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Research Articles

## The Impossible Panopticon

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# The Impossible Panopticon

Robert Cranford

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

*The under-editor and under-editor's assistant wish to apologise for the delay in the publication of Professor Cranford's scrappy and pathetically self-promoting paper, and for its severely redacted nature. We would like to make it clear that Professor Cranford is to blame throughout for these unusual features of the essay. Even to call it an 'essay' is misleading; what follows is merely a bowdlerized version of his so-called lecture at the University of Stirling, which was, in truth, by and large a reading of poems from his new book, Testament. Professor Cranford has refused permission for several of these poems to be reprinted here without excessive copyright permissions fees being paid to him and his publisher by Aberdeen University Press. 'If people want to read the poems, let them buy the book, which is published by Jonathan Cape', he has said (through his lawyers, Barrage, Ming and McCutcheon plc). Responding through their own lawyers (Oil, Alford and O'Doric), Aberdeen University Press has stated simply, 'We will not pay one penny for this mendacious trash.'*

*Throughout his dealings with both the editorial team and the Press, Professor Cranford has been shy, curmudgeonly, and scrupulously offensive. We note his hypocritical refusal to pay any permissions fees for the inclusion of further copyrighted illustrative material from the oeuvres of several photographers; after extensive scrutiny our own legal team has deemed much of this work 'sensitive and semi-pornographic'. We would not have published such pictures anyhow. Furthermore, though Professor Cranford has assured us that some of the characters mentioned in his piece 'bear hardly any relation at all' to real people, we wonder about this, and are seeking further advice with a view to impending prosecutions.*

*As a result of a prolonged series of legal meetings (laughably called 'a process of dispute resolution') which have taken up much editorial time, not to mention the time of several officers of the Press, their PAs and dog-handlers, Professor Cranford (who is, by the way, a wilfully slipshod proof-reader, and has made not the slightest attempt to follow the Aberdeen University Press style-sheet) has reluctantly agreed to make available in lieu of the full texts of several poems from Testament a long – and, in our opinion, thoroughly shoddy – ramble. This so called 'Shakespikedian Mashup' first appeared as*

*part of the Oxford University Press (New York) blog just before the Scottish Independence Referendum. The entire editorial team at the present journal regard this piece as an absurd attempt to hijack the American wing of a British university press for blatantly political propaganda. Professor Crawford (through Barrage, Ming and McCutcheon plc) has said it was simply an attempt to 'seize the means of production.' We print this piece (under some duress, but with obsequiously grateful acknowledgement to Oxford University Press) as an appendix. Libraries and individual subscribers may wish to protect themselves from any further potential legal action by burning this issue of the Journal of Scottish Thought.*

### **Text of oration delivered at the University of Stirling, c. 2044**

Thank you for your introduction. It always saddens me to come to Stirling. I feel particularly miserable today on the campus, because I remember clearly what the view was like before the demolition of the Wallace Monument; before the Ochil Hills were quarried out and filled with silos for post-Trident nuclear deterrents; and before the post-Referendum erasure of Kathleen Jamie's poem from the rotunda at Bannockburn. Though my memory is beginning to fail (especially with names), and, though, particularly when listening to academic papers, I experience episodes of intense confusion, nonetheless I still recall this campus as it was before the erection of the Lord McConnell Library, let alone before the installation of those five celebrated and imposing equestrian statues of that most notable among modern-day Secretaries of State for Scotland, the blessed Theresa May.

I'm sad, too, because I've been asked to offer some memories of what is for me, in retrospect, a particularly unhappy summer: a long ago summer which began in melancholy with my own failure to qualify for the Scottish weightlifting team for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Not long after I had received that unexpected and distressing news, I was invited by my friend Professor (now Baron) Pittock to attend the First World Conglomeration of Scottish Cultures at my *alma mater*, the Universitas Glasguensis. When I agreed to go there to give a reading from what was then my new collection of poems, *Testament*, I was unaware that Baron Pittock had also invited Jean McGillivray to read.

Today, of course, MacGillivray needs no introduction. In the west, at least, that period which I am recalling is often called the Age of McGillivray. One has only to quote from the start of her novel, *The Impossible Panopticon*, those opening syllables – '6, 15, 87, 243, 17' – for people to smile with warm approval. Before McGillivray, no novel had started with a 70-page chapter comprised entirely of numbers. Nowadays we are familiar with the critical

writings of Lord Hames who has demonstrated so eloquently how those opening numbers fuse the world of the working-class bingo caller with the elite white-collar digital environments of coders and gamers; now, we are used to reading remotely, happy, in the wake of the late Franco Moretti, to have our computers digest texts for us, rather than wasting our own valuable time in unmediated reading. But then, back in 2014, I was hardly alone in being bemused by that most famous of passages, beginning ‘6, 15, 87, 243, 17’, and, though I am ashamed to confess it now (and indeed my opinion led to a period of internment), I thought that McGillivray was something of a charlatan.

