



Romanticism on the Net

The Coastal Turn in Romantic Studies

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Abstract

This introductory article explores the opportunities opened up by a coastal turn in Romantic Studies. I analyse critical preoccupations in the connected fields of the environmental and blue humanities to make a case for the value of Coastal Studies to approach past and present coastal encounters. Scotland's coast – the most expansive of Britain and Ireland – offers an exemplary case study to get into the prepositional ways of being *on*, *of*, *by*, and *with* the coast and to delve into the various forms through which they manifest in textual, visual, and material forms as lived-in environments that are shaped by artistic, colonial, economic, political, and scientific agendas. I suggest the year 1814 as a critical vantage point via readings of William Daniell and Walter Scott, whose works bring into focus the existence of multiple temporalities in coastal spaces, from the ancient to the ultra-modern and imagined future. By bringing together the voices of artists, critics, and curators and the material realities of Scotland's coastal environments past and present, the special issue investigates the production of coastal knowledges two centuries ago as a process that informs twenty-first-century Romantic Studies. I argue that the coast emerges as a place and an environment that puts pressure on our understandings of genres, practices, and temporalities.

Biographical Note

Anna Pilz is an independent researcher specialising in nineteenth-century Irish and Scottish writing. Her work focuses on narratives of environmental change, particularly in relation to woodlands and coastscapes. With an emphasis on archival research, Pilz's work combines methodologies and conceptual frameworks from ecocriticism, cultural geography, and environmental history. She is a Team Member of the Irish Women's Writing Network and is co-editor of a special issue on Irish Women's Collaborations and Networks, 1880–1940 (*English Studies*, 2023). Pilz is an academic developer at the University of Edinburgh.

Uses and Abuses of Romanticism

1. With the publication of her anthology *Antlers of Water* in 2020, Kathleen Jamie announced a “new Scottish nature writing” (Introduction xi). Her twenty-three commissioned contributors are well acquainted with “Scotland’s peculiarities” as well as “its tourist appeal and lingering Romanticisation; its ongoing tension between economic exploitation and conservation; its chronic issues around land ownership and dispossession; its restive political situation; its vast, beautiful coastline; its infamous weather” (xiii). To romanticise Scotland, for Jamie, means to perceive it as “a wild and romantic place” (xii); and *wild*, in turn, is understood as uncoupled from human habitation and influence. “We have space,” she writes, “but the ‘wild’ is actually hard to find. Human intervention is everywhere. . . . There are rugged Atlantic shorelines, but they are littered with plastic trash” (xv). She has a point. “Romantic” ideas of place and aesthetics are discarded as unrepresentative of lived experience and devoid of political power. The climate crisis changes human-environment relationships in ways that require new practices of engaging with, living in, and looking at and out for environments. Jamie asserts that despite nature writing’s Romantic inheritances, it is precisely “our increasing awareness of unfolding ecological crisis” that makes *this* nature writing “new” (xii). In response, Jamie calls for an informed register whereby she appears to suggest that *to romanticise* ought to be replaced by *to notice*: “As we realise we must halt destruction, reduce emissions and renegotiate our relationship with the natural world, our *noticing* is a vital contribution” (xvi).

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2. Such a distrust and impatient dismissal of prevailing uses of Romantic notions cannot only be found in cultural productions, but also in the Scottish Parliament where nature conservation is on the political agenda.¹ In late September 2021, Emma Roddick, the SNP MSP for the Highlands and Islands, articulated the ways in which a modern interpretation of Romanticism is seen to inform misguided approaches to rewilding projects in the Highlands:

Rewilding can and should happen in conjunction with re-peopling, but it will not if you dream up your big rewilding ideas based on a romantic or even Cumberland-esque vision of a sparse, deserted Highlands, rather than on the voices and experiences of the local community, who currently use it, currently live in it. The Highlands are not just sparsely populated, they are still cleared.²

Roddick invokes a purportedly Wordsworthian Romanticism that, for her, is an aesthetic notion detached from sociopolitical and historical realities that cloaks the legacies of dispossession in the Scottish context. She is not alone in such misconceptions of Romantic meanings that tether them to England, and root them to the Lake poets in particular. There remains a critical suspicion about the uses of Romantic inheritances in our contemporary moment of climate emergency. As Kate Rigby notes in her 2020 study *Reclaiming Romanticism*, “I have become troubled by the summary dismissal of Romanticism *per se* that has become commonplace among ecocritics and eco-poets, who are at pains to dissociate themselves from such allegedly ‘romantic’ misdemeanours as individualism,

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sentimentalism and an anachronistic hankering after either pastoral idylls or sublime wilderness” (2).

3. These conversations of dismissal and reclamation in cultural productions, political discourse, and scholarship have haunted Romanticism since the nineteenth century, as highlighted by Arthur O. Lovejoy in his influential 1924 essay “On the Discrimination of Romanticisms.” In this special issue, I join Rigby and others in attempting to reevaluate Romantic inheritances by reopening Lovejoy’s call for Romanticisms. Romanticisms in the plural, some might say, muddy the waters and shies away from definitions. Yet conversing over definitions jeopardises the opportunity to widen the remit and lean into the complexities. As the examples above indicate, Romanticism *is* a touchstone for imagining, encountering, and understanding place. Romanticisms in the plural take account of local richness and geographical (as well as national) diversity that play out across different temporalities; of linguistic varieties where “Romantic” vocabularies and vernaculars mean different things to different communities; and of different forms of knowledge production and creative expression. Romanticisms make visible the coexistence of multiple temporalities that come into sharp focus if we turn our attention to coasts.

4. Scottish Romantics, like English Romantics, have been reclaimed from the idea of an aesthetic-focused imagination. The aesthetic blueprint of the *Highland landscape* that emerged during the period, popularised to a great extent by Walter Scott, has been juxtaposed in recent critical interventions with the perceived failures of improvement schemes due to the absence of a developing industrialisation and in opposition to the

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realities of (un)sustainable local economies (Jonsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier*). As Susan Oliver has reminded us, “Scotland’s nineteenth-century picturesque and sublime landscapes of wildness (think Landseer’s *Monarch of the Glen*, 1851) were a fiction in their own right. . . . Those landscapes had not been devoid of human settlement and community activity for millennia, until the clearances” (“Reading” 173). She takes up Tom Devine’s suggestion that we replace *wilderness* with *derelict landscape* in relation to the clearances, in order to reexamine “the ideology of improvement,” resulting in “major questions where environmental and ecological justice is concerned” (165).

