

## Reconfiguring the Body of Scotland

Jean Berton

### *Abstract*

*Issue 35 of New Writing Scotland (2017) is titled SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID, and co-edited by Diana Hendry and Susie Maguire. This study concentrates on the 24 texts of prose short fiction arranged in the alphabetical order of the authors' second names. However, this selection by the editors follows the main idea as expressed in my title. This anthology is viewed as a literary correspondence of T. Devine's "Being Scottish" (2002), which enables us to apply a text-context approach. This collection of pieces of short fiction introduces single individuals, couples and parents & children, more loosely connected characters through love and friendship, and characters belonging to folklore and legends — all being connected with Scotland. The tales lead us to open the whole collection of short fiction to interpretation: the family, or body, of Scotland, the broad community of the UK, and the broader society of men of Britain, Europe and America.*

*Key words: "Being Scottish", the body of Scotland, New Writing Scotland.*

*New Writing Scotland* is an ASLS yearly publication of a collection of pieces of short fiction selected from a bulk of submissions by Scottish men and women with a feeling for literature. *New Writing Scotland 35* is titled *SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID*<sup>i</sup> after one of the twenty-five prose pieces of short fiction. This paper will leave aside all the poems included in this anthology presented by Diana Hendry and Susie Maguire, co-editors — their general introduction to the collection of short fiction gives no clue about their aims and intentions in their choices among the fair amount of submitted texts. The decision of presenting the texts in an alphabetical order of authors' second names clearly shows that every reader can pick a story to read on the bus or associate them at will.

Those writings can hardly be labelled short stories for they are shorter pieces of fiction, approximately between 1,000 and 1,900 words, whereas a short story usually ranges from 1,600 to 20,000 words. They can also be qualified as "quick read" for most of the narratives are about a fragment of life, or dream, sometimes serving an epiphany. One could be tempted to call them "new kailyard" pieces of literature with a broader scope than eastern rural Scotland for they are encompassing the whole of Scotland, the larger cities as well as rural places in the west, the north, and the east of the nation. In each piece of prose short fiction, the key elements of short stories can be identified — the characters are limited in numbers; the settings vary from a section of a bus to a district on some island; the conflicts are limited to one; the plots can be restricted to some minor events highlighting a social issue or an international connection; and the themes can appear dissimilar, yet they are aspects of the main topic of the Scots as a large group of people in their environment, or body showing through minor events which are merely introduced, or rapidly sketched when they deserve developing.

Those pieces of short fiction are anecdotes for they are belonging to the oxymoronic class of realistic fiction since the stories can actually happen and be true to real life. However the anecdotes may be real or fictional, such as SIRLOIN (42)<sup>ii</sup>, the short text in which the young boy is eventually enjoying the sirloin steak his mother has just shoplifted — the event of running away with food is true to life. Still, those anecdotes aim to reveal a truth more general than what the tales show. The anecdotes of *New Writing Scotland 35* convey the idea

of the Scots in their present-day environment. Indeed, ASLS editors claim that *New Writing Scotland* is to offer their readers sketches or synopses of narratives to allow new writers to be known and encouraged to improve their skills. The editors' intention differs from that of Short Edition, for example — a French publisher in Grenoble selling short texts to people about to travel on the bus across the town: their aim is to favour reading, inviting people to enjoy a “short piece of fiction for the day”.

As it is, one can notice a correspondence between this anthology of literary texts and T. Devine's collection of opinions in *Being Scottish*. The obvious issue is the sketching of the ever-changing body of the complex nation — body, here, should be understood as “an organized group of people with a common purpose or function”, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. This justifies the text-context approach chosen to serve the aim of this paper which is to assess the underlying point common to all the pieces of short fiction in this anthology. It implies that, unlike Devine's selection of debatably spontaneous papers, each of all the narratives is conveying an intention. They depict, as they are, the intimate relationships within a family to be extended to the community of Scotland thus highlighting the necessary contrast of freedom and ties leading to conflicts between generations and sexes. Also inevitable are the causes of frustration, longing and anxiety and the unsettled limit between beliefs, dream and reality — a gate opening to the fantastic.

