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“Five Stones Underneath’: Literary Representations of the Lockerbie Air Disaster”

Dr Eleanor Bell

School of Humanities, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

4.09 Lord Hope Building, 141 St James Road, Glasgow G4 OLT

T 44 (0)141 444 8334, E eleanor.bell@strath.ac.uk

Eleanor Bell is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Strathclyde. She is the author of *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (2004) and co-editor of *Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Culture and Literature* (2004). Her current research focusses on the literary culture of the Scottish sixties, on which she has published two co-edited volumes (*The International Writers’ Conference Revisited: Edinburgh, 1962* (2012) and *The Scottish Sixties: Reading, Rebellion, Revolution?* (2013)). She was founding co-editor (with Scott Hames) of the *International Journal of Scottish Literature* from 2006-2010.

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December 21st 2018 marked the 30th anniversary of the Lockerbie Air Disaster. Despite this lengthy passage of time, the case remains highly contentious and active. A quick search on the topic reveals a host of possible conspiracy theories and cover-ups, many conflicting narratives and possibilities, and, for many, a strong feeling that the sentencing of Abdelbasset al-Megrahi represented a miscarriage of justice. While there have been many political books and articles on Lockerbie, surprisingly to date there have been no scholarly papers on its literary representations. This article therefore considers the ways in which the Lockerbie Air Disaster has been considered in fiction, drama and poetry since 1988, surveying what has been published, as well as examining some of the motivations behind these. As will be demonstrated, some common threads run through these literary texts: namely, a frustration with the slowness of the ongoing criminal case and the perception that justice has still to be served. As will be demonstrated, many of the Lockerbie texts therefore contain inherent, politically-charged provocations, sending out reminders that many aspects of the case have still to be accounted for in the public domain.

Keywords: Lockerbie Air Disaster; contemporary Scottish literature; 9/11; literature and terrorism

On the 21st December 1988, Pan Am Flight 103, a regularly scheduled transatlantic flight, was travelling from Frankfurt to Detroit, via London and New York. Less than an hour after leaving Heathrow, radio contact with the plane was lost and the plane came down in the town of Lockerbie in the Scottish borders. All on board (243 passengers and 16 crew) and eleven residents of Lockerbie were killed- a total of 270 people. After a three-year investigation into the case, two Libyan nationals were arrested, Abdelbasset al-Megrahi and Al Alim Khalifa Fhimah. The two men were subsequently sent for trial in a specially set up neutral court in the Netherlands, Camp Zeist. In 2001, Al Alim

Khalifa Fhimah was acquitted and Abdelbasset al-Megrahi was found guilty of all 270 counts of murder. Megrahi appealed his case in 2001, though this was unsuccessful. In 2007 the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission granted Megrahi leave to begin a second appeal. Megrahi later abandoned this appeal in 2009 after he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Amidst much controversy, he was subsequently released by the Scottish Government on compassionate grounds later in 2009, in order to return home to his family in Libya. He died three years later in 2012.

December 21st 2018 therefore marked the 30th anniversary of the Lockerbie Air Disaster. Despite this lengthy passage of time, the case remains highly contentious and active, many still questioning whether Abdelbasset al-Megrahi was really the bomber, or not. A quick search on the topic reveals a host of possible conspiracy theories and cover-ups, many conflicting narratives and possibilities, and, for many, a strong feeling that the sentencing of Abdelbasset al-Megrahi represented a miscarriage of justice. Several key books have been published on the case, including John Ashton and Ian Ferguson's *Cover-up of Convenience* (2001), Ashton's *Megrahi: You are my Jury: The Lockerbie Evidence* (2012), his book to mark the 25th anniversary, *Scotland's Shame: Why Lockerbie Still Matters* (2013), and also Kenny MacAskill's *The Lockerbie bombing: The Search for Justice* (2016). Yet the Lockerbie case has proven to be especially sensitive and complex, especially surrounding the evidence that convicted Megrahi. Each book on the subject clearly examines the case from its own agenda: John Ashton, for example, worked as part of the Megrahi legal team from 2006-2009, while Kenny MacAskill was the Cabinet Secretary for Justice in the Scottish Government, therefore responsible for negotiating Megrahi's release. In May 2018 it was announced that the Scottish Criminal Case Review Commission would carry out a review of

Abdelbaset al-Megrahi's conviction, which could potentially lead to a new appeal against his guilty verdict, so events are still on-going (Anderson).

Yet while there have been many political books and articles on Lockerbie, surprisingly to date there have been no scholarly papers on its literary representations. This article therefore considers the ways in which the Lockerbie Air Disaster has been considered in fiction, drama and poetry since 1988, surveying what has been published, as well as examining some of the potential motivations behind these. As will be shown, some common threads run through these literary texts: namely, a frustration with the slowness of the ongoing criminal case and a perception that justice has still to be served. As I will demonstrate, many of the Lockerbie texts therefore contain inherent, politically-charged provocations, sending out reminders that numerous aspects of the case have still to be accounted for in the public domain.