5. Jamie and Roddick exemplify contemporary interpretations of the terms *romantic* and *Romanticisation*. They are right to be suspicious of the frequent and widespread harnessing of Romantic aesthetics that disregard historical legacies of dispossession and displacement rooted in the very same period, or of the selective picturesque and sublime framings in tourism brochures that place the realities of capitalist and industrial matter from plastic to oil far from our minds. But the need to dismiss Romantic notions only indicates the extent to which the contemporary moment continues to be saturated in the Romantic imagination. Rather than dispel it, then, we must reengage with the rich and productive currents that run under the aesthetic surface, then and now. More than twenty years ago, Hugh Dunkerley argued against a “need to rid ourselves of the Romantic inheritance” and advocated, instead, “that we need to be aware of how it shapes our views of nature and of ourselves. What we need . . . is a constant reappraisal of that inheritance rather than an easy acceptance of it” (77–78). In her rendition of Robert Burns’s “Now Westlin’ Winds” on her 2017 album *A Pocket of Wind Resistance*, the Scottish singer-songwriter and folk

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musician Karine Polwart takes his line on “tyrannic man’s dominion” as the thread that allows her to braid the past and present in her ecological reflections. This reappraisal is an ongoing process.

6. A turn to the coast can put the wind in the sails. As Nigel Leask states in his contribution here, Scotland’s coasts were central to “improvement, especially in the Highlands and Islands, where economic activity was shifting from inland glens to coastal fisheries, kelp stations, and new settlements to rehouse tenants from the hinterland, cleared to make way for sheep. Coasts had never been so important.” Coasts, as geographical spaces that are often written about in terms of edges and peripheries, emerge as central catalysts for key Romantic preoccupations, then *and* now, with the power to decentre prevailing misconceptions.

7. This special issue takes Scotland’s coastal Romanticisms as a case study to get into the prepositional ways of being *on*, *of*, *by* and *with* the coast and delves into the various forms through which they manifest in textual, visual, and material forms as lived-in environments that are shaped by artistic, colonial, economic, political, and scientific agendas. The artist and writer Christina Riley adds one more preposition to the list, when she opens her reflection on “Fragments of Romance” with a nod to “a romantic notion to let the coast happen *to* you.” Together, the contributors explore Romanticisms’ relation to and with the coast. How did different groups imagine and interact with coastal environments? What motivated them to look out to sea, and what meaning emerged for them from the encounter? Where might we find narratives of ecological practices on- and offshore, and evidence of

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coastal vernaculars? What coastal vocabularies emerge from the Romantic archive and what do we hear and learn when we listen to them?

Noticing a Coastal Turn in Time

8. The “lure of the sea,” as Alain Corbin argues in his foundational study of the same title, has its origins in the Romantic era when writers, travellers, surveyors, geologists, natural historians, artists, and thinkers looked to Europe’s coasts in new ways, responding to and accelerating shifts in aesthetics, in pursuit of leisure or inspiration, to seek new knowledge through natural history and geological exploration, and by surveying and mapping shorelines for military purposes, colonial expansion, or agricultural and coastal development that in turn facilitated tourism infrastructures.

9. It was on Scotland’s coast that the geologist James Hutton came to notice and subsequently articulated the material evidence of a deep geological past in the 1780s. Accompanied by James Hall and John Playfair, Hutton journeyed by boat along the Berwickshire coast in 1788 (Furniss 188). Playfair described the implications of this coastal encounter in his often-cited biographical account of Hutton: “The mind seemed to grow giddy by looking so far into the abyss of time; and while we listened with earnestness and admiration to the philosopher who was now unfolding to us the order and series of these wonderful events, we became sensible how much farther reason may sometimes go than imagination can venture to follow” (qtd. in Furniss 191). In our present moment of accelerated climate crisis, the imagination still faces this challenge. Karine Polwart reimagines that boat

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journey in her song “Siccar Point,” the site where “the three men find no trace of a beginning, no prospect of an end.” Talking to Richard Fisher for his BBC reel on Hutton alongside David Farrier, Polwart draws attention to “the horizon line” that one notices from Siccar Point: it brings into view the volcanic plug of North Berwick Law, cement works at Dunbar, Torness nuclear power station, and the Bass Rock, connecting multiple temporalities stretching into deep time of past and future. There is a soberness to the observation. But, as David Farrier reflects, “There’s definitely that sense of the sublime there, of something that overwhelms and far exceeds the human scale” (Fisher).

10. Yet Romantic scholarship took its time to shift its focus from “green writing” on land to water. In his 2015 study *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization, 1550–1791*, Steve Mentz built on his earlier call that set in motion what became known as the “blue humanities” and proposed a critical engagement with a “blue ecology”:

The sea’s overwhelming presence in the natural environment reminds us that this element, long marginalized by ecocritical perspectives that privilege terrestrial spaces, can help correct lingering pastoral or Romantic fantasies about Nature. Thinking with the two thirds of the earth’s surface covered by the sea can develop a “blue” corrective to “green” environmental criticism. (xxix)

Yet the coast – neither land nor sea proper – is neither *truly* green nor *truly* blue. It is an interstitial space with no firm boundary; the shifting tidelines stretch and contract, sea levels rise, and waves carve off soft rock, make invisible and visible, take away and offer.