Since the editors, in their brief introduction, give no indication of a central theme to the collection of short texts, we need, first of all, to introduce them in order to find out the common theme underlying the selection. What's more, since the texts are printed in the alphabetical order of the authors' second names, this bars any attempt at an obvious global thematic view. And what we are left with is a puzzle to build. In order to tackle all the twenty-five different narratives, some methodology needs to be devised — two angles of view can help us figure out the body of modern Scotland from these pieces of short fiction: first, the characters, and second, the conflicts. This is drawn from a basic questioning of the title printed on the cover page:

SHE SAID  
HE SAID  
I SAID

It is borrowed from the text by Sylvia Dow titled SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID (31). The colons are the only punctuation marks linking the three sentences. Because the characters are introduced as “Well, she said.” Or “I said. Yes.”, and because now and then the dialogue is interrupted by undeveloped sentences in italics, such as “*Darkness. Quiet. Car passing.*” (33), we can state that the corresponding text is a play script. And this unveils some intention to stage the characters.

Out of the twenty-five narratives in this anthology, some of them are of singled out, though not isolated, individuals — RAIN (11), ROAD ENDING (75), ON AN EARTH UNIFORMLY COVERED BY SEA (114), INK (169), MA WEE BUIK O GENESIS (171) —, others of characters set within close family ties — PERFORMANCE (1), BAD ELEMENTS (17), MUM AND I (37), SIRLOIN (42), AUNTIE (71), HORRIBLE SUNSHINE (94), WET LIKE JELLY (130), SHE WASN'T PRETTY (146) —, others of human beings connected by friendship or hatred — THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STONE (22), SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID (31), A GOOD LISTENER (54), CHECKING OUT THE CZECHS WITH JACKSON (80), OWLETS (87), HITTING THE TOWN (92), THE SNOWS OF BEN NEVIS (104), A NOTE OF INTEREST (142), THE ARCHAEOLOGIST OF AKROTIRI (152) —, and others of wo/men in this world encountering the other world —

STALKING DEER (61), MY MEMORIES OF SEAL CLUBBING (110), THE STRANGER (125). Naturally, the narrators must be granted a special status.

The themes can be broadly grouped under the following headings — love and family ties and couples; humour; folklore and the fantastic; Scotland and legitimacy; nature and environment; violence; community and solidarity. The narratives are organised around conflicts — mother and daughter conflicting relationships: 3 instances; crude reality, or nature and culture: 3 instances; reality and the fantastic: 6 instances; love and hate causing acts of revenge: 2 instances; man versus nature: 4 instances; Scotland contrasted with the world: 2 instances; comedy from clash between men and women: 2 instances; the present and the past: 2 instances; and, life and death, solidarity: 1 instance.

All those conflicts are common to all nations; however, likely blatant conflicts between Scotland and England are absent, which may not betray a form of preterition. Still the political context of the years 2016 (with the Brexit vote) and 2017 and of previous generations can be referred to in order to make capital out of any hermeneutic approach. Indeed, the tales open the collection of pieces of short fiction to free interpretation in which the family of Scotland (AUNTIE (71); SHE WASN'T PRETTY (146)...), the broader community of the UK (A NOTE OF INTEREST (142); THE STRANGER (125)...), and the broader society of not only the English-speaking countries (WET LIKE JELLY (130); PERFORMANCE (1)... ) but also the European Union THE ARCHAEOLOGIST OF AKROTIRI (152)... ) can be involved. Nevertheless, in each narrative the body of Scotland is implicated to some degree and the readers' role is to update their views and understanding of the nation.

### **Snapshots of the changing body of Scotland**

In this part, the twenty-five pieces of short fiction will be discussed as snapshots of the changing body of Scotland, meaning that the narratives will be connected with the actual context of either pre-devolution or post-devolution times.

Carl MacDougall, in *Writing Scotland*, subtitled as “How Scotland’s writers shaped the nation”, writes in his preface: “Our range of voices, sense of place and the mythologies we’ve created continue to tell the world who we are and what made us this way. They have maintained our identity in the face of indifference and defeat, and have made our concerns universal.” The notion of sense of place, which is so powerful in Scottish literature, pervades the short fiction narratives under study.

