PLACE-NAMES IN 21ST CENTURY SCOTS AND SCOTTISH ENGLISH LITERATURE: LINGUISTIC INVENTIONS AND IMAGINARY COMMUNITIES

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‘Literary onomasticians enjoy a measure of freedom perhaps not shared by other onomasticians. This is because researchers who conduct onomastic studies in literature are not limited to a specific set of methods and practices but may pattern their studies after those within their own field, those borrowed from other fields or disciplines, or they may even devise studies of their own creation […]’

(Dodge Robbins, 2023, p. 3)

CRITICAL TOPONYMY

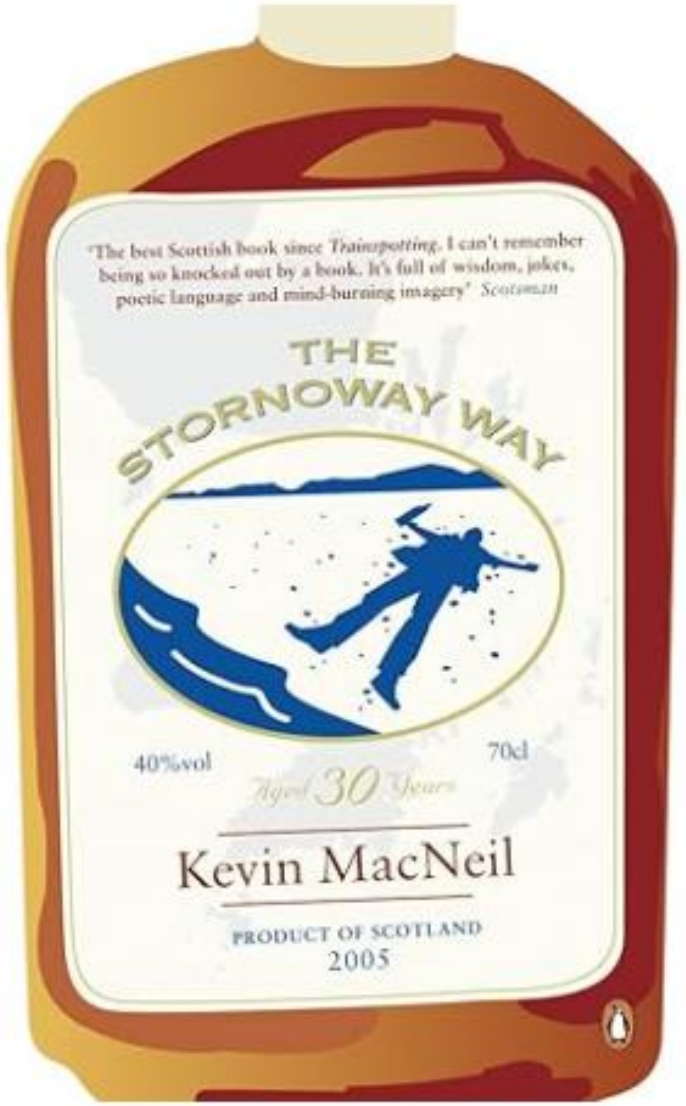
This work indicates that, far from being a neutral, mundane set of categories, place-names are imbued with power-full histories. Yet their everyday, taken-for-granted-use means these are rarely recognised: to echo Berg and Kearns, naming becomes a process of 'norming'.[33] It is often during periods of renaming that these hidden structures are revealed, as is evident in the reclaiming of names following postcolonial independence.[34] As this work shows, postcolonial renaming is far from a straightforward process of restoring past names, but is central to the 'struggles for legitimacy and visibility'[35] taking place in the named landscape, highlighting the importance of naming as well as the name.

(Scott & Clark, 2011, p. 34)

THE ‘MEANING’ OF NAMES (AFTER NICOLAISEN): ONOMASTIC, ETYMOLOGICAL, ASSOCIATIVE

‘Names contain both denotative (literal or explicit) and connotative (implied or suggested) meanings, the latter in abundance, and may evoke additional meanings in association with other names surrounding them in the literary work.’

(Dodge Robbins, 2023 p. 3)



'There are that,' mutters Johnny Banana, 'there are that. Hoi!' He shouts at no one and everyone, the way you do at a cèilidh, 'Do yous not remember what happened to Big Barney the Glaoic's* boat the last time the wind was like this?'