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11. Recent scholarship in the environmental and blue humanities has seen a burgeoning exploration of seas and oceans, with sometimes central and sometimes peripheral attention to coasts. When the coast is central, the focus is on its liminality, metaphorical richness, aesthetic appeal, political and economic relevance, and environmental fragility (Allen et al., *Coastal Works*; Cohen; Gillis, *Human Shore*; Worthington). Coastal environments have also been central to the shaping of archipelagic criticism (Allen et al., *Coastal Works*; Gange; Hewitt and Pilz; Pilz). Relevant to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contexts in particular, Samuel Baker's *Written on Water* shifts the focus from England's lakes to Britain's maritime culture in a detailed study of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Arnold; Matthew Ingleby and Matthew Kerr's 2018 collection, *Coastal Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, explores "the coast's place in culture"; and in their "collaboratively constructed discussion" on "'Better Lore' of the Romantic Coast," Baker and colleagues trace how coastlines help "to describe dynamics of commerce and settlement across centuries, and can even reposition literature programs in dynamic relation to historical patterns of extractive capital inside as well as outside of our universities" (212). Two of Baker's interlocutors, Alexander Dick and Eric Gidal, are seeking contributions for a forthcoming special issue on coasts for *Eighteenth-Century Studies* at the time of writing.³

12. Connected to and overlapping with these critical journeys is the developing interdisciplinary field of coastal studies (Allen et al., *Coastal Works*; Gillis, "Afterword" and *Human Shore*; Pastore; Worthington). In 2020, David Worthington from the University

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of the Highlands and Islands formed the Coastal History/Studies Network, an international and interdisciplinary group of scholars.⁴ These developments have confirmed a “tipping point” with the new journal *Coastal Studies & Society* that launched in March 2022. As Joana Gaspar de Freitas, Robert James, and Isaac Land posit in their debut issue editorial, to understand coastal environments it is not enough to know how they work: “they have to be considered also as living spaces and imagined futures, features that are embedded in local cultural practices and meaning-making traditions” (4). By drawing attention to “traditions,” “living spaces,” and “imagined futures” they are attentive to the multiple temporalities that are alive at the coast and expose competing realities and imaginaries.

Putting Pressure on Form – Scotland’s Coast

13. At 18,743 km in length – including over nine hundred islands – Scotland’s coastline is longer than any other in Britain or Ireland. Marine Scotland estimates that the area of Scotland’s seas can be measured at about 462,315 km², which is “nearly six times larger than the land area of Scotland” (“Facts”). The Scottish coast is, quantitatively speaking, central. The centrality of the coast to Scottish life shines through in two anthologies that gather sea stories: Alistair Lawrie and colleagues’ 1988 *Glimmer of Cold Brine: A Scottish Sea Anthology* has a thematic arrangement of its poems, songs, prose, and photographs – drawn “deeply from vernacular sources” dating across the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries – that record life by, at, and with the sea, from childhood perspectives to women’s and widows’ voices, from customs to fishing and whaling practices. Ten years later, Brian Osborne and Ronald Armstrong edited *Echoes of the Sea: Scotland & the Sea – An*

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Anthology, collecting a larger body of texts from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, including excerpts from Scott's *The Lord of the Isles*, *The Pirate*, and "Vacation 1814," as well as from Samuel Johnson, Robert Louis Stevenson, and John Galt.

14. Coastal spaces and places are "where the ocean impacts human lives the most" (Gaspar de Freitas et al., 3). The view from the land out to sea with the horizon dividing this body of water and the sky is impacted by what we know about the dynamics between water, atmosphere, and earth, and by our attention to notice and translate that noticing into meaning. It is at the coast where the relationship between bodies of water and land play out. Scotland's coasts feature in such exhibitions as *Tides Changing / Changing Tides* (2020/2021), with contributing artists including David Cass focusing "on the effects we are having on our coasts and waters and the harsh truths that are unfolding before us" ("Timeline"). Among those harsh truths sit flooding, rising sea levels, and coastal erosion. The Scottish Government's "Dynamic Coast Research Summary" report for 2021 noted that "coastal erosion currently affects 46% of soft shorelines (an increase from 38% over that reported in 2017)" (Rennie et al.). In 2019, Cass opened his fifth solo exhibition, *Rising Horizon*, at The Scottish Gallery. Using found objects such as recycled plastic waste and metals, he engaged with the theme of rising sea levels.⁵ With such harsh truths comes the need to look with a new attentiveness, to notice the interconnections between past, present, and future.

15. At the time of writing, there is a notable intensification of interest around coastal ecologies and communities of practice. The Young Academy of Scotland has set up an online

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exhibition that includes visuals, memories, stories and videos about Scotland's coasts under the theme of "Coastal Knowledge."⁶ At the University of the Highlands and Islands, the Centre for Recreation and Tourism manages the COAST project, a community-led collaboration with thirty-two local story gatherers that "aims to help in sustaining local communities, supporting them to protect and share the rich natural and cultural heritage through high-quality experiences – for both visitors and locals alike" ("About Us"). The Royal Society of Edinburgh recently funded two projects that turn their attention to Scotland's coast in relation to the nineteenth-century literary imagination. Emily Alder and Giulia Champion are leading a project on Scottish Shores: Gothic Coastal Environments that launched the Haunted Shores Network, and Katie Garner (who is among the contributors to this special issue) is leading an interdisciplinary and collaborative project on *Sounding Scotland's Waters, 1800–1900: History, Literature, Science*.⁷ Scotland's coast, then, is of central concern to the process of reappraising and revitalising the meaning-making of coastal encounters, representations and ways of life across the societal, creative, and academic spheres.

16. Visit Scotland had declared 2020 the "Year of the Coasts and Waters," signalling a wider public turn to the coast. It felt appropriate as I was set to begin work on a new research project on travel writing about Ireland and Scotland's Atlantic coasts. But then the storm cloud of COVID-19 hit. Funded by the European Commission's Marie Skłodowska-Curie scheme, I relocated from Germany to Edinburgh amid a global pandemic and found myself in lockdown. A project about travel and the Atlantic coast started off with non-travel and on the North Sea coast. During that time of lockdown immobility, I noticed a general urge

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– either actualised or imagined – to visit the coast, accompanied by the popularity of sea shanties,⁸ photographs of beach pebbles and seashells, and an embodied urge to brave the waves with a rise in wild swimming.

