

SPRING 2026 PG SYMPOSIUM



**UCSL Postgraduate
Symposium 2026
(Mis)Placing
Scottish Literature**

The local is the international.



The national is the parochial.

Friday 8th of May, University of Glasgow Studio 2, Advanced Research Centre (ARC)

PROGRAMME:

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION – 2:00-2:10PM

PANEL ONE: WHOSE PLACE? – 2:10- 2:50PM

‘A Quiet, Unnoticed Place’: Glen Conach as a Microcosm for Global Crises in James Robertson’s *News of the Dead*’

Pelin Gölcük Mirza, Karabük University

ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the parochial turn in James Robertson’s *News of the Dead* (2021) by examining how the fictional Highland enclave of Glen Conach functions as a site of spatial confinement through which broader historical processes are uncovered. Rather than representing contemporary crises through expansive geographical settings, Robertson situates his plot within an isolated “highland fastness”, where multiple temporal layers converge in a single landscape. The novel intertwines



several historical moments, including the prehistoric past of Scotland, the retreat of the eighth-century monk Saint Conach, a nineteenth-century antiquarian's attempt to reconstruct local history, and the contemporary experience of pandemic isolation. Through letters, scholarly commentary, and archival references, Robertson repetitively returns to Glen Conach as the central space where history accumulates and is reinterpreted. The spatial restriction in the novel generates a persistent sense of alienation and entrapment among the characters since the geographical remoteness of Glen Conach, intensified by pandemic quarantine, transforms the locality into a space of physical and psychological enclosure. Given this argument, this paper aims to explore how Robertson presents a peripheral locality as a microcosm to illuminate broader historical and contemporary crises.

BIO: She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Western Languages and Literatures at Karabük University, Türkiye. She graduated from the Department of English Language and Literature at Hacettepe University, Ankara, Türkiye. She received her PhD in 2023 with a dissertation titled “Herstories of Scotland: A New Historicist Approach to Liz Lochhead’s Drama”. During her doctoral studies, she was a visiting researcher at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland where she conducted research on Scottish literature and completed part of her dissertation using archival and library sources. She is currently a member of the International Association for the Study of Scottish Literatures. Her main research interests include contemporary Scottish drama, women playwrights, and medieval literature.



‘The Failed Scheme Dream: World-Building and Imaginaries in Scotland’s Council Estates’

Laura Galligan, University of Edinburgh

ABSTRACT: As Kirsten Paton (2019) argues, ‘urban restructuring and class restructuring are intimately linked processes’ (39). The creation, and ultimate failure, of high-rise architecture and council estates in Scotland throughout the late 20th century has much to tell us about the daily lives and experiences of working-class communities.

This paper uses literature as a lens through which to explore the realities of the inhabitants of the ‘streets in the sky’ and the space of juxtaposition occupied in council homes – namely, stability vs collapse; security vs fear; creation vs destruction. It examines theories of working-class apathy and defeat (McKenzie, 2017) while arguing for the potential of these spaces to be sites of world-building, imaginaries and alternative futures. Moreover, it looks at how council housing in late 20th century Scotland are archetypes for contemporary visionaries concerned with progression, nationhood and unity in a country at the brink of collapse, and the ways in which schemes subvert ideas around progression, linearity and futurity.

I centre two main works of fiction in this paper: *Our Fathers* (1999), by Andrew O’Hagan, and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995), by Irvine Welsh. However, I also draw on other relevant texts to examine themes of surveillance (*The Panopticon* (2012), Jenni Fagan) and play (*Young Mungo* (2022), Douglas Stuart).

BIO: I am a MScR English Literature student at the University of Edinburgh, with my research focusing on the coming-of-age experience of the working-class in Scotland, as depicted in contemporary fiction and memoir. My thesis is titled ‘*Who’s the man around here?: A literary exploration of ‘coming-of-age’ and the gendered landscape on the Scottish scheme in the late 20th century.*



‘Home, Like No Place Is There’: Masonic Nationalism and the Literary Landscapes of Robert Burns’

