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An Orcadian Metamorphosis: Embodied Spaces in Luke Sutherland's *Venus as a Boy*

In his introduction to *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (2007), the most comprehensive study to the present of post-devolution writing in Scotland,¹ its editor, Berthold Schoene, revises former academic analyses that have established a connection between the political climate and the literary scene in the nation from the 1980s until the turn of the century. He draws on studies such as Robert Crawford's *Devolving English Literature* (1992), Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson's *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies* (1993) or Christopher Whyte's "Masculinities in Contemporary Scottish Literature" (1998), in order to assess whether more recent publications have got beyond the generally accepted "pathos and disaffection pervading late twentieth-century Scottish culture" (Schoene 2007, 1). Similarly, his collective book aims to interrogate whether Scottish writers are still assumed to act as political representatives of the nation in the aftermath of the successful September 1997 referendum on devolution. This role has been applauded even from the field of politics, as demonstrated, for instance, in the speech given by Scotland's first Minister of Culture, Sam Galbraith, at the 1999 Edinburgh Festival, where he avowed that "the parliament would never have been re-established without the influence and impact of the artists" (qtd. in Brown 2011, 12). Gavin Wallace delves into such relations between politics and the arts in detail in one of the *Edinburgh Companion's* chapters, "Voyages of Intent: Literature and Cultural Politics in Post-devolution Scotland" (2007), and Schoene explains this further in "Going Cosmopolitan: Reconstituting 'Scottishness' in Post-Devolution Criticism," where he contends that "[d]evolutionary Scottish writing – that is, writing produced and published between the referenda of 1979 and 1997 – is always, of necessity, politically informed, or at least it was received and critiqued that way, and only considered a success if it made – or could be construed as making – some kind of case for Scotland" (Schoene 2007, 9).

Late 20th-century literary and cultural criticism in Scotland was indeed generally infused with this "pathos" after the 1979 failed referendum on devolution, to the extent that authors such as Cairns Craig even speak of a cultural and political "doomsday scenario" in this period. This appears connected to the weight of Thatcherite policies (Craig 1999, 27) in other instances of this rhetoric, as in Tom Gallagher's ironic analysis of the situation as an opportunity to "furnish the wardrobe of Scottish national identity with a new and weatherproof set of clothing for the rigours ahead" (Gallagher 1989, 19), or in Angus Calder's contention that the only "surviving option" could be provided by "the Scottish intelligentsia," who would have to "find their Scotland and their own identity in their own activities and in the conceptions of Scotland which they themselves use and create" (Calder 1996, 223). Three decades on from 1979, what Schoene addresses in his book is not only whether explorations – and

1 The seventeen years between the 1997 referendum on devolution and the 2014 referendum on independence are also crucial for an understanding of the relation between politics and the arts in Scotland. Yet, given the publication date of the novel that is the object of study in the present article and its subject matter, only "post-devolution" fiction will be discussed here, and not the later years of this period, where an active political activism on the side of Scottish writers was expected.

vindications – of the Scottish nation and Scottish identity are still present in contemporary works, which seems undeniable, but the extent to which they are "conducted invariably with reference to other debates on contemporary 'identity', such as class, sexuality and gender, globalisation and the new Europe, cosmopolitanism and post-coloniality, as well as questions of ethnicity, race and postnational multiculturalism" (Schoene 2007, 2).

