
Environmental and Ecological Readings: Nature, Human and Posthuman Dimensions in Scotland. Introduction

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And then a queer thought came to her there in the drookèd fields, that nothing endured at all, nothing but the land she passed across, tossed and turned and perpetually changed below the hands of the crofter folk since the oldest of them had set the Standing Stones by the loch of Blawearie and climbed there on their holy days and saw their terraced crops ride brave in the wind and sun. Sea and sky and the folk who wrote and fought and were learnéd, teaching and saying and praying, they lasted but as a breath, a mist of fog in the hills, but the land was forever, it moved and changed below you, but was forever, you were close to it and it to you, not at a bleak remove it held you and hurted you. And she had thought to leave it all!¹

Ecopoetics and nature narrative have been at the forefront of literary studies since Jonathan Bate's landmark essay on ecocriticism in 1991. Growing concerns with the environment and the impact of human activity on the future of the planet have also fed this narrative practice and its critical analysis. Louisa Gairn has fostered these concepts in a Scottish context; by studying how, since the nineteenth century, poets and novelists have brought nature and the environment into play in their works, she has convincingly demonstrated how relevant they are for Scottish authors and the Scottish literary tradition.²

¹ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *Sunset Song* (1932; Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1999), p. 119.

² Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology* (London: Routledge, 1991); —, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000); Louisa Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

Nature, the environment, and the relationships people have forged with their surrounding natural habitat are now recognised as central to any expression of the singularity of Scotland and of the Scottish landscape and mindscape. Be it the Highlands, the Islands, the Lowlands or the Borders, the Scottish landscape is never very far from issues of identity.

This volume features seventeen articles devoted to various authors covering a wide range of genres, from eighteenth-century travel writers to contemporary poets, playwrights, and novelists. The essays consider Nature and the environment in their relations to men and women and question how mankind is set to evolve in the contemporary world, as well as the development of mankind in the future – the posthuman dimension. They show how these concepts have affected Scottish authors and literature produced in Scotland.

The collection is divided into two parts and the articles are presented chronologically, to highlight how each of the authors featured may have influenced the ensuing literary tradition. The first part focuses on eighteenth and nineteenth century poets, novelists, artists, or travel-writers – authors largely ignored by Louisa Gairn’s groundbreaking analyses – while the second turns its attention to twentieth and twenty-first century authors, with an emphasis on modern and postmodern considerations, including the future of the human species and the posthuman perspective. A notable feature in this collection is the use and the analysis of previously unpublished material.

The first article in this collection deals with travel writing in the eighteenth century. Anne McKim, in “‘A full idea of your own country’: Paradise or Wilderness? Scottish Tourists on the Home Tour”, starts by exposing the shift in attitudes towards landscape and nature in Great Britain – and more particularly in Scotland – that had taken place by the end of the eighteenth century. The highly fashionable European Grand Tour was losing its prestige as the British home tour became more popular and affordable, offering the inquiring traveller new vistas far closer to home. Anne McKim’s contribution focuses on two authors writing before Boswell and Johnson’s very controversial but nonetheless influential descriptions of the Highlands: a travel writer whose work Anne McKim has edited, John Macky’s *Journey through Scotland* (1723), and Lady Grey’s unpublished ‘Journal of a Northern Tour’ (a tour that Jemima Grey endeavoured in

1755).³ Anne McKim shows that these two expatriate Scots heralded changes into the perception of the Highlands; they turned the horror and disgust felt for the wild and savage Highlands into a reverence for the majesty of the Scottish landscape that was to influence further descriptions of the Highlands and Islands.