There are sufficient low nodding murmurs to indicate that everyone present is well aware of the story, but at a cèilidh, of course, that doesn't matter. Half of the story

* *Glaoic*: Gaelic. Idiot. Moron. (Face it, we all know the feeling.)
Marbhaig: *a typing error, the consequences of which could be grave, e.g., instead of 'doing', 'dying'.* Lapsus calami, *but with an element of morbidity.*
Mealabost: *the practice of inventing futures for yourself (e.g., gold medal iceskater who redefines the rules/attitudes – you know the kind of thing I mean.)*
Mealabost eile: *the sure knowledge that such a future will never come to pass and never would in an infinity of possible universes.*

MARABHIG (CEANN A DEAS NAN LOCH)

- Spelling variants include *Marbhig* 2007, *Marbhaig* 2025
- Old Norse **Maravík* '(the) bay of the horses' from *marr* 'horse', or Old Norse *Mararvík '(the) bay of the sea' from *marr* 'sea'

(Cox, 2022, p. 803)

MEALBOST (STORNOWAY)

- Spelling variant *Mealabost* recorded 2007 (road sign), 2019
- Old Norse **Mel-bólstaðr* '(the) sandbank farm', from *melr* 'sandy bluff or bank'

(Cox, 2022, II, p. 805)

CONVIVIALITY

‘[…] the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere. I hope an interest in the workings of conviviality will take off from the point where ‘multiculturalism’ broke down. It does not describe the absence of racism or the triumph of tolerance. […] Conviviality has another virtue that makes it attractive to me and useful to this project. It introduces a measure of distance from the pivotal term ‘identity’, which as proved to be such an ambiguous resource in the analysis of race, ethnicity, and politics.’

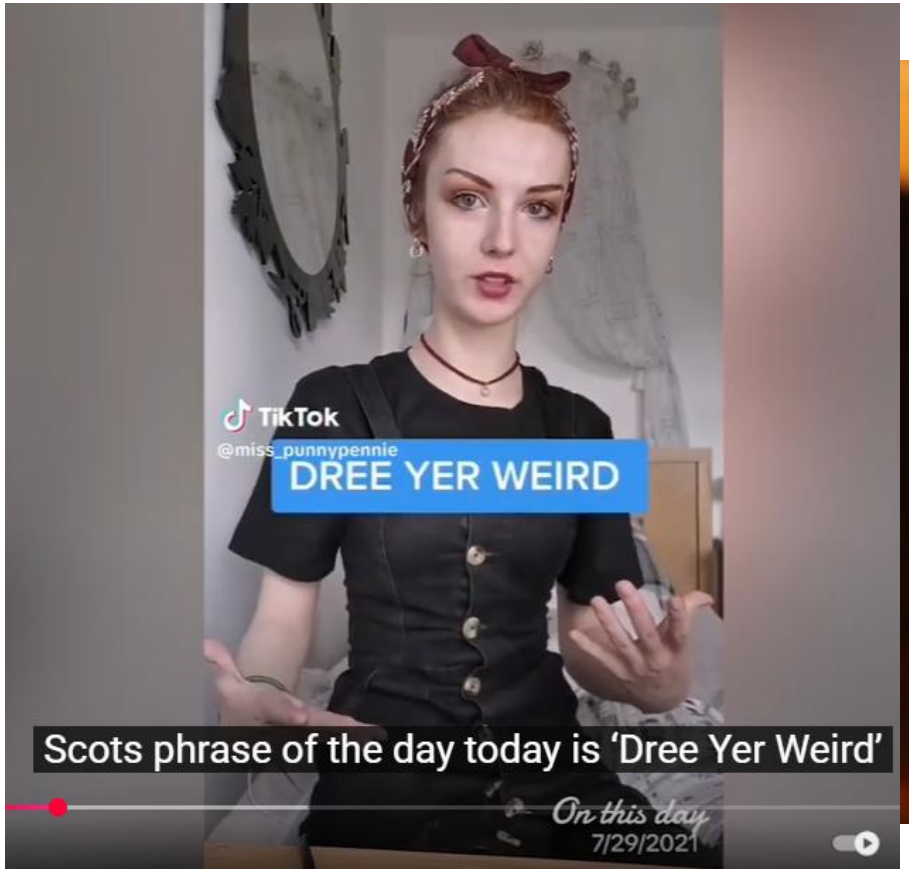
(Gilroy, 2004, p. ix)