Yet, Schoene is not alone in his approach to this new literary corpus. James McGonigal and Kirsten Stirling, for instance, editors of the collective volume *Ethically Speaking: Voice and Values in Modern Scottish Writing*, seek to analyse to what extent "the emergence of a newly empowered Scotland help[s] us to read the country and its people in a new way," and whether this political achievement might have liberated Scottish writers from a responsibility that may now allow them to explore "a small nation's sheer diversity" (2006, 10). Similarly, Graeme Macdonald, in his analysis of racial issues in post-devolution Scottish fiction, also identifies new modes of representation since 1997, which he describes as "a dual process of devolution and internationalism [that] charts the identifiable territory of the contemporary Scottish novel" (2010, 85). On her part, Marie-Odile Pittin-Hedon, in *The Space of Fiction. Voices from Scotland in a Post-Devolution Age*, reviews works produced after 1999, the opening year of the Scottish Parliament, and "the interconnections between their various approaches to a post-national, cosmopolitan, multicultural or maybe even globalised Scotland" (2015, xix). Certainly, the proliferation of what could be termed "multicultural writing" is testified by a new and exciting corpus that includes both well-established authors, like Jackie Kay MBE, and newer voices like Suhayl Saadi, Leila Aboulela, Bashabi Fraser or Leela Soma. This has run parallel to the growing incorporation of alternative voices to the national literary panorama, as evidenced in collective volumes like McNeil and Finlay's *Wish I Was Here* (2000) or Gifford and Riach's *Scotlands: Poets and the Nation* (2004). At the same time, these years have witnessed a growing political and social debate on ethnic difference within Scotland, which has materialized in a series of post-devolution administrative structures and legislation to guarantee equal opportunities (Neal and Agyeman 2006), which have not always satisfied the aspirations of Scottish multicultural artists (see, for instance, Sulter 2004). In this vein, actions like the establishment of a "civic citizenship" over an "ethnic" one, for instance, have been considered determinants in the pursuit of equality, even if they seem to have proved only partially efficient in encouraging the artistic expression of difference, especially in rural parts of Scotland (de Lima 2006; Netto 2008).

One of these rural areas is the idiosyncratic Orkney Islands, whose literary representation in the 20th century was imbued with a set of associations extracted from the works of a few, yet highly acknowledged, authors, namely Edwin Muir, Erik Linklater and George Mackay Brown. The latter's strong sensibility towards telluric forces, his exploration of identity issues, his attention to the rhythms – both human and cosmic – affecting the lives of the islanders, together with the interweaving of myth and reality in his postmodern writing constitute a powerful antecedent to the Orcadian writer and musician Luke Sutherland,² whose novel *Venus as a Boy* (2004) will serve to illustrate the paradigmatic shift described above. As this article will try to demonstrate, Sutherland's text occupies a most interesting interstitial position in

2 For instance, Graeme Macdonald considers Mackay Brown's *Greenvoe* (1972) as "one of the first [novels] in modern Scottish literature to provide a sustained non-European and non-white perspective on remote Scottish rural life" (2010, 88).

recent Scottish fiction, given its interwoven representation of subjective perceptions of time and space on the rural Orkneys and in multicultural London, as well as its subversion of previous narrative models to interrogate masculinity and collective identification on the threshold of early 21st century "Cool Britannia." In fact, as will be discussed below, the novel constructs a series of fluid and interrelated "third spaces" where, as geographer Edward Soja contends, "the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives" (Soja 1996, 5).

Insular cultures and the marginal experiences of their inhabitants become central in the works of other contemporary Scottish authors, such as Alan Warner and Kevin MacNeil, yet what makes Sutherland's fiction particular in the creation of these "third spaces" is an intrinsic concern with the representation of ethnic and sexual difference. His debut novel, *Jelly Roll* (1998), shortlisted for the Whitbread Prize, portrays the effects triggered by the incorporation of a new black saxophonist into a jazz band from Glasgow, which creates a series of racial incidents in the course of a tour across the Highlands. Issues of identity and the right to belong are mediated by the use of linguistic registers with strong geopolitical associations, which are clearly rooted in the coordinates of what Alice Ferrebe terms "the inextricable relationship between national identity and masculinity" (2007, 275), as epitomised by the late 20th-century Scottish "canon," namely the fictions of Alasdair Gray, James Kelman and Irvine Welsh. Instead of focusing on "sexually and racially homogeneous" socioscapes, that is, a "Straight and White" environment (Ferrebe 2007, 275), Sutherland chooses to focalise his narrative on the multiple layers of discrimination involved in the construction of difference. In order to do so, his other two novels portray translocated characters in contemporary London, which interestingly makes him a participant in the revival of the London novel characteristic of the turn of the century, and not so much in the exploration of space in Scottish cities carried out by other authors like, for instance, Aboulela or Saadi. *Sweetmeat* (2002) is of particular importance in our context, since it advances the experimentation with magic realism that is essential to understand the narrative of *Venus as a Boy*.