17. The intervention of the global pandemic and its lockdowns meant that the imaginative engagements with physical geographies were ever more important, giving an urgency to creative works such as the Ayrshire-based artist Christina Riley. In daily Tweets between March and July 2020, Riley shared her photographic record of her daily beachcombing. Riley’s aesthetic mode of arranging the coastal objects on white paper recalled nineteenth-century illustrations of natural history, and the project was published in 2021 by Guillemot Press with the apt title *The Beach Today*. In her introduction, Riley writes that “[n]othing else can rouse the whirling wonder and grounding awe of standing at the shoreline, looking out across an expanse of seemingly endless blue with so many mysteries held above and beneath its surface” (1). But as Riley notes, for her, “the beach ceased being singular” (2). When I read the introduction to *The Beach Today*, the references to “awe” and “wonder” called out and made me wonder about the words in circulation to describe coastal encounters and their Romantic inheritances. In her “Fragments of Romance,” Riley opens this special issue with a conversation between the past and present, and between image and text, tenderly and intimately reflecting on how a “romantic” commodified aesthetic might relate to an embodied and attentive “romance” with the coast.

18. Riley is one of many Scotland-based contemporary writers, creative practitioners, and musicians whose situated and embodied experiences shape their artistic creations.

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Embedded in coastal experiences, the Fair Isle-born singer-songwriter Inge Thomson's 2014 album *Da Fishing Hands*⁹ along works of her contemporaries contradicts John Gillis's statement, in his afterword to Allen and colleagues' *Coastal Works*, that

life follows art. Now we all view the sea through artists' eyes, through the perspective of outsider, of someone *on* the coast, but not *of* the coast, someone who lives *by* the sea, but does not know how to live *with* it. Coasts which were once seen as broad zones where history was made are now a kind of non-place where we turn our backs not just to land, but to the past itself. Both maritime art and maritime history encourage us to overlook the coast, to turn it into the edge of something else rather than the special place it actually is. (264)

Artists and musicians such as Cass, Riley, and Thomson have turned their attention to the coast. The temporal inhabits all their projects, whether they relate to intergenerational fishing practices or the changing horizon. The material realities of the ecological coast are never out of sight in their work.

19. Investigating Scottish cultural productions that engage with coastal environments means to reassemble the literary, colonial, economic, political, and scientific contexts. There is not only *one* way of looking at the coast, but multiple ways and a variety of coastal knowledge productions. The material, historical, and geographical particularities of Scotland's coast are at the forefront of this issue. All contributors have shaped and are in conversation with recent Romantic scholarship on Scotland that has seen fresh perspectives on tourism

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(Leask, *Stepping*; Bonehill et al.), geological travel writing (Furniss) and natural history (Jonsson, “Natural History”), the origins of environmentalism in the Scottish Highlands (Jonsson, *Enlightenment’s Frontier*) alongside readings of bardic poetry as an imaginative response to environmental catastrophe (Gidal), the works of Walter Scott in the context of environmental consciousness (Oliver *Walter Scott*), and attention to coastal regionalisms (McKeever).

20. In a review essay on Romantic ecocriticism, Jeremy Davies calls for a “new materialist Romantic ecocriticism” that pays closer attention to “prosaic or out-of-the-way things [which] might acquire increasingly world-altering powers: coal, sheep, cotton plants, cowpox pustules, blackthorn hedges, turnips, breadfruit, Leyden jars, and railways” (“Romantic Ecocriticism” 12). Taking such an approach to the Romantic coast, Davies’s list can be expanded to include, for example, kelp, shipwrecks, steamships, whale oil, mermaids, stuffed fish, lighthouses, navigational charts, and salt herring. All these “things” can be in relation to *on*, *of*, *by* and *with* particular coasts that – through the development of colonial infrastructures – connect to other coastal spaces. What is implied in these prepositional ways of seeing is the discrepancy between looking *at* a landscape and living *in* an environment, the outsider’s view *of* and the inhabitant’s lived experience *in* a local and regional ecosystem that connects to colonial infrastructures, extractive economies, and global ecologies. Romantic Scotland’s coastal materialities can surface neglected, forgotten, or silenced narratives.

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21. Among those neglected narratives is one that connects coastal ecologies to economic and colonial histories. Building on his call for a “new materialist Romantic ecocriticism,” Davies makes the case in an editorial to a special issue of *Studies in Romanticism* “that Romantic literary studies has much to learn from recent scholarship in economic history” (“Introduction” 187), Davies focuses on the Highlands to highlight how “the developments on the British mainland were bound with transformations of the Atlantic and colonial economy” (197–98). As Leask shows, this is particularly true in relation to the coast as “the principal market for Scottish salted herring was as cheap fodder for enslaved Africans on Caribbean plantations” (Leask, ““Penetrat[ing]”” 316). David Alston gives the example of the establishment of a curing station on Stronsay in Orkney where, in 1817, “four hundred boats were fitted out and for a number of years the salt herring were exported directly to the Caribbean” (226). By pointing to the interconnection of the slavery emancipation movement and the collapse of the Scottish salt herring market, Leask (““Penetrat[ing]””) indicates the ways in which Scotland’s coast participated in and shaped colonial coastal infrastructures.
22. Coast and water, then, take up a prominence in the artistic, civic, and scholarly sphere that calls for critical attention. *Scotland’s Coastal Romanticisms* contributes to these timely conversations by investigating coastal encounters in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the different forms of engagement and exchange they brought to life. From fishing industries to seaweed collection, from geological explorations to the development of tourism along the Western Highlands and Islands, from folklore to shipwrecks, from infrastructural developments such as the Bell Rock to the consolidation

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of trade routes that connect Scotland's coasts to Scandinavia, Ireland, the West Indies as well as the United States – Scottish writing offers a rich archive to investigate narratives that take place and wash up on the shore, or set sail from the coast to journey elsewhere. Where bodies of water meet land, they literally put pressure on form. They not only carve off soft shorelines, they shape forms of life in coastal spaces and places, forms of literary expression and narrative, forms of cultural and knowledge productions, and forms of engagement. In what ways, then, did a turn to Scotland's coastal environments put pressure on such forms historically and historiographically? And where does such an enquiry lead us in search for a new agenda for Romantic studies in the twenty-first century?