I came to Glasgow and read first of all my poem, ‘Daveheart’. Perhaps you might indulge me in listening to it, for it made almost no impression at the time, and my collection, *Testament*, sold so very badly that I still have copies of the first edition (published as what we called, in the old days, ‘a book’) here to offer you today at the 2014 cover price of £10 in the currency that was known as ‘Sterling’.

#### DAVEHEART

St George o’ Osborne tae his richt  
And SamCam by his side,  
Daveheart has ridden thro’ the nicht  
Tae flatter Scotland’s pride.

He sings the joys o’ Union lang  
And loud through shitty weather.  
His een are bricht. His voice is strang,  
‘We’re better aff thegither!’

(The rest of this poem appears on pages 17–18 of *Testament* (Cape, 2014))

Well, though it may surprise you to hear it, some people were mildly amused by this in that long-vanished summer of 2014, and I am even told that a few years later, to cheer himself up in his cell on the morning of his execution during the Year of Boris, this very poem was recited by Professor Cairns Crag. Anyhow, any pleasure I got from a few titters in the Glaswegian audience at the Conglomeration was very short-lived; because I soon became aware that what everyone was talking about was not *Testament* but McGillivray’s *The Impossible Panopticon*.

Though it was not published until 2016, chapters of *The Impossible Panopticon* were circulating throughout those summer months. I had met its author for the first time when she heckled me at a reading in the Caddies' Hut on the Old Course at St Andrews. That Hut was one of the larger venues visited by the Bus Party, a pro-independence group organized by Neal Ascherson-Ascherson, Will Storrar-Storrar, and James Justice Robertson, remembered today as the first three intellectual martyrs lobotomized in the Year of Ukipation that marked Britain's Great Withdrawal from the European Union. Anyhow, I had just begun to read in the Caddies' Hut when Jean McGillivray stood up to berate me and to invoke that French historian and cultural theorist whose name, with disconcerting results, she insisted on pronouncing repeatedly as 'Fucko'. Had I not read Fucko's 'What is an Author?' Had I not read Fucko's *Discipline and Punish* or his *Archaeology of Knowledge*? As I tried to read some of the biblical paraphrases which conclude *Testament*, all I could hear was a repeated chanting of 'Fucko! Fucko! Fucko!'

Attempting to conceal my indignation when this happened not only in St Andrews but also at other events organized by the National Collective (an enthusiastic group of minstrels I recall as inspired by Milton's *Areopagitica*) and even at the Bannockburn celebrations where I read my poems to mollify long queues for tickets and toilets, I persisted in reading over the loud cries of 'Fucko! Fucko! Fucko!' as many poems as I could possibly cram in.

Perhaps it is simply because they persist in using words rather than numbers and code that these poems seem today so passé. Now that it is recognized as the classic novel of the Scottish Independence Referendum, we can understand that *The Impossible Panopticon* draws on McGillivray's background in computer science: she had written her doctoral thesis on data visualization in the modelling of biological warfare. *The Impossible Panopticon* relies too on her readiness to hybridize Foucauldian ideas of surveillance with Glasgow University Rector Edward Snowden's mass release of NSA and GCHQ data. For while I was earnestly colloquing with Baron Pittock's colleagues at the vast Conglomeration, Jean McGillivray had absented herself from the academic proceedings in order to spend time, and indeed to make intellectual hay, with Rector Snowden, who was then visiting the university in his official capacity, though without the cognizance of the British or American authorities.

Rector Snowden, with whom I enjoyed a delicious private dinner in Professors' Square, was an unusual man, not least in his generosity. For unlike Julian Assange, to whom he is sometimes compared (and who is said to have attempted to nibble the ear of Andrea O'Pagan, his semi-crypto-biographer),

Rector Snowden showed towards Jean McGillivray only the most remarkable intellectual generosity. In fact, he became with her almost the co-author of some of her novel's most startling passages. His making available of the unredacted speeches of the then Lord Robertson (now His Cryogenic Majesty Emperor Robertson) as eavesdropped upon by the NSA allowed McGillivray to incorporate into *The Impossible Panopticon* some of its most rhetorically outré and politically admired passages. Was it not Boris de Balliol himself, shortly after he became Prime Minister of the ReUnited Kingdom, who quoted extensively from those sections of McGillivray's *magnum opus*? I remember reading those passages with some distaste, though it is now unwise to question their sentiments.

