

Sektionsvorschlag Anglistentag 2024 (Augsburg)

Scottish Futurities

The Scottish Government presented the Independence Referendum of 2014 as ‘a choice between two futures’. A ‘Yes’ vote would allow to ‘make the most of the many opportunities that lie ahead [...]’. The door will open to a new era for our nations.’ In contrast, ‘[i]f we vote No, Scotland stands still’. The Independence Referendum starkly put into relief a sense of futurity we understand not just as the notion of what will happen, or of a time that is not yet, but rather as the idea of the future intertwined with affective attachments such as hope and fear. This concept emphasises both the potentiality and transformative nature of thinking about what lies ahead – what José Esteban Muñoz calls ‘the not-quite-here’. The exploration of identities and imagined worlds through a future-oriented lens expands the present’s horizons, challenging established narratives and introducing new political concerns. This process of activating or modifying unrealised possibilities, which may involve counter-writing or queering, disrupts social structures and offers alternative political, cultural, and ethical avenues. Yet, as Arjun Appadurai reminds us, factors such as class, gender, and ethnicity determine who can envision and actively participate in shaping potential futures and might render thinking about a different tomorrow an almost insurmountable task. Also, hopeful attitudes towards the future can be instrumentalised, not least in liberal-capitalist societies that thrive on feeding ‘promises of happiness’ (Sara Ahmed), without, however, ever delivering on these. As Lauren Berlant argues in *Cruel Optimism*, for the individual, dreams of the good life can thus actually become obstacles to prospering. Therefore, futurity should be considered not only as a concept and theme, but as an active process of negotiating empowerment and social change.

Particularly suited to explore future visions, the creative arts reflect on the limitations of the past and transcend these in imaginative leaps, introducing fresh ideas and concerns with potential to lead to change. Futurity is literally engraved in the wall of the Scottish Parliament Building with a quotation attributed to Alasdair Gray: ‘work as if you live in the early days of a better nation’. However, explorations of Scottish futurities long predate devolution and the Independence Referendum. We find them in William Dunbar’s apocalyptic visions and Robert Burns’s Romantic horizons; in the Border ballads’ anticipative worldmaking and Hamish Henderson’s striving to revive folk communities; in Calvinist horizons and providential narratives; in David Lyndsay’s *Satyre* calling for political reforms in the mid-sixteenth century and 7/84’s urgent agitprop; in Walter Scott’s romantic conception of history as progress towards modernity and the potentialities of becoming offered by Catherine Carswell, Nan Shepherd, and Willa Muir; in Patrick Geddes’s urban civics and the wall-less spaces of the National Theatre of Scotland; in George Mackay Brown’s probing of the future of community and Hugh MacDiarmid’s socialist myths and dreams; in Edwin Morgan’s interstellar tomorrows and Naomi Mitchison’s memoirs of the future; in Alasdair Gray’s reimagined city as the rewritten fabric of the nation and James Kelman’s explorations of the possibilities of language and working-class experience; in Ali Smith’s narratives of hope and A. L. Kennedy’s question of what becomes; in Claire Cunningham’s choreographies of form-of-life and Jackie Kay’s creations of transformed identities; and in Douglas Stuart’s recent revisiting of struggles with limiting notions of masculinity and sexuality and recovering a sense of futurity in the post-Thatcher era.

In this section we seek to explore the diverse expressions of futurities in the Scottish context, from mediaeval and early modern imaginations of the future to reimaginings of past possibilities, and to opportunities and constraints on futurity within the present moment, particularly amidst current crises. With an inclusive definition of Scottishness as by birth, residence, or choice and encompassing the Scottish diaspora, we invite approaches from fields such as literature, theatre, cultural studies, visual arts, performance, spoken word events and oral storytelling, music, history, and beyond. We welcome papers that explore a wide range of topics related to Scottish futurities, including but not limited to:

- Envisioning the Beyond: Apocalyptic and Dystopian Visions in Scottish Mediaeval and Early Modern Literature

- The Futurity of a Justified Sinner: Calvinist Horizons and Providential Narratives
- Haunting the Future: the Temporalities of Scottish Gothic
- Red Horizons: Socialist Futurities
- National(ist) Futurities: the Scottish Literary Renaissance
- Scottish Science Fiction and Fantasy
- Bella Caledonia: Devolution and the Imagination of Scotland's Futures
- Island Prospects: Shetland, Orkney, Hebrides
- Scottish Futurities and Ecological Consciousness
- Historical Futurities
- Scotland's Queer Futurities
- Scotland's Decolonial Futures
- Crip Futurity in Scottish Literature and Performance
- Crises of Futurity

Please submit a 300-word proposal (for a 20-min paper) and a short author bio (3-4 sentences) to j.boll@uni-konstanz.de and Nina.Engelhardt@ilw.uni-stuttgart.de by **15 January 2024**.

With this section, we would also like to promote the Scottish Literature and Culture Network (ScotLitCult), a collaborative platform dedicated to the scholarly discussion of Scottish literature and culture in the DACH region (Germany, Austria, Switzerland), fostering exchange and advancing research and HE teaching in this field.

Website: <https://scotlitcult.blogspot.com/>

Sektionsleitung:

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