Patrick Jamieson, University of Glasgow

ABSTRACT: Freemasonry is one of Scotland’s most successful exports, and yet it has scarcely been analysed as a context within Scottish Literary Studies. This is largely self-inflicted: the secrecy of ‘the Craft’ is not conducive to outside research, while the fraught political landscape of the eighteenth-century led the masonic lodge to be championed as a neutral space of democratic, universal brotherhood: a ‘noplacel’. It was to this value that Robert Burns gestured in his 1795 masonic-republican anthem ‘A Man’s a Man for a’ That’. But where did this espoused neutrality originate, and was it truly accurate? This paper will highlight the cultural and political divisions within eighteenth-century Freemasonry, and show how both the physical and imaginary lodge space was politicised as a symbol of pro-Stuart Scottish and/or pro-Hanoverian British identity. It will identify a correlation between Robert Burns’ masonic activity across 1787 – the lodges he visited, chapters he joined, and freemasons with whom he corresponded – and a burgeoning interest in Stuart history, examining how practices within the noplacel of the masonic lodge influenced the highly politicised landscapes of Burns’ early Jacobite writing, and how the mythology of Scottish Freemasonry dovetailed with the Bard’s developing Jacobite Sentimentalism.

BIO: Patrick Jamieson is a PhD researcher with the University of Glasgow and Co-Founder of independent publisher Taproot Press. His research, funded by the Grand Lodge of Scotland, explores the reciprocal relationship between Freemasonry and Robert Burns throughout the poet’s life, work, and afterlife.



**‘Ethical Literary Criticism of Animal Ethics in Burns’ Poetry’
LV Xin, Shanghai International Studies University**

ABSTRACT: Burns’ poetry is oriented towards the natural scenery of Scotland, including its mountains, rivers, flora and fauna, yet it is the texts focused on animals that reveal a sustained ethical concern with non-human life. Using ethical literary criticism, this paper examines the ethical environment surrounding animals, the ethical issues involved, and the ethical choices represented in the poems. This reveals the depth and consistency of Burns’ zoocentric morality.

BIO: LV Xin, a PhD student at the School of English Studies in Shanghai International Studies University. My research focuses on British and American literature, as well as the English translation of Chinese classics. I have published 8 papers on a range of topics, including translation, literature and education.



PANEL 2: EMOTIONS AND SPACE – 2:55-3:50PM

‘Roaring (...) olive branch carried by the dove of peace’: Nuclear Anxiety in Compton Mackenzie’s *Rockets Galore*’

Oliver Greenall, University of Glasgow

ABSTRACT: Scotland was home to one of the first civil-military nuclear power stations, it was on the front line of the Cold War, and it remains the site of the UK’s deterrence system. Through an analysis of Compton Mackenzie’s *Rockets Galore* (1957), I will demonstrate that nuclear anxiety is foundational to the cultural and political histories of contemporary Scotland, bound up in longer-running debates about land ownership, ecology, and local and national autonomy.

This paper will argue that Mackenzie’s depiction of a community at the front line of ‘nuclear progress’ serves as a warning against the continuation of past trauma and historical violence; for all its ‘promises’ of bringing these islands into the 20th century, the government’s nuclear plans threaten to revisit the Highland Clearances and finish what the landowners started hundreds of years earlier.

Inspired by the real-life protests by islanders in 1955 against the government’s intentions to situate a nuclear rocket range on South Uist, Mackenzie’s bitter farce, currently out of print and dismissed by critics as a Cold War curio, is a novel concerned with celebrating and protecting a ‘traditional’ Gaelic way of life, and fighting against the unstoppable force of ‘nuclear progress’.

BIO: Oliver Greenall is a SGSAH-funded PhD researcher in Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow. His project explores nuclear anxiety in Scottish Literature since 1945, and is a literary history that ranges widely, from realist novels to Sci-Fi magazines, folk-songs to agitprop theatre, and public information broadcasts to video games.



‘Divided Selves: Calvinist Inheritance, Psychic Splitting, and Catharsis in the Scottish Gothic Tradition’
Steph Baker, University of Dundee

ABSTRACT: This paper examines Scottish Gothic Literature as a site for the production of collective catharsis and psychic play, via the staging of internal division. It focuses on Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), illustrating internal division and doubling as a particularly Scottish form of gothic abjection. I argue that this distinctive Scottish model of gothic monstrosity is rooted in cultural and theological identity. Hogg’s Gil-Martin and Stevenson’s Hyde blur the boundaries of morality and transgression, alongside the self and other. While the former self-bifurcates via Calvinism and the latter through science, both characters enact destabilisation as gender distortion.

These texts use gender distortion as a mechanism for exposing inner life and death drives, fused to create libidinal aggression. They generate fear and exhilaration through the illustration of taboo and transgressive impulses. This naturally becomes cathartic, in part due to the safety element of literary exploration of unspeakable psychic realities, which would otherwise be prohibited. By situating these texts in their Scottish contexts, this paper shows how cultural, national and religious components inevitably generate gothic depictions of identity and psyche as inherently divided.