By choosing to situate these two novels in London, Sutherland also partakes in the process of glocalisation that has characterised fiction produced in the British metropolis since the last decades of the 20th century, epitomized, for instance, by Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) or Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* (2006). This, in the case of *Venus as a Boy*, is complicated further given the central role attributed to the Orkney Islands in the framework of the novel's structure, as they always act as an essential point of reference determining the identity of its protagonist. English urban fiction and, in particular, London fiction, has undergone a transition from a generally pessimistic mood, characteristic of the 1980s and 1990s, to a "millennial optimism" that has been attributed to a contagious reaction to the marketing campaigns promoted by the Labour government after the 1997 elections, and their efforts to re-brand London as "the showpiece of 'Cool Britannia'," designed to create a "'New' and 'Sexy' London in which to enter the third millennium" (Pleßke 2014, 17). In his study of postcolonial London fiction, John McLeod identifies such optimism for this period. He argues that this stance "may be legitimately considered as cheerful and politically vital declarations of tenure and change – ones which stubbornly reminded reactionary mentalities in London that their attempts to shore up the divisive borders of race, culture and ethnicity had spectacularly failed" (2004, 162).

Interestingly for the purpose of this article, McLeod's focus on the creative representation of the city as a means of contestation, challenge and reimagination of social categories has a trans-spatial dimension that allows for the interrogation of collective identities, not only in the metropolis, but also in the communities left behind: "How has living in, and writing about, London enabled new ways of thinking about regional, national, diasporic and transcultural identities?" (2004, 4).

As this article will demonstrate, *Venus as a Boy* offers alternative modes of resistance at the heart of a "two-faced" globalised United Kingdom that, at the dawning of a new millennium, celebrates diversity at the expense of its destitute population. Yet, the novel intentionally chooses to obviate intra-state – England and the other British nations – hierarchies and draws its attention instead to forms of interpersonal exploitation in dehumanised environments that are urban and English, but also rural and Orcadian – rather than Scottish. As it will be discussed, the embodiment of emotions and their projection on space serves to demythologise the Orkney Islands as an Arcadian space, as well as hyperpositive representations of multicultural London by refocusing social relations on the microgeography of the body. As Gill Valentine contends, the global, the nation, the city, the neighbourhood and the body "are porous, inter-related and provisional spaces which are constituted in and through their relations and linkages with 'elsewhere', with the spaces which stretch beyond them" (Valentine 2002, 152). In the framework of the novel, this "elsewhere" is enacted by its protagonist on different levels: by means of his translocation in London's underworld, but also by means of his forced transsexuality. Besides, *Venus as a Boy* relocates the debates on identity and identification in Scotland within England's global city, choosing to obviate the most important centres of political and cultural activity in the nation, Glasgow and Edinburgh. They have a tangential presence in the book, only two consecutive short paragraphs (one for each city), where they are depicted as hostile, depraved spaces where its protagonist is incapable of fulfilling his quest for love (Sutherland 2005, 79). In this article, it will be contended that Sara Ahmed's theorisation of the "economy of emotions," as a "form of capital" (2004, 120), serves to illustrate Sutherland's models of oppression in *Venus as a Boy*, and to some extent provides an explanation to its protagonist's apparent failure to construct, embody and perform an alternative narrative of identity. Such narrative will be contextualised within what Saskia Sassen terms the "dominant economic narratives" that proliferate in contemporary global cities, and which "exclude large portions of the lived city and reconstitute them as some amalgamated 'other' [...] articulated and very much a part of the economy, but represented as superfluous, anachronistic, or marginal" (2003, 174).

Such marginality is paradoxically central to *Venus as a Boy*, a novel with a strong autobiographical component, as its author confesses in his article "A Boy from the Islands...", where he recalls the complexities of growing up in an overall white rural village as the adopted child of a mixed-race family who were exposed to difficulties ranging from the incapability to develop a sense of total belonging to episodes of crude racial harassment: "I developed an intense ambivalence about Orkney and its people. On the one hand I felt very much a native and was treated as such, while on the other, I was denied the possibility of real integration because of my perceived otherness" (Sutherland 2004, n.p.). The novel, later adapted by Tam Dean Burn for the National Theatre of Scotland, poses, even at the structural level, questions of authority, identification, authenticity and verisimilitude, which are reinforced by the use of initials to refer to its two narrators: L.S., recipient and transcriber of the story, and