Alan Riach tackles Duncan Bàn MacIntyre's 'Praise of Ben Dorain', a poem for which he provided a new translation from Gaelic into English in 2013.⁴ Alan Riach's article, 'The Politics of Nature in "Praise of Ben Dorain"', explores the geopolitics of the poem and of the poet. Duncan Bàn MacIntyre is a major eighteenth-century Gaelic poet whose work was largely ignored by the Edinburgh literati and Scottish Enlightenment authors. Alan Riach also explores the location, Ben Dorain in Perthshire, and the issues raised by the poem: the relationships which exist between us – men and women – and nature, its flora and fauna and the landscape where they all come to exist. The author then recalls the process of translating the poem from Gaelic into English – not without reference to the various previous translations he used in order to guide his own interpretation and rendering of the poem into English. We follow the process of putting forward (*trans-lating*) and presenting the miscellaneous majestic and dramatic images conjured up by Duncan Bàn MacIntyre; Alan Riach then shows us how they contribute to an understanding of the Highlands of Scotland and the symbiotic relationships between its inhabitants and the natural environment.

The infamous Clearances are a necessary feature in any discussion about the social and economic relationships between nature and the indigenous people in the Highlands and Islands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Christian Auer's article 'The Representation of Land in the Gaelic Poetry of the Clearances' examines the way these tragic events have been reported – or commented on – by those who were traditionally presented as the heralds of Gaelic communities. Contemporary sources describing the plight of the Highlanders are indeed rare before the end of the nineteenth century and the publication of the Napier Commission report as well as articles on the subject issued in the radical press. Gaelic poets were therefore the voice of their community: they could denounce the infamies committed in the name of economic exploitation and the betrayal of their

³ John Macky, *A Journey through Scotland (1723)*, edited with an introduction by Anne M. McKim (Glasgow: The Grimsay Press, 2014).

⁴ 'Praise of Ben Dorain', *Duncan Bàn MacIntyre. The Original Gaelic Poem with a New English Version by Alan Riach* (Newtyle: Kettillonia, 2013).

chiefs. Christian Auer studies the polysemy of the word ‘land’ in poems published throughout the nineteenth century; the land is seen as a space of liberty but also as a timeless repository for the community: a sacred and immemorial bond transmitted from generation to generation. The violence of the Clearances is therefore lived as a direct attack on nature and on the identity of Gaelic society. Christian Auer points out that the forced emigration of a large part of the local communities and the imposition of a new economic system are heavily condemned by the poets; the land – a symbiotic element – becomes central to their denunciation of the trauma of dispossession and disintegration.

Yann Tholoniati examines Robert Burns’s ecological concerns and the way the Scottish Bard revealed his first-hand knowledge of the Scottish flora and fauna in ‘Robert Burns: Nature’s Bard and Nature’s Powers’. Because of his occupation, the pre-romantic peasant poet had indeed a different grasp of the natural world than many of his followers, such as William Wordsworth – a poet who has nonetheless been widely celebrated for his eco-vision. Yann Tholoniati argues and shows that the ‘physiopolitical’ attitude that Burns displayed in his poems and writings was not, in spite of what the poet has been reproached for, sentimental and mawkish but, on the contrary, meditative and environmentally-committed. The agricultural revolution had set in and nature and the natural world were already the victims of human greed and aggression. Burns’s concern with the flora and fauna of Scotland and his rantings and ravings against human intervention were given expression in his poems and prose. Robert Burns, as Yann Tholoniati argues, is therefore an author unduly neglected by most of the ecocritical theorists; they seem to have limited their studies to the six main British Romantic poets and have overlooked Burns’s influential pre-romantic stance and beliefs on nature and the environment.

In her article ‘How Walter Scott Wrote the Scottish National Landscape’, Sarah Bisson takes us to the symbolic use of landscape by Walter Scott in three of his so-called Jacobite novels, *Waverley*, *Rob Roy* and *Redgauntlet*. Scott’s influence on later Scottish authors and towards the representation of the country is indisputable. However, Sarah Bisson shows the different symbolic means Scott called upon to depict his country and the repercussions his influence had on later representations of the Highlands. The author of *Waverley* was able to integrate and articulate various aesthetic visions, whether romantic, picturesque or sublime, to define his own description of the country. The picturesque settings and descriptions play a major narratorial role in these novels. The attractiveness and seductive

power of the natural surroundings are undeniable and lead the protagonists to wander off the path they were supposed to follow. Sarah Bisson shows that Scott's equivocal representation of the picturesque Highlands and of the Scottish landscape as a whole also served his political and national purposes. The Jacobite cause is therefore endowed with a fascinating beauty, but it is nonetheless presented as an ill-fated and dangerous lure.

