray over Joyce is based on the former's ability to represent 'the political realities and aspirations of "the new Scotland"', versus Joyce's "'baffling, unreadable prose"'.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, both commentators respond to the same binary opposition, within which cosmopolitanism represents the hegemonic model. MacMillan relies on such binarism, while Bisset angrily overturns it,<sup>32</sup> but

<sup>29</sup> See Paul Gilroy, 'Postcolonialism and Cosmopolitanism'; Lilie Chouliaraki, 'Cosmopolitanism as Irony: a Critique of Posthumanitarianism'; Patrick Hanafin 'A Cosmopolitics of Singularities: Right and the Thinking of Other Worlds', in Braidotti, Rosi, Patrick Hanafin, and Bolette Blaagaard (eds.), *After Cosmopolitanism* (Abingdon, Oxon, 2013), 111–131; 77–96; 40–56.

<sup>30</sup> Braidotti, Rosi, Patrick Hanafin, and Bolette Blaagaard, 'Introduction', *After Cosmopolitanism*, 2

<sup>31</sup> James MacMillan, 'Scotland's cultural scene is becoming vile, venal and parochial', *Spectator*, 13 August 2016, <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/08/tartan-ing-arts/>.

<sup>32</sup> To be fair, Alan Bisset's argument is more articulated than the short and out-of-



ultimately neither seems able to move beyond it. Neither seems aware of the fluid continuum that links the two terms, and of how, ironically, both Joyce and Gray, in their different times and contexts, interestingly share a very similar ‘provincial cosmopolitan’ language, speaking, as they do, from a rooted position and yet working out their respective visions through routes of transnational and transcultural experience. Not dissimilar, even though gentler in tones and on the whole more thoughtful, is Sarah Crown’s review in the *TLS* of James Kelman’s latest novel, *Dirt Road* (2016). After summarising Kelman’s ongoing conflict with British cultural institutions<sup>33</sup> (with special reference to the notorious attack on his use of demotic Scots in *How Late it Was, How Late*, awarded the Booker Prize in 1994) she goes on to remark that it is an ‘irony’ that a novel set in America’s deep south should ‘hotfoot it out in Scotland in the opening pages’, and that ‘as the pages turn ... Scotland continues to make its presence felt.’ She concludes by stating: ‘this is a brilliant book, and like all great works of art, it is universal — whether you’re reading it in Scotland, Hampstead, or Alabama.’<sup>34</sup> What Crown expresses here is an endemic truism: a text’s greatness is not evaluated on the grounds of its rootedness, but of its ability to transcend those roots. And yet, arguably, Kelman’s work, like that of many other writers, is deeply defined by its rootedness – its greatness, one would contend, is determined by its ability to make that rootedness speak across borders, to speak from a particular place, out of a particular history/experience, and to engage with and welcome ‘outsiders’. As for the myth of the universality of great works of art, as Margaret Atwood put it, ‘there is no such thing as a truly universal literature, partly because there are no truly universal readers.’<sup>35</sup> Rather, literary works engage with and construct the everyday world (local and global) in multiple ways, they may be outreaching and opening towards the world, but like all human things they are finite.

In order to make sense of ‘Scottish literature’ as a field of studies, we must then conceive of a new set of questions with which to interrogate texts – questions that transcend the strictures of the binary nationalism-

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context quotation in MacMillan’s article conveys. See Alan Bisset, ‘Don’t tell me what’s great’, *The Guardian*, 24 January 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2007/jan/24/donttellmewhatsgreat>.

<sup>33</sup> See, Marianne Taylor, ‘James Kelman: London publishers are “elitist” and don’t get Scotland’, in *The Herald*, 10 October 2015, [http://www.heraldsotland.com/news/13838719.James\\_Kelman\\_\\_London\\_publishers\\_are\\_\\_quot\\_elitist\\_\\_quot\\_and\\_don\\_t\\_get\\_Scotland/](http://www.heraldsotland.com/news/13838719.James_Kelman__London_publishers_are__quot_elitist__quot_and_don_t_get_Scotland/)

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Crown, ‘Everywhere You Go’, *TLS*, 12 August 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Atwood, ‘An End to Audience?’, *Dalhousie Review*, 60.3 (1980), 427.