D. its first-person narrator, who, by asking the former to write the story of his life, is simultaneously asking for forgiveness. The first three pages of the novel correspond to L.S., Sutherland's literary *persona*, and describe his encounter with D.'s friend Pascal in a Brick Lane venue during a concert, where he is informed about D.'s last wish. L.S. refuses and some time after receives a package containing some of D.'s personal belongings, among which there is a minidisc with the dictation of his story and several photographs of Orkney, including one of a group of children with L.S. as a child and the racist bullies that used to torment him on the island. After a walk "from Central London to Tower Bridge and back via the South Bank" (2005, 2) listening to the recording, L.S. decides to comply with D.'s wishes and so the rest of the book, "a memorial of sorts" (2005, 3), focuses on D.'s first-person autobiographical narration. That is, L.S. chooses to establish a direct contact with some of the spaces experienced by D. in order to give shape to the narrative he is being transmitted. More so, he needs to experience them in motion, enacting them as a pedestrian, re/creating what Michel de Certeau would denominate "spaces of enunciation" (1984), which in this case do not only include L.S.'s but also, and simultaneously, D.'s. In the minidisc, D. recollects his childhood and adolescence in Orkney together with his later abandonment of the islands and his subsequent relocation in London, where he is prostituted and eventually forced to take hormones for a sex change he is unwilling to undergo. From his deathbed, D. also describes the metamorphosis he is experiencing and which seems to be transforming his body into gold.

As Alice Ferrebe argues, L.S. has a marginal status in the novel that situates him in a "limbo of authority," which she attributes to a disinclination "to introduce an 'unmediated' authoritative black voice into his fiction [...] as a cautious strategy to prevent possible (mis-)readings of his work as in any way representative of the vast diversity of black Scottish experience," or to the fact that he may be using the confession "as a parody of white guilt and overcompensation" (Ferrebe 2007, 282). The opening pages containing L.S.'s section differ from the rest of the book in an essential aspect, their distant and "rational" approach to the story. This contrasts with the quasi-mythic tale recalled by D., with passages narrated in the style of magical realism which are verisimilar from his perspective, but which are sometimes destabilised by other characters' reactions to his expectations. In fact, it could be argued that it is not only L.S. who is left in a "limbo of authority" in the book, but more importantly so, D., who becomes one of the infinite links in the chain of possible meanings attributed to his text, as Jacques Derrida would contend in his study of "otobiographical" writing: "The person emitting the discourse [...] in this situation does not himself produce it, he barely emits it. He reads it. Just as you are ears that transcribe, the master is a mouth that reads, so that what you transcribe is, in sum, what he deciphers of a text that precedes him, and from which he is suspended by a similar umbilical cord" (1988, 36).³ Such process of deciphering engages the reader in D.'s quest for meaning, since after all, this is nothing more than "the story of Desirée's life dictated by Desirée himself" (Sutherland 2005, 2). This process is not only conceived of in terms of his

3 In the same vein, Paul de Man argues: "But just as we seem to assert that all texts are autobiographical, we should say that, by the same token, none of them is or can be. The difficulties of generic definition that affect the study of autobiography repeat an inherent instability that undoes the model as soon as it is established. [...] The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge – it does not – but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions" (1979, 922).

individual self, but also of his relationships with the rest of the characters he interacts with. Such relational perspective is closely associated with the portrayal of mental dispositions and emotions in his narrative, as well as with spaces. In fact, such subjective relation, as Nora Pleßke sustains, cannot be independent from "social, historical, geographical and cultural realities" (2014, 51). Thus, she explains:

The habitat is experienced through cultural codes creating spatial images which then re-constitute thinking. Spaces must then be recognised as sites of ongoing struggles over meaning and value because various ideas, forms, and images are geographically negotiated or interchangeably spaced along socially constructed boundaries, delineating cultural dynamic experiences such as transgressions, negotiations, migrations and superimpositions. (2014, 65)