Coastal Scotland in 1814 – Two Views

23. A Romantic turn to Scotland's coasts comes into sharp focus in 1814. At the beginning of that year, the first volume of *A Voyage Round Great Britain* was published. This was (initially) a collaborative project between the London-born dramatist Richard Ayton (1786–1823) and the English landscape artist and printmaker William Daniell (1769–1837), who embarked on a journey around Britain's coasts in 1813, eventually resulting in the publication of eight lavishly illustrated volumes. This project articulated a new turn to the coast with Scotland given key prominence.¹⁰ Three volumes – published between 1818 and 1820, and containing 139 of Daniell's 308 aquatints – offered pictorial representations of Scotland's coasts that captured, and would shape, its aesthetic characteristics. The February 2019 issue of the magazine *Scottish Field* features a lengthy illustrated article on Daniell, arguing that “he reshaped popular perceptions [of the Scottish coast] forever”

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(“How”). Such historic and repeated contemporary circulation and consumption of coastscapes can be considered as “coastal infiltration” whereby cultural productions of the coast such as prints, exhibits, and panoramas were rendered “portable, transportable and available” (Ingleby and Kerr 6, 8).¹¹

24. The opening introduction to the first volume of *A Voyage* asserts that “the Coast has hitherto been most unaccountably neglected, and, if we except a few fashionable watering-places, is entirely unknown to the public.” This ambitious endeavour appeals to a different type of traveller than the one who frequents seaside resorts: to one who is *not* interested in matters of convenience and ease of travel, but rather wishes to experience “ruggedness and sublimity, features for which coast scenery is most to be admired.” Ayton’s and Daniell’s explicit aim in their turn to the coast was “to illustrate the grandeur of its natural scenery, the manners and employment of people, and modes of life, in its wildest parts” (Ayton and Daniell iii) It was, in other words, an attempt to give the coast an artistic expressive form, and to document and visualise coastal ecologies and the lives of coastal communities. In its entirety, *A Voyage* pays tribute to the variety of coastal environments and infrastructures, with depictions of lighthouses and harbours, lochs, fishing activity, Gothic ruins, wrecked ships, meandering tourists looking out to sea, and attention to geological formations such as those found at Staffa. As Robert Macfarlane notes in his preface to the 2008 Folio Edition of *A Voyage*, “Daniell was clearly fascinated by the hard work of the sea life: dredging, hauling, loading, tugging, shipping. Here you will find steamships as well as stone-age ruins: The ultra-modern co-existing with the picturesquely ancient” (Shepherd ix).

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25. Lighthouses are among those “ultramodern” human interventions at the coast to which Daniell attends. Shining out offshore from Arbroath to the North Sea for the first time in 1811, the Bell Rock, designed by Robert Stevenson, is the oldest rock lighthouse still standing and is often referred to as one of the seven wonders of the industrial world (Cadbury).¹² The civil engineering work of the Commissioners of the Northern Lights (established in 1786) facilitated another pivotal coastal journey in 1814. Only about half a year after the publication of the inaugural volume of *A Voyage* brought the coast into the wider cultural imagination, serendipity, and friendship with the celebrated lighthouse engineer Stevenson enabled Walter Scott to set off on his own journey around Scotland’s coasts aboard the commissioners’ yacht.¹³ They set sail in late July 1814 from Leith harbour in Edinburgh, journeying counter-clockwise around the coast and returning via steamship along the Forth of Clyde to Glasgow. The yacht’s trajectory and its stops along the way were determined by the commissioners’ aims to evaluate the present state of Scotland’s lighthouses and make plans for future coastal engineering improvements. Over the six-week journey, Scott kept a diary, “Vacation 1814,” published in 1837 as part of Lockhart’s *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*. At the time of writing, it was intended to be shared only with “a few friends” and, as such, constituted a half-private and half-public travel account. For Scott, the coastal exploration gave an opportunity to collect information about the west coast for *The Lord of the Isles* (1815), which he was working on at the time.¹⁴ In fact, extracts from his journal were recycled and first published in the notes to *The Lord of the Isles* such as to Cantos III and IV. Scott simply referenced the extracts as taken from “a journal kept during a tour through the Scottish islands” without

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identifying himself as the author.¹⁵ Apart from that, though, there was no other reason for Scott's voyage, as Penny Fielding reminds us, "than to *go on vacation*, and the language of his diary has often the feeling of an experience that is simply unfolding itself in the present" ("All" 248).

26. Scott's coastal journey subsequently informed Daniell's voyage. A suggested West Coast itinerary in Scott's hand is inserted in a copy of volume 3 of *A Voyage* that is held at the National Library of Scotland. The itinerary implies that Scott's coastal travel and the impressions he collected along the way of both familiar (East and West Coast) and unknown (Orkney and Shetland) coastal spaces may have shaped Daniell's visits. If Scott thus informed Daniell's encounter with Scotland's coast, it highlights the way in which the workings of civil engineering projects, travel, personal networks, and cultural productions contributed to the circulation of coastal knowledge productions. Indeed, Daniell dedicates volume 3 to Scott as a tribute to his influence: "I derived great benefit from the remarks you made to me in conversation respecting a region which you had recently explored with a poet's eye, and which your genius has rescued from obscurity." These lines of influence between forms – from the "poet's eye" to the artist's sketches and aquatints – are worth noting. In both cases, they resulted from processes of recording impressions in situ, while transforming and recycling these into different cultural productions later.

27. When Scott's eye turned to the Aberdeenshire coast in 1814, it noticed, "Along the bay of Belhelvie, a whole parish was swallowed up by the shifting sands, and is still a desolate waste" (10). Noticing coastal erosion and its (destructive) impact on coastal communities,

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Scott signals the historical fragility of life in particular coastal environments and goes on to describe the process: “The coast is here very rocky; but the rocks, being rather soft, are wasted and corroded by the constant action of the waves, - and the fragments which remain, where the softer parts have been washed away, assume the appearance of old Gothic ruins. There are open arches, towers, steeples, and so forth” (10–12). Scott attempts to make sense of this process of corrosive action by way of reading the remaining rock formations as ruined human infrastructure. This ecological coast is also a political coast. Today, the shifting sand dunes of the Aberdeenshire coast around Balmedie are a Site of Special Scientific Interest. To return again to Polwart’s contemporary lyrics, her song “Cover Your Eyes” draws on oral testimonies from local communities in Balmedie to give voice to “what it is that’s being stolen from them,” as the Trump International Golf Links enterprise arrives at the scene and takes away “their stories, their memories, and their whole sense of connection to the place.”¹⁶