But where was I? Ah, yes, while I tucked into some of Glasgow's finest vegetarian haggis with Rector Snowden, little did I realise that Jean McGillivray was herself not only recording Snowden's *bon mots* and his encryption advice, but she was also cloning his phone. Surely it is the material gained from that rather questionable process that gives *The Impossible Panopticon* some of its peculiar *frisson*. Where Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* incorporates, famously, an index of plagiarisms, McGillivray's novel became the first to incorporate an email address book, long lists of favourite telephone numbers, and the entire contents of the computers at GCHQ. For some – and particularly for aficionados of remote reading – this has made it hard to put down; and for others, not least human readers, it has made *The Impossible Panopticon* hard to lift up, let alone to finish. No work before McGillivray's had been read by so many of the world's computers. It is, unlike my own *Testament*, a milestone in the digital humanities, in the history of espionage, and in the global literary canon. Even Baron Pittock has discerned in it the template of our digital era, though I part company with him when he also regards it as ironically tinged with Jacobite iconography.

Lady Penelope Fielding, that distinguished textual editor of Stevenson and McGillivray, contends that the first-edition of *The Impossible Panopticon* – which sold recently in Shanghai for 14 million Sino-US dollars – was underpriced. In her memoirs, Lady Penelope has used the opposite word of my own *Testament*, which, as I may have mentioned, still retails at ten pounds Sterling. But such questions of value continue to dog literary criticism, even in this present age when most texts are read, written, debugged and rewritten only by botnets. My most cherished literary opinions have been coloured, perhaps, by my meetings not just with Rector Snowden, Sir Drummond Byron, and other bright stars of yesteryear's Glaswegian firmament, but also by my lunches in 2014 with

that notorious quisling, Alasdair Gray. Not for a moment as I ate with him that summer and imbibed some of his mannerisms, not least his taste in lambswool pullovers which is now my own also, did I suspect that Gray was in fact an agent provocateur for the Better Together campaign.

Nowadays, thanks to researchers at this very university, we know that Gray was by no means the figure biographed so misleadingly by the artful Rodger Glass, but was in fact an Old Etonian flâneur whose retrospective Riddrification was surely the most cunning Scottish literary hoax since Ossian. I confess that, like so many others, I too was taken in, and accepted at face value Gray's support for Scottish co-operative independence. It was only later, when he was pardoned by Emperor Boris at the ASLS Show Trials, that I realised that Gray, like McGillivray, and like his own Bohu, had been writing all along a master narrative of British Unionism. In the summer of 2014 I saw none of this; indeed, I bought him a large pistachio-flavoured ice cream which he ate with his characteristic slittery gusto.

Such was my ideological naivety that while McGillivray was already securing the serialization deal of a lifetime with several of Rupert Mugdock's most squeaky-clean e-publishing henchmen, I persisted in reading to whoever would listen my poem from *Testament*, 'The Scottish Constitution'.

#### THE SCOTTISH CONSTITUTION

It must contain silver sands. It must hold water  
In the shape of lochans, hydro dams, and firths.

It must be just, in the sense both of perjink  
And even-handed, shaking hands with all.

(The rest of this poem appears on page 27 of *Testament* (Cape, 2014))

Sadly, I still believe in those sentiments, and even in that poem; but I recognize that it will cut little ice here in front of an audience of McGillivrayists. So all I can do is hope that you will understand my present melancholy as I recall, not for the first time, that long, arduous summer of 2014 when, everywhere I went, I seemed to be greeted by loud and none too friendly academically-tinged novelistic chanting of that single, impossibly panoptical word, 'Fucko!'

[This is the end of the talk – make sure to add lots of footnotes. – Under-Ed.]



APPENDICES, GATHERED BY THE UNDER-EDITOR'S ASSISTANT

(These reproduce the two blogs written by Professor Crawford for the blog of Oxford University Press in New York, and published on the Press's website in September 2014 in the run-up to the Scottish Independence Referendum. The first, earnest in tone, is thought to be one of the publications that led to Professor Crawford's sacking; the second, flippant and derivative, precipitated the subsequent loss of his pension).

BLOG ON THE SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE DEBATE

I want an independent Scotland that is true to the ideals of egalitarianism articulated in some of the best poetry of Robert Burns. I want a pluralist, cosmopolitan Scotland accountable to its own parliament and allied to the European Union. My vote goes to *Borgen*, not to *Braveheart*. I want change.