In *Venus as a Boy* these experiences occur in two very specific locations, the first one being Orkney, which provides its protagonist with the roots, the social and cultural grounds he must learn to negotiate, and the other one, London, the space of translocation and commercialisation of the self. According to Liz Bondi and Hazel Christie, contemporary cities are particularly interesting to analyse social relations, since they render hierarchies particularly visible. Therefore, it is in cities "that the complex interplay of power relations, and the array of social institutions, which lie behind a given form of gender relations, are most graphically manifest" (Bondi and Christie 2000, 293). This will be especially important for the development of the novel's protagonist, D., who is mostly referred to as "Desirée," the gendered name he adopts in London once in the hands of a Nazi Romanian pimp called Radu. D. is constructed as ambivalent in many respects, ranging from his sexual orientation to his performance of identity, but more importantly, to his quasi-divine nature and eventual transubstantiation and death, which the readers must decide whether to believe or refute and so continue the chain of meanings proposed by the author. At the end of the book, we are provided with a chronology for his life, 1964-2002, that acts as an epitaph with the inclusion of the word "CUPID" preceding it. The association of this character with love and a mystic form of eroticism is the basis of the story, thus the centrality occupied by emotions and the spatial embodiment of mental dispositions which are crucial in the game of identifications presented. It is by means of his character's emotions that Sutherland interrogates social hierarchies of diverse kinds and, therefore, what appears as the particular product of a man's imagination, in fact, goes as far as to scrutinise gender asymmetries, racial discrimination, global capitalist exploitation and the dehumanisation of contemporary Western societies. In such crude mercantilist environment, love becomes the means to cure this widespread malaise, while D. becomes a dubious redeemer. He is consistently associated with the figure of Jesus Christ, always ready to forgive and forget (Sutherland 2005, 34), and see the good in everyone (68). Moreover, the visions that he has on his sexual encounters and that some other characters seem to have too, are "hints of Heaven brought on by nothing but love" (2005, 70). This way, love becomes a form of self-knowledge, which is "knowledge of the divine – the possibility that the self and the divine could be identical" (2005, 70). He believes he has a mission, he is a "messenger – a gateway to good news," and his final epiphany allows him to understand that "True love was never going to be my reward... My reward is the understanding that, for those I've touched, knowledge of *me* is knowledge of the divine" (2005, 145). Similarly, D. regards his corporeal transformation as both a reward for his service as a "saint" (2005, 16), and as a punishment for the mistakes he has made in his life (2005, 24). Indeed, it could be argued that the actual power of redemption lies on L.S.'s hands, since he has to decide whether to answer D.'s imploration for forgiveness concerning the racist at-

tacks in which he was involved as a child. Ferrebe remarks that L.S.'s reply remains withheld (2007, 282) at the end of the book, yet the fact that he does transcribe the discs and embarks on the adventure of reimagining the spaces that D. inhabited, some of which they shared at times, involves an effort to find coherence in the narrative that he too, as the writer of the story, is creating. There is an emotional engagement, even if incomplete, which materialises in a cultural product by means of which the responsibility of completing meaning is transferred to the readers of the novel. In this vein, D.'s first words, "Maybe this'll be my resurrection" (Sutherland 2005, 4), are crucial to understand the potentiality of his story, as each reader will have to recreate D.'s life in a process that will provide the narrative with a new set of associations.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed conceptualises emotions "not 'in' either the individual or the social," instead, according to her, they "produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects" (2004b, 10). Hence, emotions configure relations that are physical, embodied, but also fluctuant, mobile and yet attached: "What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. [...] [M]ovement does not cut the body off from the 'where' of its inhabitation, but connects bodies to other bodies" (2004b, 11). Such interconnectedness between bodies, spaces and emotions is present in *Venus as a Boy*, and more specifically so, how such feelings – love, but also hate and fear – are experienced differently by its characters. This will be projected on their participation in D.'s representation of reality, which always has a fantastic or magic component. In fact, *Venus as a Boy* could be regarded predominantly as a magical realist novel, but the fact that the perspective is always D.'s complicates such assertion, since other characters either seem reluctant to accept this realm or are completely alien to it.