cosmopolitanism, and move instead freely along a continuum from local, to national/regional, to global. Within this attempt, the concept/figure of the 'stranger',<sup>36</sup> which I have borrowed and adapted from Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), represents a particularly useful tool. Appiah's contemporary revision of cosmopolitanism is relevant here as it does not coincide with a quest for a 'universal' standard or vision, but with a pluralist perspective which acknowledges the existence of differences, and focuses on the need for developing 'habits of coexistence.' Appiah's ethical cosmopolitanism is concerned with the obligations we have to others, 'obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship.' We must, he warns us, 'take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance.'<sup>37</sup> Appiah upholds 'conversation', 'in its older meaning of living together, association,' as the means that allows the development of cosmopolitan habits of coexistence 'in the human community, as in the national communities.'<sup>38</sup>

Appiah's call for a thoughtful conversation within and across cultures and nations, and his centring on an 'ethics of strangers' also encourage us to look at literary texts or artistic expressions as a privileged site for cosmopolitan negotiation, and thus represent an essential methodological motivation behind this essay. That literary texts foster empathy and strengthen the values of diversity has been foregrounded by a number of philosophers in recent times. 'Hospitality is culture itself',<sup>39</sup> claims Jacques Derrida, thereby implying that one cannot think of culture without the ability to welcome the stranger. Along similar lines, Martha Nussbaum believes that literary culture can produce 'citizens who can take charge of their own reasoning, who can see the different and the foreign not as a threat to be resisted, but as an invitation to explore and understand, expanding their own minds and their capacity

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<sup>36</sup> Of the many terms that could be used here – outsider, alien, foreigner, Other – I have privileged the broadest and most comprehensive one, that stretches to encompass the 'strangeness' of 'outsiders within'. This is also the term privileged by Kwame Anthony Appiah in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London, 2006), who has partly inspired this section of my discussion.

<sup>37</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, op. cit., xv.

<sup>38</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London, 2006) xvii.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. Trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (New York, 2001), 16.

for citizenship.<sup>40</sup> And yet, literary texts can stage very different degrees of hospitality – or indeed rejection – in relation to those who are perceived as different from, and alien to the ‘identity’ of a group or a nation. Texts may represent the Other by reducing the Other to the Same, or, in an opposite but converging approach, allow us ‘to face that which we have already designated as the beyond’<sup>41</sup> – by assimilating or rejecting the stranger they draw fixed borders meant to define and protect a ‘threatened’ identity. On the opposite, they may welcome the stranger in a conversation in which the host respectfully acknowledges that the guest ‘must come precisely from without, from some place other than home,’<sup>42</sup> and makes an attempt at listening to/engaging with his voice. It is then possible to claim that ‘literary strangers’ may provide a measure and a model for cosmopolitan hospitality. By focusing on strangers, and on the type of ‘conversation’ that literary texts stage through them, rather than on distinctive/unique features or characters, may therefore help us re-define national literatures in a cosmopolitan perspective.

‘Strangers’ have had a very central role in devolutionary and post-devolutionary Scottish literature, which has accounted for a wide variety of attitudes and relations between them and the national community: from outsiders whose irreconcilable alien-ness is beyond what is knowable and assimilable, and represents a downright threat, to strangers, or ‘outsiders inside,’ that closely border on ‘Scotland’ and slowly alter its definition. The next three sections will focus on different expressions of cosmopolitan hospitality in Scottish literary texts, and will attempt to map out their subtle re-definition of the terms ‘home’ and ‘away,’ as well as of the borders between ‘us’ and ‘them.’

### 3 The stranger as outsider

The notion and theme of ‘community’, along with a strong egalitarian ideal, have been seen as one of the distinctive features of modern and contemporary Scottish culture and literature. As Scott Lyall remarks, ‘community has not only been a key thematic concern in Scottish literary representations ... it has also been a bulwark of the Scottish tradition, helping to form Scottish literature as a subject-area.’ Community, however, has also been understood and represented as an exclusive unity, at least until the 1980s, traditionally

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<sup>40</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, Mass, 1997), 301.