In the absence of existing literary criticism, some parallels with literary representations of 9/11 literary representations and critical writings may provide a useful starting point. Writing about the sense of responsibility many American writers felt in the aftermath of 9/11, for example, Pankaj Mishra writes that "Writers had to develop new resources - a capacity for abstract thought as well as formal daring - to try to describe how and why human relations had altered in the new conditions of modern life" (Mishra 4). Mishra then draws a comparison with the immediate aftermath of WW1, going on to suggest that, "apart from a few expatriates such as Eliot and Gertrude Stein, American writers rarely contributed to this critical reassessment of European modernity - what brought forth the last great flowering of European literature" (4). Mishra's larger point is that while there has been a significant literary response to 9/11 in the American context, these texts have often demonstrated a strong

tendency towards commemoration and isolationism, a reluctance to assess the larger ideological complexities of 9/11 at more global levels. This distinction between the immediate, emotional response versus a more nuanced position of critical distance is something that has engaged other critics of 9/11 literature. For example, as Martin Randall comments in *9/11 and the Literature of Terror*:

One of the central dilemmas for fiction writers has been how to accommodate the attacks into a fictional narrative. The enormity of the event - its traumatic incomprehensibility - potentially unsettles the “flow” of a conventional linear realist narrative and as such the more conventional novels have arguably struggled to reconcile the reality of 9/11 within a fictional milieu (78).

While the Lockerbie Bombing occurred only thirteen years earlier in 1988, its media reporting and, vitally, pre-internet context, meant that immediate reactions took much longer to disseminate. As will be shown, the literary response to Lockerbie also took longer to materialize (perhaps significantly, most of the Lockerbie literature discussed in this essay was published after 2001). Following Mishra, therefore, this article will also investigate the tendency to which these engagements with Lockerbie act as works of commemoration, or as more investigative, probing critiques.

Poetry Magazines and Collections

In his article “Little Magazine, World Form” Eric Bulson suggests that:

The little magazine... doesn't just make history: it is history. Which is to say, it is a medium shaped by the material conditions of its time and place, including everything from print technologies and prudish censors to postal rates and paper

costs. It takes on different shapes and actively responds to the particular audience, literary tradition, and print culture out of which it emerges (1).

As other critics have pointed out, the editorials of small literary magazines have often captured aspects of the key moments of their times (Görtschacher 1993; Miller and Price 2006). However, a survey of the editorials of the most well-known Scottish literary journals and poetry magazines of the time reveals engagement with Lockerbie to be striking by its absence. A few poems did, however, appear more subtly, interwoven through a few literary magazines and periodicals. Stewart Conn's "Breach of Privacy" in *Chapman* in 1990, perhaps gets to the heart of the problematic nature of writing about Lockerbie, the dangers of voyeurism and impinging on the grief of others ("How, at such a moment dare a lens intrude/ on his, and others', remnant of privacy?"), yet also the need to transgress this notion at the same time ("I can but trust my motive/ is to entreat that in the future, life/ may ease rather than trespass on his grief" (42)). William Hershaw's "Lockerbie Elegy", published in Scots language magazine *Scots Glasnost*, is similarly concerned with the unfathomability of the event ("Wha farrant their foul fate/ Wha doomed them ti dee? Wha schemed the ploy?" (24)). Written in both Gaelic and English, Ruairidh MacThomais/ Derick Thomson's short poem "Nollaig 1988"/ "Christmas Day 1988" appeared in *Lines Review* in 1990. This short poem creates a sharp juxtaposition between the usual silence on the streets on Christmas Day, with the extraordinary situation in Lockerbie ("and now we can hear the voice of a child in Lockerbie- / *Natalicia*" (12)). A further two poems were dedicated to particular victims and survivors. Judy Steel's "For Nicole Boulanger", for example, was dedicated to the Syracuse University student "Who was born in the same year as my daughter, / and who died in the Lockerbie air disaster of 1988" (68). John Duffy's "Lockerbie

1990”, published in *West Coast Magazine* was dedicated to Patrick Keegans, the then newly-appointed parish priest in Lockerbie and survivor of the bombing. The poem recounts a meeting between the speaker and Keegans, their “hug holding much more/ than thirty years/ friendship”. Duffy’s poem depicts the reflective nature of this meeting, just over a year after the bombing, the search for larger meaning in small details (“The kestrel/ that roosts every day/ in the tree by his window/ is hunting the roadside bank/ beside the firm new fence:/ young grass blurs/ the sharpness of scars.”) The poem ends with the speaker leaving Keegan’s house and an omen of renewal (“under the eyes of the hawk/ look up at the new moon” (4)). A few years later, these were followed up by a collection on Lockerbie, *Blue Daze, Black Knights: The Story of Lockerbie* (1999) by Brian McManus. McManus is a former Serious Crime Squad officer, who was called to Lockerbie on the morning after the disaster. He then stayed for three and a half years. Perhaps the most well-known of these poems is “The Girl I Never Met” (“My life revolves around her memory yet;/ the girl I once picked up, but never met” (14)), which reached the final shortlist for the 1994 Rhyme International Prize.