There is a development in D.'s theory and performance of emotions from his childhood to his final years and it always has a spatial dimension. Orkney turns out to be an ambivalent source of identity for D. On the one hand, it provides him with a realisation of human brutality, yet on the other there is a clear identification between the islands and the protagonist: "When I see a map of Orkney now, I don't so much remember what the palaces look like as how I felt when I visited them. A map of Orkney's a map of my emotions, pretty much. A map of me" (Sutherland 2005, 52). It is not coincidental, then, that he chooses to have his ashes scattered there on his death. The routes charted in this personal map crisscross areas of solitude, hatred, abuse and humiliation, but also D.'s purest feelings of love, which he experiences, above all with his "first and maybe only real soulmate" (2005, 18), Finola, a young girl who lives in a nearby house, the daughter of a deeply depressed Czech single mother who triggers the children's imagination with her own fantasies of grandeur. In their children's world, magic is part of their routine and her friend's house becomes a substitute space of security and love for his own broken home. Nonetheless, it all collapses when Finola is attacked and raped by the gang of local bullies that also terrorise D. for his sexual ambiguity. After that, she and her mother flee the islands and never come back, leaving D. cut off from society. This is when he acquires the habit of cross-dressing, an act that has a clear performative intention, but that is also motivated by his love for his friend: "I wanted to be with Finola all the time, so I started wearing her clothes under my own when I was out and about, [...] I got a trick going alone in my bedroom, with lipstick and eyeshadow [...], and I'd sit a bit away from the mirror and cross my eyes, defocus and focus until I saw Finola" (2005, 26; 27). At this stage, when innocence has been lost, but not completely, drag becomes a substitute for the

object of desire, which can only be replaced by means of an embodied performance of what she represented to him. This is a conscious subversion of gender roles that remains in the private sphere at this point, but which will be performed publicly when D. moves to London.⁴

Curiously enough, the trauma of losing his friend is largely overcome when he gives in to the violence that surrounds him and is accepted by the gang of the "two-faced" under the protection of its leader, Dove. The change from victim to perpetrator is connected to his relocation in the social hierarchy after the arrival of the black boy, L.S., whom he also starts victimising: "I've never been so exhilarated by someone else's misery" (2005, 32). This provides him with a sense of belonging that is highly dependent on his close relationship with Dove, Finola's rapist, who takes him under his wing calling him by the nickname "Cunt." This relationship, as others in the course of the novel, portrays the fear of acknowledging same-sex sexual attraction and its channelling through violence. This type of reaction is analysed by Sara Ahmed, who contends that "fear and anxiety create the very effect of 'that which I am not,' through the very affect of turning from an object [...]. Fear does not involve the defense of borders that already exist; rather, fear makes those borders" (2004a, 128). D.'s understanding of sexuality does not show such constraints, "As for my sexual orientation, I hadn't any. [...] Some days I'd be all yin, others all yang sometimes both. So what?" (Sutherland 2005, 90),⁵ although he only experiences real passionate love with women: "I was never going to find true love with a guy. With them it was all belly and head, no heart" (2005, 93). The most significant one is his relationship with Tracy, a local girl who christens him Cupid. What is more relevant about it is the spatial dimension it acquires for D. He develops a sort of cosmic connexion with Orkney through his association of the emotions he feels for her and their experience of the place:

During these journeys I began to appreciate just how deep Orkney went in me and me in it. Certain things or places – cairns, hills, chambered tombs, beaches, standing stones, wind or birdsong, *qualities of light* – would make me sweat or laugh out loud. For a time just the approach of sunset over the sea was enough to bring me to tears. (2005, 52)

D.'s recall of their relationship manifests the different forms in which they love each other. He feels absolute devotion for her and this sparks his visions, but she does not partake in his mystic sexual experience, namely, the contemplation of halos, wings, or an orchard "gilded with trumpets and stars" (2005, 61). Again, the verisimilitude of D.'s story relies exclusively on his perspective, its coherence being refuted by the fact that Tracy remains in the realm of the "real." At this stage, D.'s personality is split between his immense capacity of loving and the cruelty he demonstrates in his collaboration in the racist attacks, which is the ultimate reason given by Tracy for leav-

4 Judith Butler studies the subversive potential of drag as a strategy to reveal "the imitative structure of gender itself" (1990, 175), which she conceives of as performative in essence: "acts, gestures and desire, produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (1990, 173).