Britain belongs to a past that is sometimes magnificent, but is a relic of empire. Scotland played its sometimes bloody part in that, but should now get out, and have the courage of its own distinctive convictions. It is ready to face up to being a small nation, and to get over its nostalgia for being part of some supposed 'world power'. No better, no worse than many other nations, it is regaining its self-respect.

Yet the grip of the past is strong. Almost absurdly emblematic of the complicated state of 2014 Scottish politics is Bannockburn: seven hundred years ago Bannockburn, near Stirling in central Scotland, was the site of the greatest medieval Scottish victory against an English army; today Bannockburn is part of a local government zone controlled by a Labour-Conservative political alliance eager to defeat any aspirations for Scottish independence. In the summer of 2014 Bannockburn will be the site of a civilian celebration of that 1314 Scottish victory, and of a large-scale contemporary British military rally. The way the Labour and Conservative parties in Scotland are allied, sometimes uneasily, in the 'Better Together' or 'No' campaign to preserve the British Union makes Scotland a very different political arena from England where Labour is the opposition party fighting a Conservative Westminster government. England has no parliament of its own. As a result, the so-called 'British' Parliament, awash with its Lords, with its cabinet of privately educated millionaires, and with all its braying of privilege, spends much of its time on matters that relate to England, not Britain. This is a manifest abuse of power. The Scottish Parliament at Holyrood looks – and is – very different.



Like many contemporary Scottish writers and artists, I am nourished by traditions, yet I like the idea of change and dislike the *status quo*, especially the political *status quo*. National identity is dynamic, not fixed. Democracy is about vigorous debate, about rocking the boat. Operating in an atmosphere of productive uncertainty is often good for artistic work. Writers enjoy rocking the boat, and can see that as a way of achieving a more egalitarian society. That's why most writers and artists who have spoken out are on the 'Yes' side. If there is a Yes vote in the Scottish independence referendum on 18 September 2014, it will be a clear vote for change. If there is a 'No' vote, it will be because of a strong innate conservatism in Scottish society – a sense of wanting to play it safe and not rock the boat. Whether Scotland's Labour voters remain conservative in their allegiances and vote 'No', or can be swayed to vote 'Yes' because they see the possibility of a more egalitarian future -- is a key question.

SCOTS WHA PLAY: AN ENGLISH SHAKESPIKEDIAN  
SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM MASHUP

THE DATE: 18 September 2014, Fateful Day of Scotland's Independence Referendum

THE PLACE: A Sceptred Isle

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

Alexander the Great, First Minister of Scotland

Daveheart, Prime Minister of the Britons

Assorted Other Ministers, Attendant Lords, Lordlings, Politicos and Camp Followers

Three Witches

A Botnet of Midges

The Internet (A Sprite)

A Helicopter

Dame Scotia

St George of Osborne

Boris de Balliol, Mayor of Londres

UKIP (An Acronym)

Chorus

**ACT I:** *A Blasted Heath.*

Enter THREE WITCHES –

When shall we three meet again,  
In thunder, lightning or in rain?

When the referendum's done,  
When the battle's lost and won.

That will be when Salmond's gone.

Where the place?

Hampstead Heath.

Better Together unto death!

Is that your phone?

Daveheart calls: anon! –  
Fair is foul, and foul is fair:  
Hover through the plebs and filthy air.

[WITCHES *vanish*.]

**ACT II:** *The Scottish Camp (Voters at Dawn)*

Enter a SMALL FOLKS' CHORUS, Botnet Midges,  
Who flap their wings, and then commence this chant:

See here assembled in the Scottish Camp  
The Thane of Yes, Lord Naw-Naw, Doctor Spin.  
Old folk forget; yet all shall be forgot,  
But we'll remember, with advantages,  
This Referendum Day. Then shall that name  
And date, familiar as our household words –  
Alex the Great, the eighteenth of September –

And many, many here who cast their votes,  
 A true sorority, a band of brothers,  
 Long be remembered – long as ‘Auld Lang Syne’ –  
 For she or he who votes along with me  
 Shall be my sibling; be they curt or harsh  
 This day shall gentle their condition:  
 Scots students down in England now a-bed  
 Shall think themselves accursed, they were not here,  
 Casting their votes in this our referendum.

**ACT III:** *On Arthur's Seat, a Mount Olympus  
 Near the Scots' Parliament at Holyrood*

*Proud Edward Milibrand, Daveheart, Nicholas Clegg,  
 And Anthony à Blair perch on the crags  
 With English Exiles. Now Lord Devomax speaks:*

Stands England where it did? Alas, poor country,  
 Almost afraid to know itself, a stateless  
 Nation, post-imperial, undeveloped;  
 Still sadly lacking its own Parliament,  
 It commandeers to deal with its affairs  
 The British Parliament, whose time it wastes  
 With talk of what pertains to England only,  
 And so abuses that quaint institution  
 As if it were its own, not for these islands  
 Set in a silver sea from Sark to Shetland.