Noticeably all of these poems were written soon after the event and what they share is a sense of the immensity and incomprehensibility of the disaster. In *9/11 and the Literature of Terror*, Martin Randall makes a similar observation with 9/11 that “First responses tended to be survivor/ eyewitness reports that provided commentators with empirical evidence to begin to formulate what was happening at the time and then in the bewildering aftermath” (2). In the context of Lockerbie, therefore, the initial poetic response was similar. Returning to the points in the introduction above, it is clear to see that these early responses were largely concerned with commemoration, the poem

form being well-suited to capturing such snapshot responses and tributes.

Dramatic Representations: *The Women of Lockerbie* and *Lockerbie 103*

In 2003, two plays on Lockerbie were first staged: Deborah Brevoort's *The Women of Lockerbie* and Des Dillon's *Lockerbie 103*. Brevoort's *The Women of Lockerbie*, written in 1998 and premiered in New York in 2003, is perhaps the best-known literary work on Lockerbie from an American context, with over 350 productions of the play taking place between 2003 and 2014 alone.¹ Brevoort was inspired to write the play after watching a television program which documented the deeply moving voluntary work of a group of women in Lockerbie to sort and launder approximately 11,000 pieces of personal clothing, which were later returned to families of lost ones. In the play, the women of Lockerbie appear as a Greek chorus. Commenting on this choice, Brevoort has noted in her introduction to the play that "It was a form designed to handle the big emotions and extreme behaviors that attend these kinds of events by presenting them in a way that the audiences can bear". "Naturalism as a theatrical form", she comments, "was simply inadequate in capturing the dimensions of this story and whenever the play veered in that direction, the characters and situation sunk to the level of melodrama" (8).

¹ Brevoort's *The Women of Lockerbie* "won the Kennedy Center's Fund for New American Plays Award and the silver medal in the Onassis International Playwriting Competition. It was produced in London at the Orange Tree, off-Broadway at the New Group and Women's Project and in Los Angeles at the Actor's Gang. It is produced all over the US and internationally. Published by DPS and No Passport Press, the play has had over 600 productions to date and is translated into nine languages." (Brevoort).

In this play the ancient Greek theatrical conventions such as the ode structure and heightened gestures creates a space for critical distance and reflection, one which may also be cathartic for the audience.² While much of the play is concerned with female resistance, the power of their collective work in converting “an act of hatred into an act of love”, towards the end of the play there are some sharply interjected, vitriolic moments. At such points the play becomes unexpectedly politically charged, the audience being challenged to see the case in quite confrontational ways that many would find controversial:

You bombed that passenger jet from Iran!

You shot down a plane full of innocent people!

Lockerbie was revenge for that! (114)

While Brevoort’s play concentrates mostly on the powerful nature of the women’s communal work, the temporal distance from the Air Disaster allows for contemplation of the possible conspiracies surrounding it. As the author has noted, the fact that this is post-9/11 play provides an important perspective: “Although this is a Scottish story, there is an awful lot in it that speaks to Americans... September 11 gave us a new context in which to view the Pan Am 103 disaster. Suddenly people have an

² “I found that the trick to keeping the play heightened was to stick closely to the conventions used by the Greeks. The episode/dialogue/ ode structure, as well as the use of theatrical conventions such as stichomythia, poetic speech, recited language and heightened gestures showed me how to calibrate emotion, thought, engagement and distancing effects within the performance so that the audience can not only endure the spectacle on stage, but enjoy it and experience catharsis...” (8).

understanding of what happened then that they didn't before" (*The Scotsman*).

Des Dillon's *Lockerbie 103* (2003) was inspired by John Ashton and Ian Ferguson's *The Cover-up of Convenience* (2001) and commissioned by the Ashton Group (the director of which, Rachel Ashton, is the sister of John Ashton). The play premiered in Barrow-in-Furness in 2003 and then travelled around the UK. The play is set in a small guest house in Lockerbie, in 2001, after the acquittal of Al Alim Khalifa Fhimah, one of the co-accused Libyan suspects, and largely explores the tension between two characters, Ali (described as Middle Eastern, a long-term resident in the B&B) and Michael Vogler (described simply as an American backpacker at the start of the play). As the play unfolds, we learn that Ali is in fact a double agent and that Vogler's mother was a passenger on Flight 103. Vogler, we learn, would like to pay Ali to murder Khalifa Fhimah, though, in response, Ali asserts that "there are some stones out there and when they are turned you are not going to like what you see" (24). Interwoven throughout the play are defamiliarizing, abrupt cuts to scenes of radio reports, where the characters on stage transform into radio presenters, documenting lesser-discussed aspects of the case, such as the large amounts of money and drugs found at the crash site, the almost immediate appearance at the scene by members of the CIA. Later transformation scenes give voice to both Fhimah and Megrahi, yet, strikingly, as victims rather perpetrators. These scenes again serve to highlight alleged, controversial details of the Lockerbie case ("no one thought to ask how they got there so quickly. The middle-aged American wandering around Lockerbie town center were clearly not bewildered tourists... With hindsight their presence was the first public clue that the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 was no straightforward act of terrorism" (35) and "A local farmer had seen a substantial quantity of white powder in a suitcase that

landed in his field and was puzzled by the authorities' failure to explain (or even acknowledge) the find" (37). A clear objective of the play is therefore to suggest that such controversial details have yet to be accounted for in the criminal case. As the play progresses, we are given a strong sense of the complexity of its various conspiracy theories: as Ali states to Michael, "every time your turn a stone there are five stones underneath to be turned. And each of them has five stones" (40).³