BIO: Steph Baker is a post-graduate researcher of English Literature at the University of Dundee, focusing on Nineteenth Century Gothic literature. Her research explores gender and sexual distortion, psychic splitting, and catharsis in gothic narratives, with particular attention to Scottish writers and the interplay of theology, psychology, and national identity in the formation of gothic monstrosity.



‘Emotional Spaces in the Maitland Quarto’

Naomi Wallace, University of St Andrews

ABSTRACT: Although the study of the history of emotions has flourished since the late-twentieth century, only recently have studies of emotion emerged with discretely Scottish foci. A thorny but familiar contention within this burgeoning interest in Scottish histories of emotion is how to navigate the added qualifier – what makes an emotion ‘Scottish’? This paper uses the Maitland Quarto manuscript (c.1586) as a case study from which to formulate hypotheses about the emotional styles present in post-Reformation Scotland. The elegies which constitute the Quarto’s final section impart an emotional discourse that draws upon Calvinist soteriology and offers a trajectory of consolation based on dynastic continuity. Moving beyond this, this paper draws upon the theoretical approaches of Benno Gammerl and Monique Scheer, mobilising the notion emotional spaces to emphasise the importance of the material manuscript, and the physical community out of which it emerged. This emphasis on place – both imagined emotional spaces and the Maitland’s East Lothian/Edinburgh-based circle – offers one method for thinking about histories of emotion within a distinctly Scottish context. Through this, I demonstrate that the manuscript forms an emotional space within and upon which the communal grief generated by Sir Richard Maitland’s death is articulated and mediated.

BIO: Naomi is currently undertaking an MLitt in Medieval Studies at the University of St Andrews, where her thesis examines sixteenth- and seventeenth-century engagement with Scottish historical manuscripts. She has accepted an offer to study for a PhD in Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow which will focus on identity and memory in the manuscripts associated with the Maitland family.



‘What is it like there?’: Queer and Trans Scottish Alienness in Edwin Morgan’s *The Second Life* (1968) and Harry Josephine Gille’s *Them!* (2024)’

Domenico Di Rosa, University of Glasgow

ABSTRACT: Whilst Carole Jones claims that twentieth-century Scottish queers were perceived as ‘outsiders, parasites, and alien to the nation’s story’ (2016: 180), H. Josephine Giles’s latest poetry collection *Them!* (2024) also metaphorically associates contemporary trans life in Scotland to an alien existence. This paper analyses how Edwin Morgan and Giles celebrate queer and trans Scottish lives through concrete and sound poetry, and speculative compositions. The poets’ aesthetic forms strengthen their critique of queer and trans marginalisation via visual and audial elements which overwhelm societal prejudice and redress cisheteronormative literary narratives. Morgan’s slant towards queer futurity in *The Second Life* (1968) manifests via the envisioning of space (‘In Sobieski’s Shield’) and linguistic ambiguity (‘Canedolia’), merging modernist aesthetics and the metaphorical affinities between queerness and alienness. Giles’s use of sound entails a strategic practice which guarantees care and solidarity around trans collectives within and outwith Scotland. ‘Out of Existence’, for instance, is a visual poetry score which unfolds out of transphobic discourse superscribed by singing arrangements meant to challenge the former through irony. As a result, the poem holds the function of speech therapy for trans readers who can access gender-affirming care outwith neoliberal institutional healthcare providers and their paradoxical barriers.

BIO: Domenico Di Rosa is a doctoral researcher in Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow. Their thesis, ‘Affective Kinships across Time: Queer and Trans Narratives in Modern and Contemporary Scottish Literature’, investigates the works of Scottish writers who use literary techniques and devise aesthetic forms around queerness, transness and nonnormative kinships.



BREAK – 3:50- 4:00PM

PANEL THREE: SCOTLAND IN CIRCULATION – 4:00-4:55PM

‘From Ettrick to Europe to everywhere...’

Derek Meins University of Glasgow

ABSTRACT: The work of the now highly regarded poet, balladeer and novelist, James Hogg was not always met with such high praise during his lifetime. Now regarded as his masterpiece, his seminal work, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) was largely ignored upon its initial publication. It would take 100 years, a group of Bloomsbury Modernists, a controversial French Existentialist, a New York dwelling junkie Beat Poet and 1960’s feminist interpretation of his novel for it to be as celebrated as it is now.