<sup>41</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London, 2000), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Gideon Baker, *Politicizing Ethics in International Relations: Cosmopolitanism As Hospitality* (New York, 2011), 6.

standing as ‘a mythic signifier of commonality and communal resistance to Anglophone capital and perceived affectation, as well as white, normative, often working-class, traditionalism.’<sup>43</sup> And yet, as Lyall’s edited volume goes a long way to demonstrate, both Scottish society and its literary representations have deeply changed in the past forty years or so. This is more evident than ever today. The 2011 census has recorded a doubling of Scotland’s minority ethnic population since the previous census (2001), also revealing that only 62% of adult residents describe themselves as exclusively Scottish — in particular, ‘in Edinburgh less than half of adults (49%) and 55% of adults in Aberdeen say they are ‘only Scottish.’”<sup>44</sup> Scotland’s response to globalisation and immigration, however, seems to be quite different, at least for the time being, from that of most European countries: according to the 2015 survey of attitudes to discrimination, commissioned by the Scottish Government, ‘seven out of ten Scots want to banish prejudice [...]based on people’s age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity or religion.’<sup>45</sup> The 2015 poll is very much in line with the Scottish government approach to immigration between 2015 and 2019, firmly opposing Westminster’s political response both in humanitarian terms (with the UNHRC praising Scotland’s welcoming of Syrian refugees in 2017<sup>46</sup>) and from an economic perspective, especially in relation to post-Brexit planned anti-immigration measures<sup>47</sup>.

The idea of national community has then been gradually shifting away from conventional categories, to focus slightly less on ‘tradition’ and more on shared civic values. Devolutionary and post-devolutionary literature has both foregrounded and illuminated the shifting borders and attitudes of the

<sup>43</sup> Scott Lyall, ‘Preface: in Search of a Community’, in Scott Lyall (ed.), *Community in Modern Scottish Literature* (Leiden, 2016), ix.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Scotland more diverse with doubling of non-white residents, census shows’, *The Guardian*, 26 September 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/sep/26/scotland-diverse-non-white-2011-census>

<sup>45</sup> ‘Scotland “a more tolerant place”’, Scottish Social Attitudes Survey: Attitudes to Discrimination 2015, The Scottish Government, 30 September 2016: <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Scotland-a-more-tolerant-place-2c07.aspx>

<sup>46</sup> ‘Scotland sets example, resettling 2,000 Syrian refugees’, The UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency, 19 dicembre 2017. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2017/12/5a3947c94/scotland-sets-example-resettling-2000-syrian-refugees.html>

<sup>47</sup> ‘Nicola Sturgeon brands UK Government immigration plans ‘act of vandalism’ on Scottish economy’, *The Herald*, 20 December 2018. <https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/17309647.nicola-sturgeon-brands-uk-government-immigration-plans-act-of-vandalism-on-scottish-economy/>

national community by imagining Scotland's (new) Others. Two main clusters of such literary strangers will be considered in this section, both widely represented and distinctive of the literature of this period: historical strangers – fictional renderings of real people – whose stories investigate past or present encounters with (post-)colonial Others or minority residents; and speculative aliens – non-human, extra-worldly strangers – engaging with strangeness in an ontological and 'cosmic' perspective.

Historical strangers have indeed been common encounters in Scottish literature since at least the nineteenth century, when Walter Scott's narratives often gave them a prominent role, from the eponymous hero of *Waverley*, an Englishman, to Meg Merrilies, the Gypsy in *Guy Mannering*. Their presence, however, has arguably grown considerably since the 1980s, and can be understood in the context of Scotland's intensifying awareness of nationhood, and in the consequent increasing interest in its largely forgotten imperial past. Such extensive re-vision of the nation's removed, and often deeply troubling, past has both stemmed from and led to a gradual re-drawing of Scotland's identity narratives. It is in fact historical fiction, rather than professional historical scholarship, that has arguably led the way in this process, with literary strangers often occupying an ontological status, and thus actively challenging current identity narratives, and embodying and promoting an ethical engagement with transcultural conversation. Two anti-imperial historical novels, both investigating Scotland's colonial past in the Caribbean, may illustrate this effectively: Douglas Galbraith's *The Rising Sun* (2000), reconstructing Scotland's failed attempt at founding a colony at Darien, in Panama, between 1688 and 1689, and James Robertson's *Joseph Knight* (2003) disclosing Scotland's cryptic involvement, within the British Empire, in the practice of slave trade and the exploitation of slaves in the Caribbean.