The picture of England William Shakespeare provided in a few strokes of his poetic brush is voiced by the character of John of Gaunt, in his *King Richard II* (Act II Sc.1, from line 40):

This royal throne of Kings, this scept' red isle,  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This fortress built by Nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
Or as a moat defensive to a house,

Against the envy of less happier lands;  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,  
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,  
Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth, [...]

This purple patch by Shakespeare is parodied by Liz Lochhead in the first chapter, equivalent to a prologue, of her famous play, *Mary Queen of Scots Got her Head Chopped Off*. Here the picture of Scotland is voiced by: “The chorus, LA CORBIE. *An interesting, ragged, ambiguous creature in her cold spotlight*”:

CORBIE. Country: Scotland. What like is it?  
It's a peat bog, it's a daurk forest.  
It's a cauldron o lye, a saltpan or a coal mine.  
If you're gey lucky it's a bonnie, bricht bere meadow or a park o kye.  
Or mibbe... it's a field o stanes.  
It's a tenement or a merchant's ha.  
It's a hure hoose or a humble cot. Princes street or Paddy's Merkit.  
It's a fistfu o fish or a pickle o oatmeal.  
It's a queen's banquet o roast meats and junkets.  
It depends. It depends ...  
Ah dinna ken whit like *your* Scotland is. Here's mines.  
National flower: the thistle.  
National pastime: nostalgia.  
National weather: smirr, haar drizzle, snaw!  
National bird: the crow, the corbie, la corbeille, le corbeau<sup>iii</sup>, moi!

(Lochhead 1989: 5)

In both plays by Shakespeare and Lochhead, details can be interpreted as references to historical events, whether domestic or international, grounded on political decisions. Even though the twenty-five texts selected from *New Writing Scotland 35* do not refer to Lochhead's picture of Scotland, they can be considered as twenty-five aspects of Scottishness.

Ever since the failed referendum of 1979, Scottish historians — T. Devine and T. C. Smout among so many others — have dedicated a lot of energy rediscovering and reassessing the past of Scotland, and Scottish writers have endeavoured to revive Scotland's literature — A. Gray, J. Galloway are but two names on a long list. Still, both historians and writers have been assuming the dark events, characters, and heroes brought to the surface. Even Kailyard writers' works have been reassessed. The collection of short fiction pieces in *New Writing Scotland 35*, through such texts as MUM AND I, or AUNTIE, or ROAD ENDING, reminds us of popular collections of sketches about what may pass as minor incidents, such as James M. Barrie's *A Window in Thrums*. Another example of comparable texts would be found in Iain Crichton Smith's *The Village* offering snapshots of life in a Lewis village. And over the thirty-five years of *New Writing Scotland*, the younger generation of authors have been expected to grow and become major writers.

While reviewing the literature of Scotland, MacDougall lays stress on “[the Scots'] sense of place [which] is so strong it's difficult to tell if [they] inhabit the landscape or if it inhabits [them]” (MacDougall 2004: 1). All those notions of belonging, of identity, and of guilt can be subsumed under the concept of Scottishness born with the Renaissance in the wake of the First World War.

The study of the composition of the pieces of short fiction in the anthology of *New Writing Scotland 35* reveals some degree of realism paired with a second major notion: for example, SIRLOIN (42) is based on realism and the handling of guilt; THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STONE (22), on realism and tale telling; BAD ELEMENTS (17), on realism and the consequences of rape; A GOOD LISTENER (54), on realism and the effects of attraction; STALKING DEER (61), on realism and animal killing; OWLETS (87), on realism and superstition; MY MEMORIES OF SEAL CLUBBING (110), on realism and fantasy; WET LIKE JELLY (130), on realism and legitimacy through acknowledging fatherhood; THE ARCHAEOLOGIST OF AKROTIRI (152), on realism and Scotland's prehistoric past as a worldwide value; and INK (169), on realism and the need to be in tune with the nation's history.