Since *The Women of Lockerbie* and *Lockerbie 103* there have been several other dramatic engagements. Michael Eaton's *The Families of Lockerbie* premiered at the Nottingham Playhouse in 2010, and in the same year David Benson staged *Lockerbie: Unfinished Business*. Kenneth Ross's *The Lockerbie Bomber* and Lee Gershuny's *Lockerbie: Lost Voices* were both first staged at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2013. In stark comparison with the poetry referenced above, what many of these plays share is a stark reminder to their audience, often delivered bluntly and polemically, is that perhaps much of the evidence surrounding Lockerbie has yet been brought to public awareness. Reviewing Benson's play, for example, *Scotsman* theatre critic Joyce McMillan commented that:

The heart of the show, though, lies in [Jim] Swire's rage at the abject failure of British – and Scottish – justice even to try to expose the truth about the bombings. In meticulous detail, Benson's script stacks up the detail which suggests that the story of Libyan involvement in the bombing was fabricated, that the conviction of Abdelbaset Ali Al-Megrahi was a shocking miscarriage of justice – Swire actually fainted when he heard the guilty verdict – and that the

³ See also Sassi (2012). In her "Glocalising Democracy: The Quest for Truth and Justice in *Lockerbie 103* by Des Dillon", Sassi reads the play in terms of its cosmopolitanism, the tension between local and global concerns in the play.

men who probably did murder his daughter have never been brought to justice (McMillan).⁴

Following this vein, discussing his rationale for writing *The Lockerbie Bomber*, Kenneth Ross has commented that:

I wrote the play, my first, as a reminder that the 270 victims and their families still await justice. I started with an open mind but the more I researched, the clearer it became to me that Governments have systematically covered up the truth for nearly twenty-five years. Evidence withheld. Evidence fabricated. Witnesses paid for their testimony. Scottish justice reduced to the level of a corrupt, banana republic (Ross).

Throughout these various dramatic engagements is a growing anger and resentment at the information withheld from public knowledge, the stage conventions attempting to jolt the assumptions and expectations of its audience. Similarly, recurring is a strong view that the prosecution of Megrahi represented a miscarriage of justice, that many of the facts surrounding the bombing have been covered up as a matter of national and international security.

The Aviation Thriller Novel

Returning to the distinctions between commemoration and critique in 9/11 literature established in the introduction, in representations of Lockerbie a third category might be added, that of sensation. Noticeably, one of the most prominent ways in which

⁴ Dr Jim Swire lost his daughter, Flora, in the Lockerbie Air Disaster. He subsequently became a spokesperson for UK Families Flight 103 and has been one of the most vocal advocates for the release of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi.

Lockerbie has been represented in literature is through the aviation thriller novel. As will be explored, while this investigative approach has helped to open out some of the controversies surrounding the case, it has also at times run the risk of representing the tragedy in what might be regarded as overly superficial and sensational ways.

The first novel to be published was Morag Morrison's *The Lockerbie Legend* (1993). Morrison had previously published four other independently produced novels, one of which was also an airplane thriller, *Harrier Hijack* (1990). *The Lockerbie Legend* was self-published by Dorrance Publishing. Published in the recent aftermath of the bombing, the novel takes a definitive view that "For those who suffered incalculable loss and pain at the tragic deaths of their loved ones, three years of waiting and praying for justice have resulted in a political stalemate, with the perpetrators of the heinous crime reveling in the sanctuary of Libya" (1).

After Morrison's novel there was a gap of over a decade before Chris Petit's *The Passenger* (2006) and Sam Green's *Flight into Danger* (2008). In these novels, form and content intertwine, with the complexities of plot in each novel elucidating in turn the labyrinthine nature of the case itself.⁵ Juval Aviv, who writes under the name of Sam Green, claims to be a former major in the Israel Defense Force and secret intelligence officer for Mossad, though, as reviews of his book evidence, even these details are open to question.⁶ Green's *Flight into Danger* suggests that Iranian and American secret services were complicit in the Lockerbie Bombing and Petit's *The*

⁵ The British title of Green's novel was *Flight 103* (2008).

⁶ Several sources question this. See, for example, Andrew Billen's article in *The Times*: "This is an interview with an assassin. At least I think it is. Though it's just possible that Juval Aviv is a brilliant conman who has persuaded some of the world's most powerful corporations, media organisations and governments to trust him." <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/a-trained-mossad-killer-or-a-cab-driver-8k09tgb08rz>.

Passenger similarly raises many questions about the underlying reason for the bombing in the first instance.⁷

In contrast to these novels of political intrigue and espionage, a more flippant engagement with Lockerbie (disguised as “Cairbridge”), can be found in the blurb for Amanda Blundy’s *Double Shot* (2008)⁸:

Faith Zanetti doesn't much care who put the bomb on flight TAA67, the plane that blew up over the tiny Scottish village of Cairbridge twenty-five years ago. Wasn't it those Libyan blokes who went to prison for it? For a woman whose comfort zone is a war zone it seems like the boring assignment from hell. But as the conspiracy theories start seeming less theoretical and the threats get increasingly real, Faith realizes she's skating on thin ice.