Galbraith's fictional chronicle of the Darien enterprise stages a dark and relentless indictment, even a ridiculing of, Scottish colonial ambitions and unattainable plans. Over half of the novel centres on the encounter with the indigenous populations, presented here as (potentially) transformative: 'one thing I have learned is that everything strong in Nature comes from mixture. Purity is a perversion to her and she always destroys it in the end,'<sup>48</sup> claims one of the Scottish colonials of Caledonia. And this is indeed a novel of swift and unpredictable transformations, the most striking of which is possibly that undergone by the Minister, Reverend Mackay, whose corpse is ceremoniously

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<sup>48</sup> Douglas Galbraith, *The Rising Sun* (London, 2000), 373.

escorted back to the colonial settlement by an indigenous tribe, among whom he had eventually chosen to live. His painted, naked body stands as a metamorphic metaphor of the collapse of borders separating self from Other:

A bird flew across the chest towards its young, which looked out from the pit of an arm. At the centre of it all a monkey balanced on a branch. A navel for an eye, its tail hung down straight extending wittily along the length of the carnal member.<sup>49</sup>

On his return to Scotland, the protagonist-narrator – Roderick Mackenzie, a young Scot of ambition – feels radically displaced, not just because the approaching Union with England is deeply changing his native country, but because his perspective and identity have been transformed through the colonial encounter. Again, the sense that identity borders have shifted, or indeed collapsed is evident: ‘the existence of Edinburgh’ he explains, ‘became partial to me, a half-way reality towards which I struggled against Darien’s mad pull.’<sup>50</sup>

Robertson’s novel moves along similar lines: focusing on an historical character, one of the many voiceless subalterns of the imperial age, this is a work that sets itself the formidable task of retrieving a story that can only be partly reclaimed from archives or libraries or books. Joseph Knight’s voice and largely imagined story, that of a black slave taken from Jamaica to Scotland by his master, eventually winning his freedom in a Scottish civil court in 1778, are evoked by the author in what can be described as an anachronistic ‘conversation’ across time and space. While recent historical investigations<sup>51</sup> have shed light on the national/istic agenda of Scottish-Caribbean imperial networks, Robertson’s work has highlighted that the act of telling the truth requires a *dialogue* in order to happen – it cannot be structured as a unilateral act. Knight remains a ghost figure throughout the novel, evoked and remembered by those he has met in his life. He materialises only at the very end of the novel, where his voice is ventriloquised by the narrator, who records his fictional encounter with Archie Jamieson, a private detective recruited by Sir John Wedderburn, Knight’s by now deceased master. Knight is imagined as

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 466.

<sup>51</sup> See Douglas Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750–1820* (Manchester, 2005), and, more recently, Thomas Martin Devine (ed.), *Recovering Scotland’s Slavery Past: The Caribbean Connection* (Edinburgh, 2015).

reluctant to engage in a conversation he has not sought or desired, and his words are bitter: the wrongs he has suffered at the hands of Scottish slave traders and his Scottish masters outweigh the goodness of his Scottish wife, Anne, and of the Scottish miners who supported him in his legal battle. He is depicted as both part of the miners' community he now lives in, and as irreconcilably alien. For example, Knight never reveals his African name to anyone: 'it was about himself. He had to keep his name whole, away from others, away, especially, from white people.'<sup>52</sup> If the novel's 'ventriloquism' may be questioned as not 'politically correct', this is no doubt a work that powerfully and valuably articulates the desire and need for dialogue, and for a national identity that is negotiated with strangers, and not simply passed over from generation to generation. Like Galbraith's novel, *Joseph Knight* signals a gradually changing ontological status of Scotland's colonial Others, a change which goes hand in hand with the radical re-shaping of the idea of national community that takes place in the devolutionary and post-devolutionary period.