*(Exit, pursued by A. Blair)*

**ACT IV:** *The Archipelago (High Noon)*

Enter THE INTERNET, A Sprite, who sings:

Full fathom five Westminster lies;  
 Democracy begins to fade;  
 Stout, undeveloped, John Bull still eyes

Imperial power so long mislaid;  
England must suffer a sea-change  
Into something small and strange,  
MPs hourly clang Big Ben:

## **DING-DONG!**

Come, John Bull, and toll Big Ben.

### **ACT V:** *South London: top floor of the Shard*

*Boris de Balliol, St George of Osborne,  
Attendant Lords, and Chorus Bankerorum,  
Et Nympharum Tamesis et Parliamentorum*

*Sheet lightnings flash offstage while clashing cymbals  
Crescendo in a thunderous night's farrage.*

ST GEORGE: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!  
Ye exit polls and hurricanoes spout!  
Come, Boris, here's the place. Stand still.  
How fearful  
And dizzy 'tis, to cast one's eyes so low!  
The crows and choughs, that wing the midway air  
Seem gross as bankers' apps: here from this Shard  
See floors of smug short-sellers, dreadful traders  
Inside a giant gherkin, and the City  
Fraternity of *inegalité*  
Spread out around us while its denizens  
Appear like lice.

ATTENDANT LORDS: Scotia and Boris, hail!

BORIS: O Bella, Bella Caledonia,  
Hic Boris Maior, Londinii Imperator,  
Ego –

*Fanfare of hautboys, bagpipes, and a tucket.*

ST GEORGE: A tucket!

BORIS:                   Tempus fugit.

CHORUS: Fuckaduckit!

Pipers, desist! Your music from this height  
Has calmed the storm, and, blithely, while we wait  
For the result to come from Holyrood,  
So charms the ear that, clad in English tartans –  
The Hunting Cholmondesley, the Royal Agincourt,  
And chic crisscrosses of the National Trust –  
Our city here, ravished by this fair sound  
Of tweeted pibroch, YouTubed from the Shard  
To Wapping, Westminster and Heathrow's tarmac,  
While gazing up from bingo and Big Macs,  
Brooding upon our disunited kingdom,  
Stands all agog to hear Dame Scotia speak.

*Scotia descends, ex machina helicopteris*

HELICOPTER: Bzzz.

SCOTIA: O England, England, your tight cabinet's  
Sly Oxbridge public-schoolboy millionaires  
Fight while your country sinks beneath their yoke;  
It weeps, it bleeds; and each new day a gash  
Is added to those wounds: new Europhiles  
Repulsed, the world repelled; England whose riots  
Failed to stop students' fees for your own folk  
Or to contain their escalating cost.  
Sad, catastrophic, calculating drones  
Miscalculating loans, kicking the arts,  
England betrayed by Scoto-English Blair  
Into wrong wars and then to Gordon Brown,  
Jowled lord of loss and light-touch regulation.  
O England, England! Rise and be a nation

United under your own Parliament!  
Methinks I am a prophet now inspired  
And thus, inspiring, do foretell of you:  
Your Europhobia must not endure,  
For violent fires must soon burn out themselves;  
Small showers last long, but sudden storms are short.  
Learn from the Scots: plant windfarms, make yourself  
A Saudi Arabia of tidal power,  
Though not of gender; learn, too, from the French,  
There is no need to stay a sceptred isle,  
Scuffed other Eden, demi-paradise;  
No fortress, built by UKIP for themselves,  
Against infection in their Brussels wars;  
Be happy as a nation on an island  
That's not England's alone, a little world,  
This precious stone set in a silver sea,  
Which serves to link it now with all the globe,  
Or as the front door to a happy home,  
Be, still, the envy of less happier lands,  
And set up soon an English Parliament,  
Maybe in London, Britain's other eye,  
Maybe in Yorkshire, so you may become  
A better friend to Scotland whose folk love  
This blessed plot, this earth, and independence.

*She zooms northwards*

Robert Crawford's *Bannockburns: Scottish Independence and Literary Imagination, 1314–2014* was published by Edinburgh University Press in January 2014. *Testament*, his new collection of poems (including a whole gang of poems on the theme of Scottish independence) was published in July 2014 by Jonathan Cape. He teaches (surely 'taught' – Under-Ed.), in the School of English at the University of St Andrews.