28. The “poet’s eye” is not impartial to the aesthetics of the picturesque and sublime, but “Vacation 1814” is indicative of a much richer vocabulary of the Romantic archive. Scott’s attention to “the amphibious character of fishers and farmers” with “one foot on land and one on sea” (22), for instance, connects with a proverbial description of coastal dwellers who have “one foot in the boat, the other in the field” (Gillis, *Human Shore* 78). The geographical and environmental materiality of the coast shapes forms of life that demand their own vocabulary. As an amphibious habitat, the coast demands or calls into being a particular form of literary production that Penny Fielding refers to as “amphibious writing” that can be performed in different vernaculars (“Eels”). As Fielding argues for the existence

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of an “eco-vernacular,” she compellingly retraces the development of a regional print culture in relation to a revived interest in local languages in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Lines of connection might be identified with a contemporary publishing scene via such examples as Amanda Thomson’s 2018 *A Scots Dictionary of Nature* and Roseanne Watt’s 2019 poetry collection *Moder Dy / Mother Wave*. As highlighted by Magnus Course and Gillebride MacMillan, “Gaelic forms an essential part of a centuries-old relationship with the sea” (1).¹⁸ Opening up a Romantic archive to a linguistic plurality operating at Scotland’s coast would take into account Gaelic, Danish, French, Icelandic and Irish sources as one path for future enquiries to investigate “a coastal culture that is local in context and global in connection” (Allen et al., “Introduction” 4).

29. Scott’s diary offers only one indication for the possible reuses and Romantic reimaginings that have purchase in the context of Scottish coastal environments.¹⁹ They draw his attention into various directions of the lived realities of coastal communities and their connection to place. Among the things he notices are: the physical effects of journeying by sea; differing coastal ecologies “from a bold and rocky to a low and sandy character” (10); fishing trade networks and practices between Shetland, Orkney, Greenland, Denmark, and Norway; different communities of practice that navigate and move within coastal spaces from fishermen to whalers, sailors to mariners; the products that make their way into (“spirits, tea, coffee, tobacco, snuff and sugar” [17]) and out of harbours (salt herring); castle ruins; shipwrecks; “dreadful” deaths (10); local customs and “horrid” opinions (24); folklore; vernacular traditions of naming to navigate coastscapes; “ill-conducted” roads (25); agricultural practices; soil conditions; (missed) economic opportunities; lacking

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and/or enabling infrastructure; contact and exchange between coastal communities; the archipelagic nature of Scotland's coasts and islands; how coastal living conditions shape character; geological formations such as the Giant's Causeway; caves; lochs; landed investments in coastal spaces; curiosities of natural history via mermaid tales, kraken sightings, and a "massacre of Leviathans" (43); "curious specimens of natural history" (59); picturesque and romantic views and vistas.

30. In these attentive noticings we find an abundance of fragments for the art, natural, environmental, social, economic, and maritime historian, geologist, historian of science or those working in interdisciplinary fields such as coastal studies, environmental humanities, food studies, and migration studies. Scott's vacation has no clear focus. Daniell's Scottish tour highlights the archipelagic geography with perhaps the first pictorial representations of Orkney, Harris and Lewis, Raasay, Mull, Skye, Rum and Eigg. Neither offers a homogenous representation of *a* coast, but rather a fragmented coast where the cultural, ecological, economic, and political coast presents itself along various temporal registers. It is this multiplied view that is of value to the Romantic turn to the coast. Romantic-period methods of understanding, engaging with, and experiencing the coast drew on a variety of fields of knowledge and practices of knowledge production that often result or come together in a single cultural production. It is a way of modelling an interdisciplinary approach that relied on networks and the circulation of knowledge. Colonial infrastructures managed access to such knowledge networks with differing communities of practice. All contributors to this special issue ground their work in archives that bring those historic practices to light while embracing interdisciplinary approaches where references to literary

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critics, geographers, historians, natural historians, scientists, and coastal studies scholars enter productive conversations.

Scotland's Coastal Romanticisms

31. The interdisciplinary view of Scotland's coast is central in Susan Oliver's contribution here, in which Turner's *Bell Rock Lighthouse* (1819) is compared and contrasted with his sketches and drawings of a different rock in the Firth of Forth: the Bass. Oliver teases out the ways in which Turner brings together different knowledge systems and highlights the dynamic interplay of science and art that she describes as "an aesthetics of data" that invokes "a sense of awe and astonishment consistent with eighteenth-century and Romantic models of the sublime." Stevenson's description of the lighthouse during a storm presented one form of data for Turner; Oliver expands this database to geology and natural history. Drawing on key topics within the environmental humanities – deep time via the geologist and natural philosopher James Hutton, and species decline via the natural historian John Walker – she argues for "an interdisciplinary 'knowledge ecology'" at Scotland's coast. Oliver opens out to a comparison of literary and visual forms when she reads Turner's paintings alongside Hugh Miller's geological essays, arguing that both "communicate a sense of natural mystery and wonder that eludes either standard forms of scientific writing or more directly representational forms of art." The pictorial representations of the Bell Rock Lighthouse and the Bass Rock stand as reminders that diluted definitions of Romanticism foreclose the possibilities of temporal multiplicities. The coast brings these multiplicities into view as it acts as a pressure point to understand the coexistence of

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different temporalities that connect to different community practices, linguistic traditions, ways of encountering, and aesthetic registers of representation.

32. Like Oliver, Nigel Leask draws out the interdisciplinary make-up of a coastal aesthetic and investigates its underlying politics in his analysis of a different culture archive: William Daniell's aquatints of the Western Highlands and Islands. In *Stepping Westward*, Leask noted how "Daniell's letter-press description of key sites on the coastal itinerary (Smowe Cave, Loch Scavaig, Mingarry Castle) reads like a series of footnotes to Scott's poetry and *Pharos* narrative" (277). Here, he builds on his earlier work by situating Daniell's voyage in the literary history of Highland travel narratives by Pennant, Johnson, and Boswell with a focus on the relationship between text and image. Different genres (prose, poetry, visual art) and ways of looking at the coast infiltrate each other here, shaping Scotland's coastal Romanticisms past and present. In particular, Leask argues that "the aesthetic motives of an artist are closely related to the ideological concerns of the travel writer: in both senses, they are based on a colonial, or imperial vision of Britain." Reading Daniell's Scottish coastal views as a "sequel" to his earlier imperial view of Indian landscapes, Leask shows how Daniell aimed "to downplay the social crisis of *Gaidhealtachd* by reinventing it as scenery." An emphasis on economic shifts, from inland agriculture to coastal industries, and from fishing to kelping, enables a fresh consideration of new forms of coastal infrastructures.