The imperial theme also underlies contemporary Scottish science fiction, often dealing with acts of colonisation or clashes with 'exotic' and irreconcilably alien Others, from Edwin Morgan's science fiction poems (*From Glasgow to Saturn*, 1973), to Alasdair Gray's iconic *Lanark* (1981) with its hybrid and disquieting creations, or Iain M. Banks's and Ken MacLeod's fictions and their kaleidoscopic range of human and post-human aliens. Scottish speculative fictions may or may not refer directly to Scotland's predicament but, as John Garrison observes in relation to Banks's work, we may still trace a Scottish connection here, if only disguised and standing 'conceptually within a much larger context.'<sup>53</sup> Morgan's 'The First Men on Mercury' represents a most formidable example of cosmopolitan hospitality – effectively conveyed by the vivid and concise quality of the poem. Opening with the cacophonous clash of the languages spoken respectively by humans and aliens ('We come in peace from the third planet./ Would you take us to your leader?/ – Bawr stretter! Bawr. Bawr. Stretterhaw!'), it closes on a Morgan-esque note of exchange and hybridisation, with the humans speaking the alien language and the aliens speaking English: '– Stretterworra gawl, gawl.../ – Of course, but nothing is

<sup>52</sup> James Robertson, *Joseph Knight*, 352.

<sup>53</sup> John Garrison, 'Speculative Nationality: "Stands Scotland Where it Did?" in the Culture of Iain M. Banks', in Caroline MacCracken-Flesher (ed.), *Scotland as Science Fiction* (Lewistown Pa., 2012), 65.

ever the same,/ now is it? You'll remember Mercury.'<sup>54</sup> There could hardly be a more effective illustration of the effectiveness of cosmopolitan conversation, leading to see things from the Other's perspective – to (literally) 'becoming' the stranger.

A more complex and problematic approach to alien-ness is that articulated in Banks' Culture series. The Culture, a democratic civilization that has banned notions of property and fear of death, honours diversity in all its expressions, upholds a political philosophy that rejects all relationships of power, and thus stands for a quasi-anarchic form of anti-imperialism. And yet, the Culture also acts as a 'benevolent' Empire, eager to expand its positive influence across the universe, and resorting, if required, to violence and military force. Banks does not pursue a consistent representation of the Culture, but rather sets it in a complex network of tensions by choosing narrators or central characters who are outsiders. In the first novel of the series, for example, *Consider Phlebas* (1987), the main perspective is that of Bora Horza Gobuchul, a Changer recruited by the Idiran Empire (the Culture's irreconcilable enemy), who despises the Culture for its dependence on machines and what he sees as a lack of spirituality. No matter how close to Utopia the Culture is, Banks on the whole steers clear from the risk of over-idealising it or turning it into a hegemonic perspective. This is achieved through what has been described as 'a systematic examination of the 'problem of the Other' in liberal societies,'<sup>55</sup> and a constant investigation of a kaleidoscopic continuum of possible encounters – from real or ludic conflict, to gradual convergence or hybridisation. Encounters are usually not marked by hospitality (as the Culture attempts to 'culturalise' other civilisations), but Banks's constant focus and reflection on them does represent in itself a valuable workshop of cosmopolitan conversation.

#### 4 The 'familiar' stranger

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been a time of swiftly changing socio-political scenarios, and of shifting (internal) borders for the Scottish national community.<sup>56</sup> It is possibly not so surprising that writers have often

<sup>54</sup> Edwin Morgan, 'The First Men on Mercury', *From Glasgow to Saturn* (Manchester, 1973), 63–4.

<sup>55</sup> Patrick Taddeus Jackson, James Heilman (eds), 'Outside Context Problem. Liberalism and the Other in the Work of Iain M. Banks', in Donald M. Hassler and Clyde Wilcox (eds), *New Boundaries in Political Science Fiction* (Columbia, S.C., 2008), 239.

<sup>56</sup> See, Carla Sassi, 'The (B)order in Modern Scottish Literature' in Ian Brown, Alan Riach (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh, 2009),



imagined and mapped out – and growingly so in the devolutionary and post-devolutionary period – a new idea of national identity by turning their attention to the stranger inside. A ‘familiar’ stranger borders closely with the national community, or is born/resides within it and yet s/he is not regarded as a member with full rights – not technically a stranger, s/he is nonetheless interpellated as one. The radical potential of such ‘soft’ strangeness is highlighted, for example, in Christopher Whyte’s poem ‘An Daolag Shonach’ (‘The Chinese Beetle’) (2004), where the ability of the beetles to impress a wonderful aroma in each fruit they briefly nest in as larvae, leaves the scholars and gardeners of the court at a loss, unable to provide an explanation. ‘S e sin a nì mi leis a’ chàinain seo’ (‘That is what I do with this language’)<sup>57</sup>, the lyrical voice concludes, evoking Whyte’s own experience and role as a Glasgow-born, non-native speaker of Gaelic, who has established himself as one of the contemporary leading poets in that language – a language and a tradition he has subtly changed by impressing on it his outsider’s ‘accent’. Presenting himself as the stranger within, Whyte refers here to the difficulty of being fully accepted, at the time of writing, as a non-native voice, in an historically threatened and marginalised culture. He also conveys, however, the transformative and empowering experience of his borderline stance, as well as the important contribution that his work represents in this context.