Most recently, and the novel that has come across as the most sensational and problematic is Gerard de Villiers’ *Les Fantomes De Lockerbie* (2013). While the novel addresses Villiers’ belief that Lockerbie was retribution for the US military warship US Vincennes shooting down an Iranian passenger plane five months before Lockerbie (killing 290 people), the novel also controversially appeared with a glamour model holding a gun in each hand on the cover. While this debasement caused outrage and

⁷ In his *Guardian* article on Lockerbie, “What if they are innocent?”, Russell Warren Howe writes that “Aviv proved fairly convincingly that the bomb was placed in Frankfurt and he implicated a Palestinian resistance movement. His Interfor report concludes that the bombing was directed not at the US airliner per se, but at a small unit of US military intelligence-members of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA)- that had uncovered a drugs-smuggling ring in Lebanon.” Petit’s novel also goes down a similar path: “Was it all to do with drugs or arms smuggling? Could it have been an act of revenge against individual spies? Was it Islamic terrorism? Or could it have been a bungled Machiavellian plot by the Israelis to cast suspicion on Palestinians working in Germany? What is certain is that there are no easy answers - even to the big question: is Nick really alive? (As for Libyans, they hardly feature in the book at all)” (Lewin).

⁸ *Double Shot* is the fourth novel in Blundy’s Faith Zanetti thriller series. Its US title was *Breaking Faith*.

anger from victims' families, De Villier responded that: "I don't consider myself a literary man. I'm a storyteller. I write fairytales for adults" (Aitken).

Literary Fiction: *The Professor of Truth* and *The Letters of Ivor Punch*

Perhaps the best-known novel about Lockerbie is James Robertson's *The Professor of Truth* (2013). This was followed by Colin MacIntyre's *The Letters of Ivor Punch* (2015).⁹ At the heart of each novel is an obsession with the potential "truths" of Lockerbie. In *The Professor of Truth*, the central character proclaims near the start of the novel that "the only thing I've ever felt an allegiance to... is the truth" (22). In this novel, protagonist Alan Tealing has lost his wife and daughter in the bombing of a plane over Scotland. While the crash location is never revealed, events, suspects and dating of the novel all closely align with the 1988 Lockerbie Air Crash Disaster. Alan Tealing spends most of his free time trying to get to the heart of what he describes as "The Case", that is, his personal investigation into the bombing. *The Letters of Ivor Punch*, is similarly haunted by a plane crash, this time revealed to have taken place in Lockerbie. In each novel there is a self-conscious engagement with the Lockerbie tragedy, a need for the central characters to simultaneously address yet escape from the trauma it has inflicted. In *The Professor of Truth*, most of the action takes place outside of Scotland, with Tealing on a quest to find one of the key witnesses in Australia, whereas in *The Letters of Ivor Punch* the tragedy is just one strand of a densely woven plot with many interconnected characters, set on an island closely resembling Mull, where myth and the supernatural readily blur with everyday life. Each novel explores the ways in which its very different central characters are struggling to come to terms with the Disaster more

⁹ Colin MacIntyre is perhaps better known as a singer and songwriter, releasing several albums under the name Mull Historical Society. *The Letters of Ivor Punch* was his first novel, winning the 2015 Edinburgh International Book Festival First Book Award.

than twenty years later. In its analysis of both novels, this section will therefore consider the blurring of fact and fiction, the implications of this quest for truth, examining the political tensions which emerge in each as a consequence.

Interestingly, in discussing *The Professor of Truth* Robertson has denied that this is a novel about Lockerbie, claiming instead that it takes inspiration from the tragedy. Yet at a personal level Robertson has clearly been deeply engaged with the context of Lockerbie for some time, as shown, for example, in his 2011 Saltire Society Lecture delivered at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. Robertson opened his lecture by stating: “Since it is because of my occupation as a writer of fiction that I am giving this talk, why do I wish to devote it to something so clearly and tragically real as the Lockerbie bombing and its aftermath?”. He then goes on to suggest:

There are two reasons. First, I believe that fiction and reality are by no means mutually exclusive: through fiction, or literature more generally, there is sometimes the possibility of reaching for truths about the human condition that cannot readily be grasped as we lead our daily lives, either because our lives are too busy or too difficult, or because other people and powers keep those truths from us. Second... The health and wellbeing of a community, of a country, of a nation – and Scotland is each and all of these – can be measured in many different ways, but if those of us engaged in “culture” shrink from engaging with politics and the law, then neither our politics, nor our law, nor our culture in the widest sense, will be honest or progressive... Quite the reverse: without that engagement, at a time in our history when there is so much public rhetoric about Scots taking more responsibility for running our own affairs... we run the risk of suggesting to our lawmakers and elected leaders that we hand them that

responsibility without much caring what they do with it. I for one care very much (Robertson).

For Robertson, too many questions have been left unanswered, which, he states, “hang like spectral shadows over the future of our country”. And, he goes on, “If we cannot feel confident that the biggest criminal trial in Scottish history achieved a just, and convincingly just, outcome, then not only do those whose loved ones were murdered go on suffering, but Scotland as a whole suffers.” (Robertson).