33. Social crises in coastal communities come into sharp focus in Claire Connolly's contribution on "Watery Romanticism: Walking and Sailing West with Keats." Following

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Keats's crossing of the Irish Sea and the aesthetic and preconceived notions that he carried with him on that journey, Connolly dwells on Keats's letters alongside guidebooks, travel writing, and poetry. In "putting the term *romanticism* to work between and across bodies of water," Connolly combines English, Irish, and Scottish literary studies, following the channel opened up by David Duff and Catherine Jones in the introduction to their 2007 collection *Scotland, Ireland, and the Romantic Aesthetic*, where they state their ambition to make "possible a comprehensive remapping of the cultural geography of British and Irish, or 'archipelagic,' Romanticism" (11). To promote this line of enquiry, Connolly offers what Steve Mentz has termed "watery criticism" with its aim of "describing the complex workings of water in our environment and also imagining ways to change our relationship to it" (2). Elsewhere, Connolly makes a case for literature as a key archive to understand human-water relationships: "Composed of stories that can be retrieved, at least in part, culture offers a special kind of archive of Irish Sea crossings: richly textured, patterned, often voicing the views of elites but sometimes able to give us the trace of ordinary lives" (244). In one of his letters, Keats gives a "close up view of the old Irish woman he meets in Belfast," whom he describes in a letter as "a squalid old Woman squat like an ape half starved from a scarcity of Biscuit in its passage from Madagascar to the cape." By drawing our attention to Keats's letter about "the Duchess of Dunghill," in which he asks, "What a thing would be a history of her Life and sensations?" Connolly turns to the Romantic archive to explore the textures of such coastal lives.

34. In their telling of "A Tale of Two Stuffed Fish," the cultural historian Christopher Donaldson and James Maclaine, curator at the Natural History Museum (London), draw

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attention to the material reality of coastal environments by examining the way in which scientific explorers have experienced and explored global coastal regions. Responding to an archival find of a sketch of a stuffed Australian prowfish that John Ruskin made at the British Museum in 1817, they trace the fish's travel back to Sir James Clark's Antarctic voyage in 1843 and John Richardson's *Ichthyology of the Voyage* (1844). In the taxonomies and generalisations of Richardson and other naturalists, Donaldson and Maclaine find the mechanisms for the ways in which "the natural world [was] translated into units of colonial knowledge" and "colonial organisms were converted into museum objects." Indigenous communities and local guides were often the silenced and unnamed collaborators in the processes of knowledge production, even amid such efforts as Richardson's "desire to reveal and document native and vernacular knowledge about colonial species and their environments" in his account of *Salmo Tillibee/Ottonneebee*. This tale, then, opens new research avenues whereby the development of Scottish natural history and natural science relies on the development of colonial coastal infrastructures and the intersection of Indigenous and Western forms of knowledge production.

35. The fragility of species boundaries, and the silencing of certain forms of knowledge, are also addressed in Katie Garner's article, "The Caithness Mermaid, Female Testimony, and the Production of Coastal Knowledge." Here, the focus is a detailed description of an encounter with a marine creature at Scotland's northern coast. Eliza Mackay, a clergyman's daughter, wrote in a private letter about her sighting of a mermaid in 1809. Drawing on Donna Haraway's work on "situated knowledges," Garner traces the way in which Mackay's account circulated in the public realm through reprinting of her letter in the press

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and its appropriation in (male) writers' travel writings and satirical fiction. With her attention to human-marine animal encounters, Garner establishes the extent to which such encounters pushed the limits of existing forms of representation. As she notes, Mackay's "evidence intersects with folklore, science, and cultural history to suggest that understanding the Romantic coastline necessarily involves attending to a patchwork of intersecting – and emerging – situated knowledges, if we are to recover the experience of the local subject for which the sea was a daily presence."

36. The local and familiar is likewise the starting point for Gerard McKeever's article on "John Galt and the Horizons of the Firth of Clyde," in which he builds on his work on dialectical regionalism and the Solway Firth (2021). At the heart of McKeever's contribution is a dive into John Galt's travel writing, fiction, and autobiographies that brings to the surface the ways in which that dialectical regionalism "is rarefied under the pressure of migration and mobility." Focusing on Galt's coastal Scotland, McKeever connects the local coast of Greenock to the transatlantic and imperial context via Galt's improvement projects in Canada, a connection that leads to an exploration of Scotland's double colonialism. As McKeever notes, "[W]hat might strike us as cognitive dissonance was an essential feature of long eighteenth-century Scotland, where sophisticated home-longing marked an unfolding history of clearance as well as economic migration, but was also an imperial reflex, dogged by acts of erasure at the colonial frontier." Any notion of a romanticised coast falls flat as Galt encounters "landscapes and coastlines that repeatedly fail to deliver on their promise."

Coastal Reckonings

37. By bringing together the voices of artists, critics, and curators with the material realities of Scotland's coastal environments past and present across genres, this special issue investigates the production of coastal knowledges two centuries ago as a practice very much replicated in twenty-first-century Romantic scholarship. Across the contributions, the cultural, ecological, engineered, geological, political, and imagined future coast come together and converse to create tension and put pressure on literary forms and artistic expressions. To retrieve the meanings of these conversations demands a collaborative approach that brings multiple perspectives together, across multiple temporalities. It is in the practices and in the cocreation of knowledge production and meaning-making that we can take learnings from Romantic approaches to further reactivate connections between forms of knowledge. It is the very coexistence of multiple historical temporalities, cultural imaginings, and real historical developments that I consider as characteristic of coastal Romanticisms. The ways of noticing we find in the period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, before disciplinary boundaries formed, is to be commended in our contemporary moment of climate emergency where disciplines must join forces to address global challenges. Crucial to that process is the sharing of what we notice and the bringing together of different disciplinary perspectives and methodologies.