The largest and most distinctive category of ‘familiar’ strangers is no doubt that represented by the many abjected subjects who take centre-stage in devolutionary and post-devolutionary fiction, and represent indeed a well-known, if only controversial, distinguishing feature of contemporary Scottish literature. A remarkable gallery of ‘damaged’ characters, living beyond the margins of society, appear in some of Scotland’s most canonical texts of this period: from anorexic and alcoholic Joy in Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), to the iconic junkies in Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993). These characters are ‘strangers’ insofar as they inhabit a space of ambivalence – they are ‘Scottish,’ by official standards, and yet society confines them to a space of negation, a space of non-presence. Their gained centrality in contemporary Scottish fiction both articulates a powerful indictment of society’s epistemic violence and a desire to enter into dialogue with them – the

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145–8.

<sup>57</sup> The poem and his translation in English have been published in *Words without Borders*, June 2004 <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/two-poems6>

silenced and the marginal. Jenni Fagan's *The Panopticon* (2012), for example, describes the world as seen through the eyes of Anais and a group of fellow 'socially impaired' teen-agers, all forced 'guests' of the Panopticon, an institution for dysfunctional minors, reclaimed from a Victorian jail, and built so as to give the guards a simultaneous view into each inmate's room. If the Panopticon stands as a powerful metaphor of society's 'Othering' gaze on a most vulnerable group of underprivileged citizens, Fagan's extraordinary fantastic-realistic language powerfully challenges the normalising discourse of surveillance. Anais both lucidly identifies the Panopticon's intrusive and de-humanizing gaze as the source, rather than the effect, of her and her friends' marginalisation, and angrily asserts her humanity against it and beyond the barriers of social norm, as when she responds to a faceless and nameless bureaucrat who reprimands her for her misdemeanours:

Sometimes I deal, or I trash things, or I get in fights, but I am honest as fuck and you'll never understand that. I've read books you'll never look at, danced to music you couldnae appreciate, and I've more class, guts and soul in my wee finger than you will ever, ever have in your entire, miserable fucking life.<sup>58</sup>

That our inability to see the humanity in the stranger inside is often the outcome of our expectations and beliefs is also the underlying theme of *Under the Skin* (2000) by Michel Faber, a science fiction novel set in the Scottish Highlands and featuring a deeply alien and yet very familiar stranger. Isserley, a female alien from an unnamed planet, has undergone invasive and painful surgery in order to look like a seductive woman. Her task is to drive around and pick up solitary hitchhikers, anesthetize them and consign them to her 'colleagues', who then process them into coveted alien delicacies. In Faber's subtly constructed novel, strangeness becomes a trick of mirrors. All characters are in fact strangers, as all the action takes place on country roads or at the aliens' underground 'farm,' where neither humans nor aliens are at home. Furthermore, aliens are referred to as 'human' throughout the narrative, while human males are largely presented (in line with the aliens' perspective) as 'animals' – a source of food or heartless sexual predators. It is Isserley, however, who embodies simultaneously all forms of strangeness: an alien from outer space, she looks strangely human to the men she lures into her car, and who often look at her as

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<sup>58</sup> Jenni Fagan, *The Panopticon* (London, 2012), 174.

a mere sexual object, while her transformed body, carved by surgery, distances her from her fellow creatures. She is the ultimate outcast, and doubly so. *Under the Skin* – whose title implies an investigation of (post-)human identity – can be described as her tragic and complex home-coming. Isserley chooses, at the end of the novel, to move out of the farm and live in the hauntingly beautiful landscape of northern Scotland. But she has a car accident and, aware that her alien-ness is about to be disclosed, opts for suicide. In her final moments she is relieved by the thought of merging, through her death, with the landscape she loves, and that ‘her invisible remains would combine, over time, with all the wonders under the sun.’<sup>59</sup> She is also able, for the first time, and in the short time that precedes her death, to relate to human beings and to care for them, and in turn she is taken care of: while she tries to save the life of her wounded passenger, a passer-by offers her help while the ambulance is approaching. Alien-ness is thus replaced by a precarious sense of belonging, a ‘convergence’ that can only become permanent through Isserley’s physical dissolution.