Taking these statements into account, it is interesting to examine the ways in which Robertson’s novel blurs the line between and fiction vs fact in his novel. In *The Professor of Truth* the central character, Alan Tealing, a lecturer in English Literature, is researching the life and work of a little-known writer, David Dibald, who wrote “four moderately successful novels” from 1906 to 1914. Alan Tealing is drawn to this writer he explains, for the simplicity of his work, his ability to capture the seemingly unremarkable in his writing. Dibald, we are told, was concerned with “continuity in life, with patterns, with those things of the world that may be described as ‘recurring’ or ‘unchanging’: the annual cycle of birth, death and rebirth in nature.” (56). Tealing explains that “What I find attractive about Dibald is the total absence of signs of arrogance or ambition. He seems just to be having a stab at writing down his take on life, disguising it as fiction. All novelists do that of course – do it bravely, or arrogantly or stupidly, or well or badly...” (57). Tealing is drawn to Dibald’s work as it is the testimony of one rather unremarkable man who went largely unrecorded in history. Tealing may also see himself reflected in this image: his own life feels unremarkable and small, especially when set in contrast with the tragedy of the plane crash.

This concern, however, with “disguising life in fiction” reaches a new level

given that so many of the events of the novel are disguised references to the Lockerbie bombing. In this novel Robertson has taken inspiration from the real-life quest of Jim Swire to prove the innocence of the convicted bomber Abdelbaset al-Megrahi. In 1988 Swire lost his daughter Flora to the tragedy, whereas in this novel Alan Tealing loses both his wife and daughter. At the start of the novel Alan Tealing receives a tip-off from a former CIA agent, who confides to Tealing that one of the key witnesses of the case who had previously disappeared, Martin Parroulet, is in fact still alive, in Australia. For the reader familiar with the Lockerbie context, there are parallels between Parroulet and the real-life shop keeper in Malta, Tony Gauci (who allegedly sold clothes to Megrahi, fragments of which were supposedly linked to the timer of the explosive device). However, despite these parallels, Robertson has claimed that this is *not* a novel about Lockerbie. Commenting in a *Scotsman* review, Robertson comments that “It’s not a roman à clef... It’s not thinly disguised history. But it is my attempt through fiction to investigate and explore some of the issues that come out of an event like that.” Yet, at the same time he goes on to suggest, “Inevitably, people are going to read it as being about Lockerbie. I don’t blame them for that and I don’t expect anything else” (Robinson).

It is therefore natural to question *why* Robertson would write a novel which so closely reflects key details of the crash, which confuse fact and fiction in this way. Such blurring of fact and fantasy can of course be seen in much of Robertson’s other fictional works, from *The Fanatic* through to *And the Land Lay Still*, and he is clearly interested in testing out the boundaries of lived history within fiction. When questioned about this blurring of fact and fiction in *The Professor of Truth*, Robertson has suggested that “a novel is a way in which people can have their interest triggered and maybe even though

this is fiction, within it readers might find something that explains why so many people are convinced that there has been a miscarriage of justice.” (Robinson).

Robertson himself is a member of the Justice for Megrahi group, whose function is to promote their belief that the prosecution of Megrahi was a miscarriage of justice, that the truth of Lockerbie has still to officially emerge. In *The Professor of Truth*, it is revealed that Khalil Khazir (who is the Megrahi figure in the novel) was a scapegoat, set up for prosecution as a convenient cover-up, at intergovernmental levels. In some ways, therefore, the novel could also be regarded as an exposé of the secretive behavior of governments and the information consequently withheld from public knowledge. The reader might not be any closer to the “truth” of Lockerbie by the end of the novel, yet they get a sense of the labyrinthine control of information at intergovernmental levels that may be at the heart of this case.

In a recent article for *Scottish Affairs*, Daniel Kenealy maps out his analysis of the Lockerbie case in terms of Scottish national interests, intergovernmental relations and what he terms para-diplomacy from political perspectives. Para-diplomacy, he explains, “is a concept that has emerged in academia to try to make sense of the external affairs of sub-national governments... Scholars of para-diplomacy most often focus on economic and cultural activities by sub-national governments, such as trade missions, sporting events, tourism, and national heritage. However, it is also possible to engage in *political* para-diplomacy” (426). For Kenealy, the decision to release Megrahi on compassionate grounds by the Scottish Government in 2009 was a clear example of such *political* para-diplomacy: that is, empowered to make the decision under Scots Law, the Scottish Government were in an unexpected position of political strength and cardholding, directly in the global limelight. For Kenealy, this political paradiplomacy

provided both the means for the Scottish Government avoiding further appeals against Megrahi and simultaneously promoting this decision as “distinctly Scottish” - that is, he describes, “based on Scottish values and notions of justice and mercy, contrasted with the UK’s shadier dealings” (427). What Kenealy suggests, therefore, is that the Lockerbie case is therefore hugely complex, sensitive and *international*, that any attempts to understand it involves navigating between many different accounts of evidence, including possible conspiracy theories, from across the globe.