Wondering whether there is such a thing as a voice common to Scotland is a spurious question since the Scots have rarely spoken in a single voice. The nation means a wide range of voices because, first of all, it is a self-declared multilingual country, with a bulk of native languages — Scottish Gaelic (a Celtic language) and English and Scots (Germanic languages) and Latin and French (Roman languages)... and more recently imported languages such as Urdu, Polish, etc. *New Writing Scotland* welcomes texts written in Gaelic (the language was modernised in the 1980s), Scots and English. The case of Scots versus English in Scotland has a long history: since the eighteenth century, and quite a few generations before, when London's English endeavoured to phagocytise Scots on the grounds that both tongues had a common origin and that Scots was a corrupt form of English — Burns, the poet, propounded the native tongue against the language of trading, and Adam Smith, the philosopher, among others, took action to teach proper English to educated Scots... In prose fiction, today, writers are free to enjoy all forms in the continuum of the language of the Angles<sup>iv</sup> — standard English, Highland English, Standard Scottish English, standard Scots, and any form of broad Scots... All Scottish writers, and the editors of *New Writing Scotland*, agree that the body of Scotland has many tongues and that it is no handicap but a national treasure. Cairns Craig, in his *The Modern Scottish Novel*, published in 1999, goes so far as to state: “[...] Scots displaces English into being the supplementary language because it remains the origin of the nation's literary culture, though it can do so only by allowing Gaelic in turn to assert its founding claim upon the nation's ‘throat’” (Craig 1999: 76).

In *New Writing Scotland 35*, the twenty-five pieces of short fiction put forward the many different voices in tongues we can hear in the nation — the voices of friendship and of hate, those of loneliness and of pain, those of dream and of nature... not to mention the case of male and female writers' voices.

### **Millions of cells in the body of Scotland**

In the introduction of his collection of *Personal Reflections on Scottish Identity Today* listed in the alphabetical order of the second names of authors, Devine writes that “*Being Scottish* [...] offers an opportunity to penetrate behind the statistical surveys and explore the rich complexity of changing identity from a varied range of opinion” (Devine 2002: ix). Obviously no two answers can be exactly identical. Similarly, if one asks a thousand authors to produce a piece of fiction, the outcome will be remarkably varied. Still, the amount of effort to produce a piece of fiction equates what is required to voice one's opinion: “It is surprisingly difficult to explain something so profound and innate as a sense of belonging to a

particular country” (Devine 202: 171). *Being Scottish* is also a cultural end result of countless centuries:

For me, being Scottish is an unenviable mixture of conditioning and characteristics set in motion eras ago and influenced by the variables of the weather, the diet, Celtic chromosomes and who made it to the shores from other gene pools to cheer us up or make us fiercer, taller, blue eyed, better engineers, more artistic, more soulful.

(Devine 2002: 4)

This is developed further by this other interviewee: “Being Scottish for me is being proud of our heritage, our landscape, our friendliness — which is second to none — our traditions, music and language, although I personally know not one word of Gaelic, and our dancing ...” (Devine 2002: 13).

Thus we could read some five million personal reflections highlighting the specific traditions in the culture of Scotland to be confirmed by a definite sense of place where the three native languages are competing. About Scots, one reads: “I stand alone with the many hundreds of thousands who use Scots as their first language, yet see it given scant recognition from our major institutions” (Devine 2002: 112), and about Gaelic: “Gaelic is understood by only 1.4 per cent of the population, so presumably 98.6 per cent of Scots think they can find their soul that way” (Devine 2002: 23).