## 5 Caught between homes

Since the publication of the first ‘Scottish multicultural anthology’ – *Wish I Was Here* (2000)<sup>60</sup> – accounting for the different Scotlands ‘imagined’ by the nation’s diasporic communities, the Scottish literary scene has gone a long way to engaging with, and indeed giving canonical status to texts that celebrate complex identities, or denounce their rejection and abuse in Scottish contemporary society. This section will focus on a category that straddles across the two investigated above, that of ‘diasporic’ subjects divided between a sense of belonging to Scotland and a loyalty to their ‘ancestral’ home(s) — insiders, who have lived all their lives in Scotland, are second or third generation, or are of a mixed descent, but are nonetheless perceived and constructed as outsiders. Scottish writers with a diasporic background have often accounted for their own encounters with racism and an exclusively conceived national identity: from Jackie Kay’s recording of the almost casual offensiveness of the question ‘where are you from?’<sup>61</sup> implying that her black skin does not fit in her interlocutor’s idea of Scottishness, to Luke Sutherland’s fictional account, in *Venus as a Boy* (2004), of his deeply traumatic Orkney childhood and teen years as a black boy faced by vicious racist attacks; from Suhayl Saadi’s representations

<sup>59</sup> Michel Faber, *Under the Skin* (Edinburgh, 2010), 296.

<sup>60</sup> Kevin MacNeil, Alec Finlay (eds), *Wish I Was Here. A Scottish Multicultural Anthology* (Edinburgh, 2000).

<sup>61</sup> Jackie Kay, ‘In My Country,’ *Other Lovers* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1993), 24.

of racist prejudice surrounding the Asian-Scottish community in Glasgow in *The Burning Mirror* (2001) or in *Psychoraag* (2004), to Leila Aboulela's personal memory of fearfully threateningly abuses – as that 'Black Bastards' penned over the Glasgow mosque's door<sup>62</sup> – levelling all 'non-white immigrants' into the same category of irreconcilable outcasts. By recording and denouncing society's ostracism, however, these writers have also implied and promoted a positive vision of inclusiveness – their shared agenda being to learn and teach 'how to be both,' to borrow and adapt the title of Ali Smith's 2014 novel. They have in fact often upheld an idea of identity that is fluid and complex, but also firmly place-bound. In Saadi's *Psychoraag*, for example, Zaf, a young Pakistani-Glaswegian DJ, leads the reader through his daily life and early-morning shifts at a local Asian radio. Zaf's syncretic playlists, ranging from 'Allahabadi, Janki Bai' to the 'Yardbirds',<sup>63</sup> and combining selections of Irish folk, pop-rock and traditional Pakistani songs, create a fluid continuum of collective and individual cultural associations. So does his language, incorporating Urdu, English, Gaelic and Glaswegian-Scots, as when addressing the listeners of his radio programme ('*Salaam alaikum, namaste ji*, good evenin on this hoat, hoat summer's night! Fae the peaks ae Kirkintilloch tae the dips ae Cambuslang [...]')<sup>64</sup>, and as mirrored in the kaleidoscopic 'Glossary'<sup>65</sup> at the end of the book. Zaf's non-hierarchical incorporation of transcultural elements, very much like Saadi's writing, no doubt foregrounds a cosmopolitan identity: 'we're playin a real mix ae auld an new, of Eastern an Western an aw points in between. An beyond. Or, tae be more accurate, the soangs that let us hear the truth ae the fact that the waruld is aw wan.'<sup>66</sup> This is not a freely chosen and freely mixed set of features, an abstracted globalised cosmopolitanism, but rather a rooted one. Zaf's connecting of his worlds poses questions of self-definition, gesturing towards a transcultural re-definition of Scottishness, through a process of indigenization of the 'alien,' as subtly suggested by Zaf's trans-linguistic game: 'Scootland in Urdu, is a wee man in a coracle, croassin the ocean.'<sup>67</sup>

A similar journey into questions of (self-)definition characterises Jackie Kay's more explicitly autobiographical engagement with both her Scottish

<sup>62</sup> Leila Aboulela, "'When I First Came to Scotland...'", in Kevin MacNeil, Alec Finlay (eds), *Wish I Was Here*, 27.