In *The Professor of Truth*, the Megrahi figure is released on compassionate grounds, and Tealing, much like Jim Swire, meets with this man on several occasions and is convinced of his innocence. The broader implication of the novel is that political para-diplomacy and governmental cover-ups are at the center of The Case. The Lockerbie trial was the first time that a Scottish criminal trial had been held outside Scotland. In this respect it placed Scotland in an interesting paradiplomatic position where a small country exerted its own will- yet going against the grain of Westminster and the wishes of the USA in doing so (which outraged then-President Barack Obama and future British prime minister David Cameron).

In his own recent book on Lockerbie, Kenny MacAskill, Cabinet Secretary for Justice during the time of Megrahi’s release, states that: “[The book] shows that the trial and the subsequent legal wranglings were in some ways a side issue to major international, commercial and security deals ... I knew at the time that Scotland was just a small cog in a big wheel, but what I did not realize then was just how small and how big” (MacAskill 8). Through the defiant quest of Alan Tealing, *The Professor of Truth* similarly reveals the smallness of Scotland as a small cog in a much larger wheel that will always be subject to the manipulation of larger global powers and forces of para-

diplomacy. Against this, however, Alan Tealing does have a level of success in his plight. Towards the end of the novel, after the dramatic bush fire in Australia in which they are almost killed, Tealing convinces Parroulet to provide a written testimony which will have a significant impact on The Case. With this evidence, there is a chance that the criminal investigation would have to be re-opened. With a renewed air of defiance and optimism, Tealing heads back home to Scotland, stating “I’d be back from the dead, with news” (270).

Colin MacIntyre’s *The Letters of Ivor Punch*, is similarly haunted by a plane crash, this time revealed to have taken place in Lockerbie. The novel fluctuates throughout history- through generations of the Punch family, going back as far as the mid-nineteenth century. Yet Lockerbie is only one strand in a densely woven plot, with many interconnected characters, set on an island closely resembling Mull, where myth and the supernatural readily blur with everyday life. Much of the action of the novel centers on several interweaving narratives- with characters who have some relationship with the eponymous character, familial or otherwise. The novel is deliberately dense and difficult to follow, so that partly the challenge for the reader is to solve the puzzle of the ways in which these characters interconnect, and perhaps more importantly, precisely *why* the narrative is constructed in this manner.

The Lockerbie context is clearly established from early on. In the Prologue, Jake, a relative of Punch, reflects on the death of his father in the crash. References to Lockerbie then permeate though the novel. Yet, there are many other layers of narrative also at work, as the novel flits through history. There is also reference to real life historical figures- for example, the travel writer Isabella Bird and her sister Henrietta, who came to Mull in the 1860s, who are visited there by friend Charles Darwin. For

MacIntyre, the opportunity to contextualize these historical figures within the novel creates another play with stark oppositions: Darwin in this novel is scared off the island after his encounter with the ghost of Duncan Punch- the “great man” of science is therefore shown to be humiliated by irrational forces. This self-conscious play with history, real-life events and characters, creates an estranging effect: the reader may recognize particular instances of historical truth or accuracy within the novel, though they are also made self-consciously aware that these instances are part of a larger world of fictional play and unreality. Against these engagements with history, the island life depicted is also strongly linked with myth and the supernatural. In such ways the novel attempts to depict island life as a hybrid of the real and the unreal, the historical and the contemporary, the local and the global.

In *The Letters of Ivor Punch* there are many such sharp hybridizations between traditional and global culture which again reveal the island, and Scotland by extension, to be small cogs in a much bigger wheel. Ivor Punch, we learn, has become a prolific letter writer as a means of trying to account for the devastating effect that Lockerbie has had on both his personal life and that of the island- we told at the start of the novel that “a plane falling out of the sky was my transformation” (3). Punch directs his anger and frustration at a variety of individuals ranging from Kenny MacAskill, Megrahi and to then President of the USA, Barack Obama, writing letters to each. While Punch’s letters are often rambling and idiosyncratic, their function is also to come to terms with his own deep sense of loss and incomprehension. In early letters to Obama he writes “I live here on the island in a home that houses a bloody ghost: a memory of a person that died too young. I am writing about the plane that fell out of the sky. And I am writing to you sir because I appreciate your support of my cause, so to speak, which is to block the

release of the Libyan bomber... I am writing to you good sir as a man must suffer for this act" (103). Yet by the time Punch writes to Megrahi, he reveals that he is no longer certain of the latter's guilt: "I am rage itself. But there is something worse- I am not even convinced of your guilt... Some of the bodies were found in a sheep meadow a mile away; a long way from home. And that is dreadful enough that somebody must pay. And it is me" (239).

Writing in the *Irish Times*, MacIntyre reflects on some of the underlying reasons for Ivor's letter writing:

But why was Ivor writing to President Obama? In my songwriting I have always been drawn to the notion of community, possibly because I come from a small, isolated one, and have enjoyed focusing in on micro issues which I hope then tell a bigger, more universal, story; one to which we can all relate. My own home, the isle of Mull, was tragically affected directly by the Lockerbie bombing: we lost one of our sons on the plane, and this loss moved me and I had always wanted to write about it. I transferred that loss to Ivor, and staged his first letter to Obama at the time of the international furore that accompanied the (eventual) release of the alleged Libyan bomber of the plane. And so Ivor writes because a man fell out of the sky, and he hopes the President can tell him why. Really, in a way Ivor is falling too (MacIntyre).