Cyril Besson's article 'Paradise Lost or Creation Regained? Nature and Culture in Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet*' takes us to the core of Walter Scott's historical *écriture* by reflecting on how the nineteenth-century author navigated between his representation of a realistic Scotland and his account of a fictitious Jacobite rising in 1760. *Redgauntlet* occupies an ambivalent position in Scott's 'Waverley novels': history is indeed seen as a pseudo-artificial narrative feature. Nature and the environment become a culturally modified setting in order for Scott to deploy his rhetoric and his symbolic imagination. The Jacobites and the Quakers, who occupy the same Scottish territory, are portrayed as the bearers of hope. Nature and the environment are vested with political and national or nationalist interests. Cyril Besson points to the dichotomy between nature and culture through the relationships and ideological positions of the Jacobites and the Quakers, both seeking to establish – or re-establish – their own paradise.

Landscape is of course a natural setting, but it can also be understood as a man-made artificial area designed as a recreational ground for a local landowner or landlord. In 'Recreating an Ideal Landscape: A Community's Approach to the Designed Landscape of Cally' David Steel presents us Cally, in Dumfries and Galloway. It is a designed landscape first planned by the Murray family in the mid-eighteenth century and has since been purchased by the Forestry Commission and then restored by the Gatehouse Development Initiative. Plans for a massive mansion and the surrounding parkland were first drawn up in 1763. However, Cally soon exceeded its planners' initial design and scope. It became a famous and well-known source of inspiration for many landscape painters – such as John Faed – or even some of the Glasgow Boys and others – authors such as John Macky who, for instance, recounts visiting The House at Cally in his *Journeys* but also Robert Burns who ridiculed James Murray and his political ambitions. David Steel takes us through the history of the Gatehouse of Fleet and its owners, and the ideas of an ideal landscape it was supposed to embody. Changes and improvements were made, – to which paintings bore witness – until the demise of the Murray family at the end of the nineteenth century. Work has been going on since in order to restore and improve this designed

landscape of Cally, providing cultural information to visitors and local amenities, and developing tourism.

The following article ends the first part of this volume and offers a perfect transition to the second part. If a designed landscape such as Cally was a source of inspiration for painters, Marion Amblard however considers next the representations of the Highland landscape by Scottish artists between the eighteenth and the twenty-first centuries. She examines how such sublime and dramatic panoramas were brought to life by a number of artists over the course of three centuries. She distinguishes three stages in that history, but shows how Burke's considerations on the sublime – as well as the crucial influence of Walter Scott – remained central to most of these pictorial representations. Even if Italy proved more attractive to Scottish painters in the eighteenth century, the Highlands had slowly become an essential part of Scottish pictorial landscape representation by the beginning and the first half of the nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, new concerns over the Highlands and Islands developed and naturalism became a dominant feature of Highland landscape painting, sometimes highlighting the history or the traumas of the Clearances and emigration. Marion Amblard shows that the representation of Highland landscapes was concomitant with the evolution of the feelings of Scottish and Highland identities: later artists, such as the Glasgow Boys, distanced themselves from previous romantic representations of the Highlands and contemporary artists now question issues of identity and Scottishness.