<sup>63</sup> 'Discography', in Suhayl Saadi, *Psychoraag* (Edinburgh, 2004), 434–8.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 421–30.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

and African heritage. In *Trumpet* (1998), her first (semi-biographical) novel, Joss Moody, a Scottish transgender jazz musician and, like Kay, the child of a Scottish mother and an African father, nurtures a ‘fantasy Africa,’ shared by all ‘Black British people, Black Americans, Black Caribbeans,’<sup>68</sup> but has never travelled to ‘real’ Africa. In her first memoir, *Red Dust Road* (2010), Kay fills in the distance between ‘fantasy’ and reality, by accounting her tracing of her birth parents — her Scottish mother and her Nigerian father. It is thus in *Red Dust Road* that Kay’s autobiographical project arguably achieves its ultimate meaning. The title of the novel takes the road, an image of movement and fluidity, centre-stage, but also attracts our attention to a cliché image of the African landscape — the correlative objective for Kay’s ‘fantasy Africa, and for her desire to explore her African connections. Her memoir, however, rather strives to achieve a precarious balance between the two sides of her complex background — between biological and cultural roots, between her birth parents and her foster ones. Such symmetry is captured, at the end of the book, in the powerful image of a new identity shaped through ‘convergence’ — Kay’s actual project of planting an African tree, the *Moringa oleifera*, a plant renowned in Africa for its healing properties, in her Manchester garden: ‘I imagine a magical moringa, years and years away from now; its roots have happily absorbed and transported water and minerals from the dark, moist soil to the rest of the splendid tree.’<sup>69</sup> That *Dust Red Road* was 2014 Scottish Book of the Year, and that Kay was named Makar — National Poet for Scotland — in 2016, tells something not only of her history of institutional success, but of how her journey into a rootedly cosmopolitan vision has reached out to the wider public.

## Conclusion

The academic debate on the allegedly difficult and belated engagement of Scottish literature with Theory has often stressed the limitations of current constructions of this field of studies, and implied that it was because of its intrinsic faults — backwardness and self-referentiality — that it stubbornly failed or refused to engage with mainstream disciplinary concerns. Much of the critique of modern and contemporary descriptions of Scottish literature is no doubt justified, and it is certainly fair to investigate the reasons why criticism of Scottish literature has largely ‘ignored theory’, as the editors of the first issue of *The International Journal of Scottish Literature* point out. It

<sup>68</sup> Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (London, 1998), 34.

<sup>69</sup> Jackie Kay, *Red Dust Road* (London, 2010), 289.

would be equally necessary, and timely, however, to analyse why Theory has not engaged with Scottish literature – both as a category, and (quite often) as the individual voice of individual writers – and why, more generally, it has failed to engage with the complexities and dynamics of nationalism, flattening it to an unredeemably negative and destructive ideology. If ‘Theory’ was an unwelcoming epistemological environment for Scottish literature and other nation- or local-related disciplinary pursuits, the pluralistic, shifting post-Theory world is decidedly more hospitable. More focused on a dialogue across disciplinary borders, more attentive to ‘affects’ and emotions, and on the whole (in line with the shifting realities of the Digital and Virtual Age) more open to radical change and ‘contradiction’, less prone to ideological orthodoxy, ‘theory’ has opened up new interpretative paths and the possibility of new connections. Tracing the centrality of the ‘stranger’ and cosmopolitan conversations in contemporary Scottish literature is not only a way of redefining a specific field of studies, but of reclaiming a complex and more useful idea of nation, as ‘the host’, in Cairns Craig’s words, ‘to multiple nationalisms, to marginal and antagonistic communities,’<sup>70</sup> and of revealing the tangled coexistence of cosmopolitan and national discourses.

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<sup>70</sup> Cairns Craig, ‘Scotland and Hybridity’, Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie and Alastair Renfrew (eds), *Beyond Scotland. New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam, 2004), 249.