5 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's argument for the openness of restricted definitions of sexuality may apply here. She contends that definitions of sexuality should comprehend "the full spectrum of positions between the more intimate and the most social, the most predetermined and the more aleatory, the most physically rooted and the most symbolically infused, the most innate and the most learned, the most autonomous and the most relational" (1991, 29).

ing him. Their breakup also represents a rupture with the space for D., who leaves Orkney on Christmas Eve only to end up living in the heart of London, in Soho. This area stands for duplicity too, not only given its immediate association with Robert Louis Stevenson's tale of the double and his location of Jekyll's apartment here, but also because of the contradictory identities that it has in contemporary times: on the one hand, a middle-class bohemian gentrified environment or a gay ghetto, and on the other, a base for the sex industry and criminality associated with global forms of human exploitation. As Doreen Massey argues, "[i]f it is now recognised that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places. Moreover, such multiple identities can be a source of richness, or a source of conflict, or both" (1993, 153). Nevertheless, duplicity has further connotations in the context of Scottish cultural analysis and, as Ferrebe contends, has been considered "quintessential to the Scottish condition" (2007, 276), at least since Gregory Smith coined the term "Caledonian antisyzygy" in 1919 to refer to "the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability" (Palmer McCulloch 2004, 6).⁶ In *Venus as a Boy* this duplicity has a gender dimension that, during its setting in London, is connected to D.'s embodiment of emotions and space in this global metropolis. Ahmed states that "If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with" (2006, 543), and this proves to be particularly evident in the novel. Both D.'s body – his fluid sexual orientation and his eventual transsexuality – and the brothel where he works become heterotopian spaces, "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 1986, 26), that is, places of difference and contradiction, which always have an emotional turn in the novel.

An obvious contradiction has to do with the portrayal of the brothel and the area surrounding it. This "half-derelict block in St Giles" (Sutherland 2005, 82) becomes home, a "refuge" (2005, 91) for D. and the drag queens that live with him. It is a space of domesticity that, in spite of the poor housing conditions and the sexual exploitation, provides D. with the opportunity to observe the city from the secure space of his room's roof terrace. However, this security is threatened by the appearance of a new character, Wendy, an American transsexual that instantly becomes D.'s object of desire. Her arrival coincides with the April 1999 Neo-Nazi attacks in central London, anticipating the chaos and destruction that her presence will cause. Wendy has a physical influence over D. with her ambiguous attitude, sometimes insinuating an attraction and other times dispelling him, while D. has "attacks" of intense emotion in her presence. The appearance of this new character also redistributes the use of the space, since D. allows her to have his room, and therefore, his access to the view of London, which becomes restricted to the times when Wendy allows him to enter her newly appropriated space. In these occasions, watching the city in her company makes him see it as a "wonderland" (2005, 99), and the terrace becomes a "third space" (Soja 1996) from which to interpret and redefine London through his imagination and emotions:

I'd pick out pathways between aeries, chimneys, railings, gable ends, roof gardens, coolers, hoardings, scaffold, street lights, skywalking to these big spillages of gold – Christchurch, St Paul's, St Bride's, Parliament, Canon Street, all the bridges, the whole of Holloway, Kensington, Chelsea,

6 Although "the double" was a recurrent theme in former Scottish works, as exemplified by James Hogg or Robert Louis Stevenson.

Shoreditch, Whitechapel, Spitalfield, Islington, King's Cross, Clerkenwell, Smithfields and more; the Thames a flaming comet's tail, meandering through interconnected constellations, supernovas, nebulae; the city a mirror held up to Heaven. (Sutherland 2005, 100)