We move on to the twentieth century in the second part of this volume with the next article devoted to Hugh MacDiarmid's ecocritical positions. Béatrice Duchateau's article, 'Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Landscape: Landscape as Sign', examines an unpublished typescript entitled 'Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Landscape, by Valda Trevlyn', undoubtedly written by the poet himself. Béatrice Duchateau shows that toponymy was particularly significant for MacDiarmid who invested place-names with historical and political meanings, and – in an arguably idiosyncratic, elitist move – deplored common people's lack of knowledge of those markers of identity. MacDiarmid, who was passionate and well versed in linguistic matters, found a recurring issue in the multiplicity of the landscapes of Scotland which he expresses in 'Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Landscape': what language could honour the protean Scottish landscape, its variety and its diversity? As Béatrice Duchateau explains, MacDiarmid's obsession with listing and cataloguing corresponds to this pursuit of an adequate Scottish language, capable of expressing the

complexity of Scotland and of its people. Landscape and nature therefore provide him with the essential foundation for this quest for his distinctive and personal Scotland.

The next article, ‘The Posthuman as an Oxymoronic Mirror to Man’s Paradoxes in Iain Crichton Smith’s Meditative Poem “Deer on the High Hill”’ takes us to the use of that rhetorical device by the Gaelic poet Iain Crichton Smith in one of his major works written in 1962. Jean Berton’s narratological study explores the intricacy of the poem and the way Crichton Smith used oxymora in order to convey loneliness and the fate of depopulation in the Highlands, highlighting posthuman dimensions. The lexical environment of the poem becomes the nucleus for understanding the way the poet has organized his vision. Starting with Crichton Smith’s bilingual identity, Jean Berton shows, through the analysis of oxymora and similes, that the aim of the poet was to insist on and highlight the notions of clash and contrast in a peaceful Highland setting, using the animal which stands as one of its embodiments as the subject of these rhetorical devices. The stately deer also symbolizes the complicated fate of the Highlands and Islands, depopulated and replaced by animals either used as an economic commodity or as quarry for the wealthy; as Jean Berton argues, loving and killing thus become the ultimate oxymoron, which symbolizes the complicated relationships between the Highlanders and their habitat through the ages.

Christopher Whyte, because of his well-known interest in other fields – such as gender studies or Gaelic – is not an author usually associated with a concern for the environment or indeed ecology. However, Robin Mackenzie, in his article entitled ‘The Hieroglyphic of Raindrops: Reading the Signs of Nature in *The Warlock of Strathearn*’ explores environmental and ecological concerns in Whyte’s second novel. Representations of the natural world and the relationships between the environment and humans are central to the vision developed by Whyte in *The Warlock of Strathearn*; Robin Mackenzie then studies how two non-Scottish authors, the English novelist Lawrence Norfolk and the Australian poet Les Murray, have also presented these in their works. Mackenzie shows that *The Warlock of Strathearn* is a hybrid work that can be characterized as a mixture of genres: it dabbles with the historical novel, magic realism, and the Bildungsroman. However ecological considerations are never very far from the surface of the novel through the use of metaphors and rhetorical devices: animals and nature are used as a text or palimpsest on which the story is written. Mackenzie shows us that the ecological themes developed in the novel

nonetheless bring us back to Whyte's major areas of interest, that is to say those of gender, sexuality, and identity.

Monika Szuba's article 'I Think of Them as Guests' is devoted to John Burnside's poems and his vision of the world. Ecopoetry is part and parcel of Burnside's work and, in spite of the poet's rejection of some characterizations linking him to nature, the presence, the crossings and the encounters with nature pervade his poetry and most of his writing. Monika Szuba focuses mostly on poems from his 2000, 2002, 2009 and 2014 collections, and shows that Burnside puts a strong emphasis on inclusiveness, that is to say considering the world as a whole unit, nature and the surrounding world being one with human subjects. Monika Szuba also uses the Heideggerian concept of dwelling to analyse Burnside's poems and main preoccupation, a concept closely linked to transience and the need to understand and respect our natural surroundings. Monika Szuba concludes her essay on the necessity, for Burnside, of reuniting the natural and human worlds, therefore re-establishing a necessary symbiosis and order on the Earth where we all dwell.