This brief review of Devine and Logue’s collection of reflections shows how close using fiction can be to voicing one’s opinion — the reader being aware of the use of ‘mirrors’ in fiction: in *SIRLOIN* (42), a lone mother steals some sirloin steak to feed her 10-year-old son who “knows she tries her best to make sure he always has enough to eat” (42), yet the boy feels sick with fear. Eventually, the boy has a revelation on discovering how good sirloin steak is. Beyond the sociological fact of stealing food to eat, the reader catches the notion that guilt is a relative feeling. This leads to the idea of freedom from imposed moral restraint. *SNOWS OF BEN NEVIS* (104) merely relates a climber being rescued. This documentary fiction shows the value of solidarity, which is the antonym of the credo of competition. This reminds us of how Cairns Craig connects fiction (being the product of one’s ability to create pictures in one’s mind) and real life, in his *The Modern Scottish Novel*: “A national imagination is the means by which individuals relate the personal shape of their lives, both retrospective and prospective, to the larger trajectory of the life of the community from which they draw their significance” (Craig 1999: 10). And in *THE ARCHAEOLOGIST OF AKROTIRI* (152), a teenager’s last family summer holiday on the island of Santorini brings together the Scottish teenager and Phaedra, the dedicated twelve-year-old daughter of the leader of the group of archaeologists. Years later, the Scottish boy has become an archaeologist “spending his life searching for lost worlds” (160). This narrative not only connects Scotland and Greece and their pre-historic cultures, but also exposes the worldwide network of archaeologists which the reader is free to think it is a possible parallel to the diaspora of Scots round the world.

Craig also refers to Allan Massie (Craig 1999: 206):

[...] in his introductory chapter he pointed to two different traditions of the novel which shaped the nature of contemporary writing in Britain: on the one hand is ‘naturalism’ whose ‘ambition seems to be to hold up a mirror to nature’ and ‘such novelists may indeed be said to be at the mercy of their material’; on the other,

we find novelists [...] whose novels seem first of all to be conceived as objects. We are aware of the author standing at an angle to his work. Their novels convince not by challenging comparison with “real life” but by offering us something which is as clearly a part of real life as a piece of furniture; and may be said to stand in the same relation to it. Something has been created to enhance and quicken our sense of being.

(Massie 1979: 8-9)

This sense of being is the core of *INK* (169) where the narrator is visiting a tattoo parlour (169). Throughout the whole experience of being tattooed the narrator and the artist talk sharing memories of places they had visited separately. Eventually, the narrator — and patron — concludes: “She had fulfilled one of my ambitions, [...] She had made one of my dreams come true. I’d had an itch, and she scratched it” (170). The unanswered question is about the itch, and the first notion — however debatable — that springs to mind is the urge to connect one’s life to that of the Picts. The narrator of *MUM AND I* (37) is a nine-year-old girl who never knew her father. Her point of view on her Mum and the men she seduces is rather distant until her Mum meets Paul. The last scene is taking place at the café for breakfast: “Then it was just the three of us, and I liked that” (40). This concluding remark reveals that she has found the proper position within the new family unit she had been tacitly hoping for. At a symbolical level, is Caledonia, the ‘mother’ of all Scots, expected to find a suitable match to replace the unsuited John Bull?

### **The body of Scotland acknowledged by her tradition**

*New Writing Scotland* has published short texts of prose and verse, in English, Scots and Gaelic, for some thirty-five years, thus creating a tradition of its own. Craig tackles the notion of narrative — that of individuals, that of characters, and that of the nation. Is the nation of Scotland an imagined community springing from imagined characters — like those we find in each piece of short fiction — however different they can be from real people? Then Craig refers to Hobsbawm’s *The Invention of Tradition*, particularly to the concept of ‘Invented tradition’ developed in his introduction:

‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.

(Craig 1999: 12)

Still, this continuity respecting tradition is open to innovation. This is what Craig introduces:

As form, the novel is a force of modernisation, an outcome of the print capitalism which Benedict Anderson has identified as one of the driving forces of modernity; in its contents, however, what it does is to render the process of modernisation explicable by turning the welter of events in which humanity is caught up into the orderly trajectory of narrative, a narrative which tames the threat of the future by binding it back as the necessary outcome of the known order of the past, and which renders the past significant by making it the foundation of the values of the present.

(Craig 1999: 11)

The narrative of SHE SAID: HE SAID: I SAID (31) offers a highly traditional scenario: two female friends fighting for the one man who betrayed SHE by being seduced by I — “pretty young girls have wiles” (31). SHE is going to murder I who tries to defend her life and accidentally kills SHE. The form is innovative since it mixes a dramatic text and a novel form:

And you and I, girl, we know that to be true. Don't we? she said.  
Don't we?  
I said. Yes.  
Look, I said. Listen.  
I'm sorry, I said.  
I never meant to harm you.  
To be honest I said I never thought about you.