This initial stage in his relationship with Wendy allows him to live in a space that is "no longer London, but a sheet of *flame*" (2005, 111). There are no restrictions to their accessing its public spaces, not only on an oneiric level, but also on a physical one. Accessing consumer goods is, nevertheless, mediated by the commercialisation of their bodies; they are both "consumer citizens" (Bell and Binnie 2004, 1809), and the objects to be consumed in cosmopolitan London. For instance, they can drive across the city in any direction on a "blue MG convertible, hood down" (Sutherland 2005, 110) or go to upper-class parties in residential areas. D. is desperate to make Wendy love him, but she, like Tracy before, cannot feel the ecstasies he describes. However, love, joy and illusion keep D. in a state of euphoria that provides him with a strong confidence to arrogate the city's spaces. Liz Bondi argues that "embodied experiences of cities are necessarily inflected by emotions" (Bondi 2005, 12). This will explain to some extent D.'s belief that his mission of redemption is signaled to him again when, after buying a telescope with which he spies on the city's dwellers, he sees a mixed-race couple fighting and decides to enter their flat to comfort the man that has been left alone, Jason. Thus, he asks Wendy to accompany him in order to give him "a Christmas present he'll never forget" (2005, 115). This is the highest point of crisis in the story. After the visit, Wendy chooses not to run away with D., as he had asked her to, and instead goes on with the kind of life she has led over the last years, first of all by having a sexual encounter with Jason. When D. discovers the betrayal, he becomes infuriated and attacks her. Love is replaced by hatred and an urge for revenge, so he breaks into Wendy's room and steals some very intimate belongings, her sex-change diary as well as photographs and a video of her transformation, which he sends Jason. Wendy disappears on Christmas Day and Radu punishes D. by confining him in "an upstairs room on the edge of Soho [...] with only two windows looking out on blocks across the way" (2005, 125), where he will live until his last days. At first, D. keeps looking for love in the women he has relationships with, always to fail "being anywhere other than here in London" (2005, 127). His emotional deterioration is worsened when, on 11 September 2001 – again the date of a terrorist attack brought to the foreground to emphasise a turning point in D.'s life – Radu forces him to take hormone pills for a sex change. This final act of vengeance instigated by Wendy, who now lives with Radu, establishes a parallelism between the attack on the heart of the US and the destruction of D.'s body and identity. Now D. feels an actual split between mind and body, "I was there in mind but not in body, because my body wasn't my own any more. [...] I became this man with an unwanted woman's body" (2005, 6), complicating a sexuality that until that moment had been unproblematic to him. Such enforced change must also be understood in spatial terms, since as Jay Prosser contends, "transition as a geographic trope allies to transsexual narratives: that is, transsexuality as a passage through space, a journey from one location to another" (Prosser 1998, 5). In the case of D., this involves paying a high emotional price. Indeed, D.'s despair is so strong that, after a failed escape to Orkney with Pascal, and being brought back to London, he decides to commit suicide, jumping off one of the city's landmarks, the Millennium Bridge, a symbol of the optimism with which the 21st century was celebrated in "Cool Britannia." At this stage, the only means to recover his mystic visions is stretching the limits of his corporeality to the limit, so when he jumps he has a glimpse of the emotions he has lost: "I saw massive

gates on London Wall. The Thames caught fire on my way down, blazed all the way from Westminster to Canary Wharf. I saw the City gates open just before I hit the water. Meadows and orchards beyond" (2005, 138). Again, his mental disposition has a clear spatial component, and so his embodiment of the city in this metaphorical baptism allows him to recuperate some coherence and the control of his mythical narration of events. A clear instance is provided by an episode that comes to strengthen the supernatural version over the realist one. When the explanation for the physical change in D.'s skin, which is "golden all over" (2005, 4), is given in scientific terms, illnesses like jaundice or hepatitis B are mentioned. However, the sudden appearance of two new characters tips the scales in favour of D.'s version. They are a Spanish blind girl and her mother, who sees D. through the window and believes him to be a saint who can cure her daughter. They ask him to perform a miracle by letting the child touch his skin, but nothing happens to the disappointment of the mother, except for D. getting a final vision. This would seem to confirm the fallacy in his narrative, but some days later, he receives a letter from this woman thanking him for her daughter's transformation: "she can't see, not at all, but she's come right out her shell and's been laughing non stop" (2005, 142). Similarly, when Radu realises D. is dying and tries to ask for forgiveness, he perceives a beautiful smell, "like a field full of flowers" (2005, 143) coming out from his skin.

D.'s final act of self-acknowledgement is made possible by his efforts to put order in his narrative of emotions, which is systematically projected on the spaces he has inhabited. By recalling his life, he comes to believe that his real mission is not finding love on Earth, but the actual process of searching for it, the quest in itself. Thus, as an imperfect redeemer who, nevertheless, sacrifices his body for the sake of the others, he does not obtain a personal reward; instead, the reward is for those he has touched and who have shared his vision, those who may now have faith in the possibility of prevailing over their isolation. Tim Edensor contends that "whilst there are multiple texts, representations, illusions, myths and dreams through which the city may be interpreted, bodies act upon the city, inscribing their presence through movement in a process of continual remaking" (Edensor 2000, 121). At the end of the novel, what the reader is asked to discern is whether D. has succeeded in inscribing his presence in the city, and if his mythic understanding of interpersonal relations has effected any change on what Sara Ahmed denominates the "economy of emotions;" that is, if he has contributed to changing the social "affective value" created by the accumulation and circulation of emotions (Ahmed 2004b, 11) in this dehumanised contemporary metropolis.

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