Stewart Smith's article, 'Basho Borne on the Carrying Stream: the Word-Mapping of Scotland and the Eco-poetics of Wind Power in Alec Finlay's *The Road North* and *Skying*' examines Alec Finlay's 'microtonal' projects – that is to say the combination of smaller elements within a much larger field – through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizome and geophilosophy. Stewart Smith studies how Alec Finlay and co-author Ken Cockburn reproduced the journey undertaken by Basho, a seventeenth century Japanese haiku master and poet traveller in his native Japan. Both Scottish authors used blogs to record their prose and poetry, inviting people to contribute to their acts of creation which they named *The Road North*. In *Skying*, Alec Finlay undertook the same 'microtonal' practice, but this time concentrated on renewable energy in Scotland, therefore raising awareness about environmental causes and the relationships we share with nature. Aesthetic considerations and practical considerations were also high on his agenda and Stewart Smith shows how Alec Finlay's eco-poetics is an aspect of the new ecological artistic reflections in Scotland.

The next article, by William Welstead, offers a close reading of five of Meg Bateman's poems in English, namely 'From Ben Aslaig', 'The Year's Flowers', 'Touched', 'Honeysuckle' and 'Among Trees', all taken from the poet's latest collection *Transparencies* (2013). Meg Bateman is a Gaelic poet and scholar and the issue of language is at the forefront of her poetical voice. William Welstead, like Stewart Smith in the previous article, starts

from Louisa Gairn's concept of an 'ecological line of defence' and argues that Meg Bateman's linguistic involvement with Gaelic has also influenced the poet's own ecological *écriture*. Languages – or means of apprehending the world, as the poems were written in English – change the perception and the aesthetic transmission of the poet's natural surroundings. More than the dated ideas of the Sublime, William Welstead shows that it is cultural legacy or, as he calls it, a cultural landscape composed of environmental and geomorphological features and culture, that informs Meg Bateman's poetry, either in Gaelic or English.

Camille Manfredi's article 'Scottish Petroliterature 1993-2013: Poetics of an Oil Spill' starts out by examining the paradoxical relationships between Scotland and oil. Disasters such as the wreck of MV Braer brutally rocked the belief that crude oil was Scotland's future. Believing in North Sea oil as Scotland's future or 'Black gold' was not such an obvious conclusion to reach for people living in the Shetland islands. Camille Manfredi explores the ecological issues raised by ecodystopian novels and non-fiction works by Shetlanders Robert Alan Jamieson, *Thin Wealth* (1986), Jonathan Wills, *Innocent Passage. The Wreck of the Tanker Braer* (1993), Tom Morton, *The Further North you Go* (2003) and various poems by Shetlanders (Christine de Luca, Christie Williamson) written in the wake of the disaster, keeping in mind that previous works such as John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil* or George Mackay Brown's *Greenvoe* had also prophesied that oil was not to be considered as a blessing. Camille Manfredi ends her article by considering the Scottish Government's plans for wind turbines in the Shetland islands and wondering if this is really the answer to the current ecological and environmental crises.

Nature and the landscape have been fundamental features of Scottish drama since the radical 1973 play *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil*. Danièle Berton-Charrière proposes to study the representation of Scottish landscape onstage through Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, that is to say of 'other spaces' or spaces of otherness, spaces which differ from traditional spaces and which conform to other criteria and other rules within a given society. Danièle Berton-Charrière shows that the landscapes of the Highlands and Islands – far from the romantic, pastoral, or traditional Arcadian representation inherited from the Celtic Twilight – have been transformed into a desperate vacuum from which contemporary productions have no escape. This sense of emptiness is explored through plays written by David Greig and Henry Adam – including a hitherto

unpublished play. Danièle Berton-Charrière also raises the issue of physical representation – the mimetic representation of the Highlands and Islands on stage – and she shows that many artists have chosen to compensate for the barrenness of the stage by synesthetic or other sensory devices.