38. "Today," wrote John Gillis in 2017, "we travel ever further for the unobstructed view" (*Coastal Works* 265). Half a decade and a global pandemic later, we can no longer afford to indulge in such selective framings, and as the contributors to this issue have highlighted

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– the “unobstructed view” was (and continues to be) a manufactured view. In a “Diary” contribution to the *London Review of Books* in August 2022, Kathleen Jamie reflected on a for her familiar visit to Scotland’s East Coast that resulted in an unfamiliar response. From a bench at Kinghorn, she looked out to the Firth of Forth: “Last time I was here it was winter and I was watching humpback whales. This time I hardly dared lift the binoculars. That’s never happened to me before: a reluctance to go to the coast and, once there, a reluctance to scan the waves.” To lift the binoculars would mean to notice “[m]ore naked rock visible, fewer birds,” as the avian flu hit the Scottish Seabird Centre at the Bass Rock. Jamie finds herself in the dilemma of daring to look at or away on this occasion. Her thoughtful reflection shows, perhaps unintentionally, how Romanticisms’ currents run on multiple temporalities concurrently, connecting past, present, and future. It is no longer about what we want to see, but how closely we look and what we notice. The question is whether we dare to take notice as the waters are rising.

G676 Acknowledgement of Support

My thanks to the European Commission's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme for funding this research under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 890850. The contributions to this special issue emerged from a one-day symposium on "Scotland's Coastal Romanticisms" that took place at the University of Edinburgh in February 2022, hosted by Penny Fielding and me. It was further supported by Scottish Writing in the Nineteenth Century and the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities. Many of the contributors to the event and this special issue have informed my own research trajectory, and it is certainly one of the highlights of academic life to gather and exchange ideas on shared research interests. As I have benefited from their work in shaping the project, it is my pleasure to acknowledge that collective thinking and move the conversation forward. My warmest thanks to Penny Fielding, as the Coastal Routes project mentor, for shepherding me into the world of Scottish Literature and enabling me to take ownership of this introduction. Special thanks to Claire Connolly, Katie Garner, Gerardine Meaney, Katie Ritson, and Edel Semple for their astute comments and suggestions. I am indebted to the two anonymous peer reviewers whose constructive and positive feedback has greatly assisted us in strengthening and sharpening this special issue.

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Notes

¹ Allen and colleagues note in their introduction to *Coastal Works* that among the first devolved powers in Scotland and Wales “were [those] concerned with environment and heritage, and we have since begun to see different attitudes to the coastal landscape emerge between the members of the United Kingdom, with Scotland in particular placing a premium on the legacy of literature in what has come to be called its ‘Earth Heritage’” (“Introduction” 6).

² On the rewilding debate, see MacDonald.

³ See the open CFP at the time of writing: <https://www.asecs.org/ecs-preview>. Accessed 10 February 2023.

⁴ As gatherings in Zoom rooms became a common feature of pandemic academic life, I greatly benefited from the opportunity to become part of the Coastal History Network and its cross-disciplinary reading group.

⁵ David Cass discusses his techniques of using recycled materials with John Ennis (*Journeys in Design*).

⁶ See <https://www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk/coastal-knowledge/>, accessed 27 January 2023.

⁷ For the Haunted Shores Network, see <https://haunted-shores.com/scottish-shores-gothic-coastal-environments/>. Accessed 27 January 2023.

⁸ In December 2020, the Scottish postman and musician Nathan Evans became a TikTok sensation with a recording of himself singing “Soon May the Wellerman Come.” See, for instance, Renner

⁹ Thomson states in the album’s liner notes that the titular phrase “is a marine term, meaning fishing grounds, areas where you could be guaranteed to find a good catch. Finding the exact

location of these hands required a deep knowledge of the isle of geography, the cliff faces, stacks and ocean topography. This information was passed down through the generations.” For a short video on the project, see “Da Fishing Hands”: <https://vimeo.com/124520229>. The importance of vernacular intergenerational traditions of naming are highlighted in MacKinnon and Brennan

¹⁰ Across the eight volumes, the coasts of England, Wales and Scotland are covered. Ireland is notably not included.

¹¹ See, for instance, David Addey’s retracing of Daniell’s coastal journey and the 2008 Folio Society edition of *A Voyage Round the Coast of Great Britain* edited by C. J. Shepherd.

¹² In fact, six of the seven wonders listed by Cadbury are related to bodies of water. The others being the “Great Eastern,” Bazalgette’s London sewers, the Transcontinental Railway, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Panama Canal, and the Hoover Dam.

¹³ I am grateful to Alexander Dick and Samuel Baker for inviting me to contribute to their Coastal Scott panels for the Scott at 250 conference at the University of Edinburgh (June 2021), where I presented initial findings on “Scott’s Coastal Travel” in relation to William Daniell.

¹⁴ For a coastal approach to *The Lord of the Isles*, see Dick.

¹⁵ Many thanks to Robert Irvine for drawing my attention to this.

¹⁶ The song was inspired by Anthony Baxter’s award-winning documentary *You’ve Been Trumped*. See <https://karinepolwart.com/track/1101465/cover-your-eyes>. And listen here to a performance from the Shrewsbury Folk Festival 2012: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELeZmPDdFPE>. Accessed 24 January 2023.

¹⁷ Mary-Ann Constantine, Nigel Leask, and Fiona O’Kane are co-editing a forthcoming special issue on Landscape and Language: Romantic Travelers in the Celtic Nations that seeks to explore, among other topics, how “notions of indigeneity, often derived from encounters in the colonial

contact zone, shape encounters with people and landscapes in the British and Irish archipelago” as well as bringing into focus the importance of local knowledge “for the development of environmental consciousness in the period.” See the open CFP at the time of writing: https://www.press.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/media/2023/02/CFP_Landscape_and_Language.pdf.

Accessed 10 February 2023.

¹⁸ The authors note that today, “an estimated 75% of active fishermen [in the Outer Hebrides are] speaking” Gaelic (1).

¹⁹ The Abbotsford Trust has acquired the manuscript of Scott’s diary. They are due to launch a new academic project in 2024 that will see the transcription of the manuscript, followed by a community project, titled “A Light in the Dark,” that will engage vulnerable groups with Scott’s stories of coastal life as well as the practice of journaling. For further information, see “Blatvatnik.”