The tragedy of Lockerbie therefore permeates through the novel, as does its association with global insecurity and terrorism.

Both *The Professor of Truth* and *The Letters of Ivor Punch* therefore encourage a blurring of fact and fiction in order to self-consciously explore the context of

Lockerbie. In doing so, each creates a space for the recreation of events, a creative revisiting of history, using fiction to open up its silences. Both Tealing and Punch are aware of their own limitations, neither are especially heroic figures, yet through their perseverance both manage to have some agency. Each novel therefore reaches a form of resolution, even if partial. Robertson does not name Lockerbie, MacIntyre does not name Mull- yet both novels self-consciously engage with what they do not explicitly name. In this way, each novel takes a defiant stance against the control of information that has made the Lockerbie tragedy so controversial and disputed.

For many, the evidence which convicted Megrahi has been shown to be deeply flawed and problematic, based on insubstantial and conflicting evidence. Arguably, all of the sensation surrounding the compassionate release of Megrahi in 2009, and whether the Scottish Government should have done this or not, had the effect of taking attention away from the crucial issue of whether Megrahi was actually guilty or not. For many involved with the case there are many unanswered questions, many leads left unexplored. Robertson, for example, in his Book Festival talk, neatly sums up six of the main reasons why he feels that Megrahi's conviction should now be reviewed.¹⁰

In their own recent findings, seven years after Robertson's Book Festival talk in 2018, The Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission similarly found there to be six grounds for appeal, alluding to the possibility that there could have been a miscarriage

¹⁰ In summary, these refer to the lack of evidence surrounding the unaccompanied suitcase allegedly put on the Air Malta flight, the confusion as to whether the suitcase actually came from Malta or London, evidence which suggests that Megrahi was not in Malta on the day that the clothing was purchased, the controversies surrounding which kind of timer was used in the detonator, the security breach at Heathrow airport about 16 hours before Pan Am Flight 103 took off and, finally, the evidence pointing the fact Gauci was paid off by the CIA for his evidence. The full text of Robertson's talk "The Lockerbie Affair and Scottish Society" is available online: <http://lockerbiecase.blogspot.com/2011/08/lockerbie-affair-and-scottish-society.html>.

of justice against Megrahi. While some have seen this report, it remains top secret. The “real facts” behind Lockerbie therefore remain elusive, largely because key evidence has still to be properly accounted for. Yet, in both Robertson and MacIntyre’s novels there is a suggestion that perhaps fiction can play a small catalytic role in seeing the case from alternate, unexpected angles, in anticipating the evidence that still needs to come forward for public scrutiny.

Conclusion

With the exception of the poems discussed above, from 1988 to 2003 very little was written about Lockerbie. Most of the representations of Lockerbie referenced in this essay were therefore written or first performed after 9/11. As has been demonstrated, the initial responses to Lockerbie were broadly in the form of poetry, followed by drama, then by novels. Perhaps this passage of time was necessary before novelists felt they could address the subject matter in sufficient depth, or perhaps the deluge of responses to 9/11 acted as a catalyst for more developed literary representations of Lockerbie.

As Ann Kenniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn have noted, there has been a similar pattern with 9/11 literature:

The history of literature written about and after 9/11 can also be seen, at least in part, as a sequence of genres. That is, shorter forms appeared first- essays, brief personal reminiscences, and poetry. It took several years longer for novels and full-length memoirs to appear. Early works often attempted directly to capture and convey the vents of 9/11 and emotional responses to the events; as time has passed, the approach to the attacks has become more nuanced (3).

Commenting on the ability of literary texts to act as political provocations, Kenniston and Follansbee Quinn also suggest that “If literature expresses what remains unrepresentable about 9/11, it also raises persistent questions about how we interpret and represent 9/11, questions precipitated by debates within and outside the United States about the ‘war on terror’” (2). While literary representations can only ever provide partial engagements with the immensity of the terrorist atrocities they engage with, in the context of the Lockerbie examples discussed here, it might nonetheless be said that they contain the possibility of generating resistant readings and self-conscious critiques of the criminal case to date.

In *9/11 and the Literature of Terror*, Martin Randall echoes Mishra’s earlier point that a key feature of early responses to 9/11 was their pull towards commemoration, commenting that “perhaps by its nature, it takes some time for 9/11 to appear in literary fiction” (2). A comparison with the literary representations of Lockerbie clearly presents similar findings. A crucial difference, though, is that Lockerbie has not yet been written into the literary history of twentieth century British literature in the way that 9/11 has been in the American context. Despite the difference of scale between the two tragedies, there are few references to the Air Disaster in literary histories despite it being largest disaster in British aviation history.

So why have literary engagements with Lockerbie have taken longer to materialize than those surrounding 9/11? What has this passage of time allowed? Perhaps one explanation is that the Lockerbie case is still ongoing, many aspects of it left unanswered. The wider political implications and international context of the case have taken so long to unfold, and, for many conspiracy theorists, perhaps deliberately so. Whether commemorative or investigative, or indeed a mixture of both, what many

of the representations discussed here suggest is that there are many gaps in our understanding of Lockerbie which have still to be fully accounted for in the public realm.

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