Hogg’s text is fundamentally Scottish in its nature: the protagonist, Robert Wringham, flits between scenes in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Hogg’s own native Scottish Borders. However, the 20th century revisiting, republication and reappraisal of the novel was largely led by those based outside of Hogg’s homeland. Examining the publishing history of the work and investigating the people who led its renaissance, this presentation will explore how and why this once ignored text rose to become regarded as one of Scottish literature’s most commended works.

By examining two mid-20th century novels, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* by Muriel Spark (1960) and *Young Adam* by Alexander Trocchi (1954), the presentation will also explore the phenomenal influence that *Justified Sinner* has had on the Scottish novel since its 1920’s reawakening.

BIO: Derek Meins is a part-time PhD researcher in the Scottish Literature department of the University of Glasgow. His work explores the influence of



James Hogg's *Justified Sinner* on the modern Scottish novel. Growing up in the Scottish Borders, Meins studied an undergraduate degree at the Open University and an MA at the University of Sheffield before finding his spiritual home in Glasgow. Examples of his poetry and music have been released through Rough Trade Records and 1965 Records and published in *Route 65* magazine and *STAT* magazine.

'Materializing the Border: The Displaced Circulation and Performance of George Buchanan's Neo-Latin Drama'
Fang Chuanjie, Shanghai International Studies University

ABSTRACT: The maturation of printing technology offered the Scottish intelligentsia a material theatre for geopolitical contestation. This paper examines the material circulation and performance of George Buchanan's Neo-Latin drama as a strategic manifestation of Scottish sovereignty within the early modern archipelagic world. It argues that the offshore production of Buchanan's works—specifically *Baptistes* and *Jephthes*—printed primarily in France and the Low Countries constituted a form of material politics that re-situated the Scottish cultural border to resist English ideological appropriation. These productions existed in a state of creative fluidity, allowing Scottish political thought to remain resilient within the European Republic of Letters.

While the Neo-Latin medium provided a cosmopolitan veneer, the texts' radical constitutionalist rhetoric functioned as a mode of intellectual resistance rooted in a Scottish legal tradition. This extraterritorial existence allowed Scottish political thought to navigate archipelagic interstices, effectively bypassing the structural suppression of the London Stationers' Company. Ultimately, this study contends that Buchanan's strategic internationalism exemplifies how the local Scottish voice achieved its most potent national expression through its most physically displaced material form, reconfiguring the archipelagic literary geography long before the political Union of 1707.



BIO: I am a doctoral student at Shanghai International Studies University (SISU), researching the performance and circulation of early modern British drama. With a background in British and American drama from Beijing Jiaotong University (BJTU), my current research focuses on book culture, cross-cultural studies and New British History.

‘Queer Potentiality as Diplomatic Strategy in 15th Century Scottish Romance’

Alice Gibson, University of St Andrews

ABSTRACT: The lengths to which men will go to protect chivalric notions of masculinity is key to the narrative arcs of two fifteenth century Scottish romances: *Eger and Grime* and *Golagros and Gawane*. In the former text, Eger’s defeat at the hands of another knight is covered up and avenged by Grime; in the latter, when Gawain defeats Gologras in hand-to-hand combat, he agrees to pretend that Gologras won instead, in order to protect Gologras’ reputation in front of his court. This paper surveys Tison Pugh’s reading of *Eger and Grime* as a queer narrative, and will turn this lens towards *Golagros and Gawane*, ultimately arguing that the queer homosocial relationships in both narratives are essential to the diplomatic resolution of each text. I will therefore examine the way in which *Gologras* both furthers and contains this queerness, and suggest that Gawain’s queer potential is both embraced by and circumscribed within the text. In conjunction with my queer reading, I will revisit the geographic particularities of these texts, in order to suggest that these romances evince not just a specifically Scottish audience, but an audience in fifteenth century Scotland who were alive to queer possibilities in romance.

BIO: Alice Gibson is a SGSAH-funded PhD researcher co-supervised between the University of St Andrews and the University of Glasgow. Her research employs the methodology of fanfiction studies in order to examine

SPRING 2026 PG SYMPOSIUM



the active and engaged role of readers in medieval literary communities. Her project focusses on Scottish romances of the late fifteenth century and suggests a more diverse conception of the audiences who rendered this material popular is necessary to understand the relationship between late medieval readers and these texts.

Following the symposium, all attendees are invited to retire for drinks and further discussion.