The dialogue includes the environment of the scene, and the typography requires the reader's interpretation. This piece of fiction, dramatised fiction, connects the past to the present as well as the dramatic genre (tragedy) to the epic (prose) form, whether classic novels or present-day detective novels.

The body of Scotland is prodded, analysed, contemplated by historians, sociologists and politicians. Still, it wants a new life to be breathed into it by narrative artists whose imagination is indispensable. The countless metaphors they use blend reality, realism and tale telling into an oxymoronic sense of belonging. The pot-pourri of pieces of fiction found in *New Writing Scotland* 35 seems to meet what this interviewee declares in *Being Scottish*: “If we Scots have anything to offer to the international community, it is that ‘mankind touch’, the instinct, impulse, compulsion even, to touch, embrace and join with common humanity whenever we encounter it” (Devine 2002: 97).

The value of Scottishness appears in several pieces calling for interpretation. In RAIN the sense of Gàidhealtachd is powerful: the imaginative girl enjoys going to the spring every morning to fill the tin pail, especially when it rains. The family is bilingual, her father “used to say that Gaelic is the language for all things to do with the earth” (11). That morning she spots two golden eagles feeding on some lamb offal on the beach. Then comes a buzzard but the couple of golden eagles take off to attack the intruder and kill it in the loch. On coming back home she sees that a little brother has just been born, mewling like a buzzard. She thinks: “Was this *draoidheachd* – enchantment?” (15). The character is blurring reality into dream. The senses of place, of nature, and of bilingualism all together belong to reality, whereas the girl's dream brings fantasy into the narrative. The reader is then free to discuss the possible interpretation of the killing first of the lambs (a biblical reference?), then of the intruder by the native couple of golden eagles — a fable on the national motto, “Nemo me impune lacessit”? The narrative thus blends realism, culture, and latent or frustrated desire.

The title of ON AN EARTH UNIFORMLY COVERED BY SEA (114) is enigmatic until we read it is about tide theory. Is it a reference to the origin of our sea-covered planet or to the Flood meaning either or both the birth and the rebirth of Scotland and of Man into real life? The narrative is about a student, Callum, visiting his uncle and aunt in northern Scotland for two weeks to revise for his reset exams; but Callum helps his uncle, Uisdean, repair the roof of the byre. In the evenings, Callum is too tired to revise and he is most likely to fail. But the heart of the narrative is a tale within the tale about the moth which “spent the whole night fluttering at that lamp” (118) of the creel boat. Then, back at the university, on opening his

pen case, he finds a dead moth, “bringing him north, further north till the traffic shrank back and the moor began, the air rippling the lochans and a dreamlike floating as grasses and reeds whipped by” (119). To put it in a nutshell, the call of nature is fighting against bookish learning. The reader can discuss the urge to combine nature and learning.

The narrative of SHE WASN'T PRETTY (146) is about a young couple, Jeb and Edwina, who are going to spend their first night in their new house in the Highlands. Edwina is so nervous that she keeps squabbling about petty things, so much so that she thinks of divorcing. But deer are coming into their field at night: “Red deer, tall and rangy. Half a dozen hinds, in the patch field about to become their garden” (150). They then hear stags belling: “Somehow she'd never thought of deer as wild animals – rough, smelly and slightly unnerving. Not at all how they looked from a distance. Maybe it was the same with love. Prettier from a distance” (151). And the short story ends with: “She could feel her heart reconfigure itself around this new knowledge, as if molecules of love had been added or taken away. She wasn't sure which. She wanted a man to love and here he was” (151). The fable could end with the moral: connecting thinking wo/man and nature to discover the truth about love within a couple, a family, and a nation, or with the notion of the imperative requirement for the young couple to reconfigure their commitment.

Those twenty-five short stories — which read as attempts to regenerate Scottish fiction — blend metaphors and similes into realistic narratives and lead the reader to come to the conclusion that the body needs fiction in the guise of dreams, fantasy, or fear.