This volume concludes with Jessica Aliaga Lavrijsen’s article ‘Shall We Try “Something New”? The Posthuman in Brian McCabe’. This article explores the ultimate relationships between the environment and humankind in what can be described as a posthuman world. Jessica Aliaga Lavrijsen has recently published a book on McCabe and the concepts of identity.⁵ In this article, she studies more particularly the tensions between the environment and posthuman issues in one of McCabe’s short stories, ‘Something New’, where, in a near future, genetically modified human beings express the wish to learn about their ancestors. After having explained the concepts of posthumanism, Jessica Aliaga Lavrijsen explores the tensions between identity, whether it is Scottish or simply inscribed within human experience, and the posthuman world where contact and new boundaries have been redefined – since the advent of the Internet – in a post-biological world. Technological progress has moved nature and the environment to a peripheral area and human beings seem to evolve in limbo, in-between two dimensions. According to posthuman theorists, this could indeed be the future of the human species, and this also raises issues of boundaries and identity(ies) in a twenty-first century Scotland.

The overarching purpose of the essays gathered in this volume is to show how preoccupations with nature, the environment and the landscape are intrinsically linked to Scotland and, one could even say, to a tradition in the culture and literature of Scotland. In the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Scottish authors either found in nature and the landscape the inspiration for their poetic practice, or turned their creation to the service of their surrounding environment, thus attempting to protect it from the developing industrial revolution or raising concerns about its exploitation. In our postmodern society, the return to nature has acquired an even deeper dimension: ecological preoccupations mingle with human and posthuman apprehensions. Humans – endowed with greater technological powers – must still confront their changed, post-industrial world in order to save themselves from mutual annihilation. Technological accomplishments, dreams, or nightmares, have also given rise to posthuman considerations.

⁵ Jessica Aliaga Lavrijsen, *The Fiction of Brian McCabe and (Scottish) Identity*. Studies in the History and Culture of Scotland, book 5 (Oxford, Berlin, New York: Peter Lang, 2013).

Jonathan Bate opened his study on Romantic ecology by quoting Luboš Beniak on the role played by air pollution in the December 1989 Czech Velvet Revolution.⁶ As we sent this volume to the press, Scotland was in throes of a momentous referendum that attracted worldwide attention. Not surprisingly, the ‘Yes’ camp and the Scottish Government’s White Paper (*Scotland’s Future. Your Guide to an Independent Scotland*) both highlighted the preservation of nature and the environment as top priorities, with policies including championing climate change legislation, the phasing out of nuclear power stations in Scotland, and a clear emphasis on renewable energy.⁷

However, these commendable pledges were concurrent with what appeared to be a contrary emphasis on offshore oil and gas.⁸ The oil industry can indeed be seen as an obsessive trademark of Scotland’s political rhetoric, from the famous slogan used in the February and October 1974 General Elections – ‘*It’s Scotland’s Oil!*’ – to the economic asset deliberately put forward during the 2014 independence referendum campaign. Such inconsistencies notwithstanding, the Scottish Government and the ‘Yes’ camp nonetheless both endeavoured to present themselves as the rightful heirs of a long-standing Scottish commitment to environmental and ecological issues. It is this historic, cultural and literary tradition and its contemporary manifestations and recuperations that will be studied in the present volume.

⁶ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology. Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.

⁷ ‘Using independence to build a clean, green and nuclear-free nation, Scotland can be a beacon of environmentalism and sustainability’, p. 291, *Scotland’s Future. Your Guide to an Independent Scotland*, <<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00439021.pdf>> [accessed 6 March 2015]. See the chapter ‘Environment, Rural Scotland, Energy and Resources’, pp. 276-306.

⁸ The White Paper nonetheless innocently states: ‘Is continued oil and gas production consistent with Scotland’s commitments on climate change? Yes. In Scotland, we will need a mixed energy portfolio, including hydrocarbons, to provide secure and affordable heat and electricity for decades to come.’, *Scotland’s Future*, p. 512.