Measuring the twenty-five pieces of short fiction in *New Writing Scotland 35* against the hundred texts listed in *Being Scottish* shows that, beyond the fact that writing fiction with no set theme to work on is hardly comparable to writing down one's opinion about a set topic, the result can be felt as puzzling. Those pieces of short fiction selected by editors of *New Writing Scotland* convey an implied sense of belonging to Scotland. And those hundred selected elaborate opinions on being Scottish, often including memories and other narratives, voice, even if critically, a similar propensity without a liberal use of metaphors. Hence, this strong impression that the palpable body of Scotland is not only far from falling to pieces but also benefiting from continuous intake of elusive air blown from unreal areas. The collection of short fiction texts, in *New Writing Scotland 35* sounds as an illustration of the following quote by Shakespeare: “We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep” (*The Tempest*, IV.1.154-156).

These lines seem to be illustrated by this interviewee —

On a very personal level, being Scottish has given me a sense of belonging to something greater than myself — a sense of belonging to both a history and a future, as much as I belong in the present. [...] the sound of the distant Highland pipes and drums [...] mixing with Bach's organ music (inside Westminster Abbey), which created a magnificent new sound, at once strange yet hauntingly familiar — a new music with distinctive Scottish notes, reflecting and symbolising a reconfigured United Kingdom.

(Devine 2002: 144-145)

— leading to another debate on the sense of solidarity, a major topic in Scotland.

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<sup>i</sup> The italics are mine, and so are the colons. The general title of *New Writing Scotland 35*, printed vertically, is borrowed from the title of the short story on pages 31 to 36 which includes colons. In this paper the title of the book must be differentiated from that of the short story. All quotations from this collection of pieces of short fiction will be indicated only by the page number in parentheses.

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<sup>ii</sup> The titles of the narratives in this collection will be given in block letters followed by the page number between parentheses.

We can inquire, though, into the separate voices of authors and of editors and publisher: actually, in this anthology the titles of the texts are in upper-case letters, whereas the first and second names of authors are indicated in lower-case letters, with the initials in block letters — e.g. “David McVey / MY MEMORIES OF SEAL CLUBBING”. Knowing that one must be very careful about the spelling of names and surnames, how far is it meaningful? Do we have to understand that the texts are more important than the writers? Is it no more than a typography gimmick, since, in the CONTENTS, the titles are printed in lower-case letters?

<sup>iii</sup> “Le corbeau” is a French word meaning ‘the crow’, gone into Scots as ‘corbie’.

<sup>iv</sup> About tongue and language, although most linguists are adamant on the fact that English and Scots are two separate languages, Cairns Craig, remarks, in his *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 167, that “the courtesy that the Scottish writer requests for deforming the standard written language of English is asked not of the written language but of the tongue, a tongue, of course, which itself transforms the written language in every act of pronunciation.”

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Vicci Adams. Performance, p. 1.

Jennifer M. Baker. Rain, 11.

Lynsey Calderwood. Bad Elements, 17.

Linda Cracknell. The Other Side of the Stone, p. 22.

Sylvia Dow. She said: he said: I said, p. 31.

Louise Farqhar. Mum and I, p. 37.

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Lis Lee. Road Ending, p. 75.

Robin Lloyd-Jones. Checking Out the Czechs with Jackson, p. 80.

Rose McDonagh. Owlets, p. 87.

Alan Macfarlane. Hitting the Town, p. 92.

Rachael McGill. Horrible Sunshine, p. 94.

Roddie McKenzie. The Snows of Ben Nevis, p. 104.

David McVey. My Memories of Seal Clubbing, p. 110.

Laura Morgan. On an Earth Uniformly Covered by Sea, p. 114.

Catherine Ogston. The Stranger, p. 125.

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*Jean Berton*  
*Universite de Toulouse – Jean-Jaures*  
*Laboratoire Cultures Anglo-Saxonnes (CAS)*  
*e-mail: jean.berton@univ-tlse2.fr / jam.berton@wanadoo.fr*

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