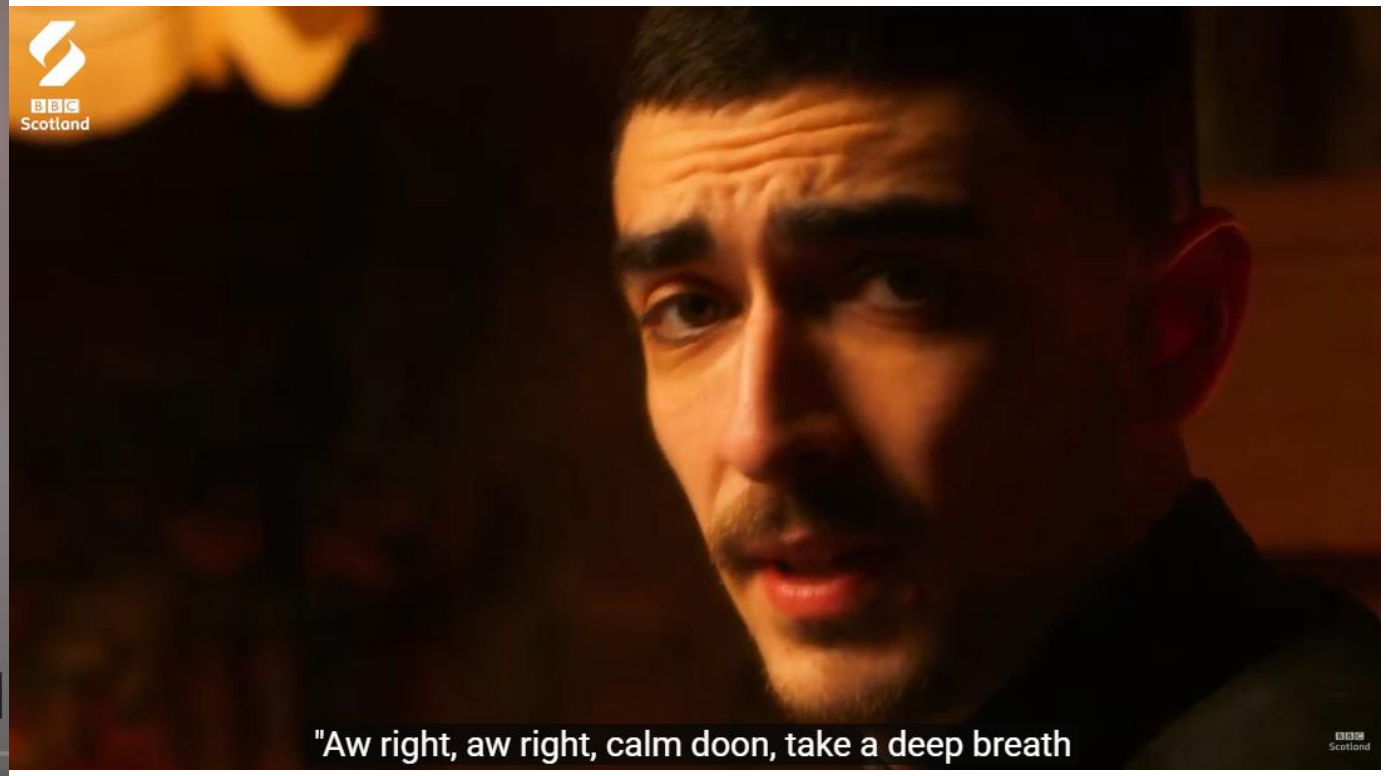
THE SCOTS CONTINUUM AND CREATIVITY

- Scottish Standard English, typically characterised as English with a Scottish accent and Scots lexis / idiom, with some Scots grammatical features, has achieved '*de facto* recognition' (Millar, 2005, p. 197); not that we have an actual codified standard to refer to it, it has no dictionary…)
- Scots (partially codified through the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* and related publications such as The Concise Scots Dictionary and of course the DSL Phone Application; resistant to standardisation with many writers preferring to retain regional dialectal and accent features)
- Legacies of MacDiarmid's *Lallans* (often termed 'synthetic' Scots) include creative practices energised by the 'licence' that the lack of a standard grants, with extremely inventive language coinages notable in the science fiction prose written in Scots, and widely in Scots poetry.
- Expanding Scots genres: graphic novels, children's literature, social media (e.g. scotsradio.com)

21ST CENTURY SCOTS LITERATURE

NEW MEDIA AND NEXT GEN VERNACULAR VOICES LEN PENNIE AND CHRIS MCQUEER (ETC…)





WHAUR AND WHAN TAE SCRIEVE…?

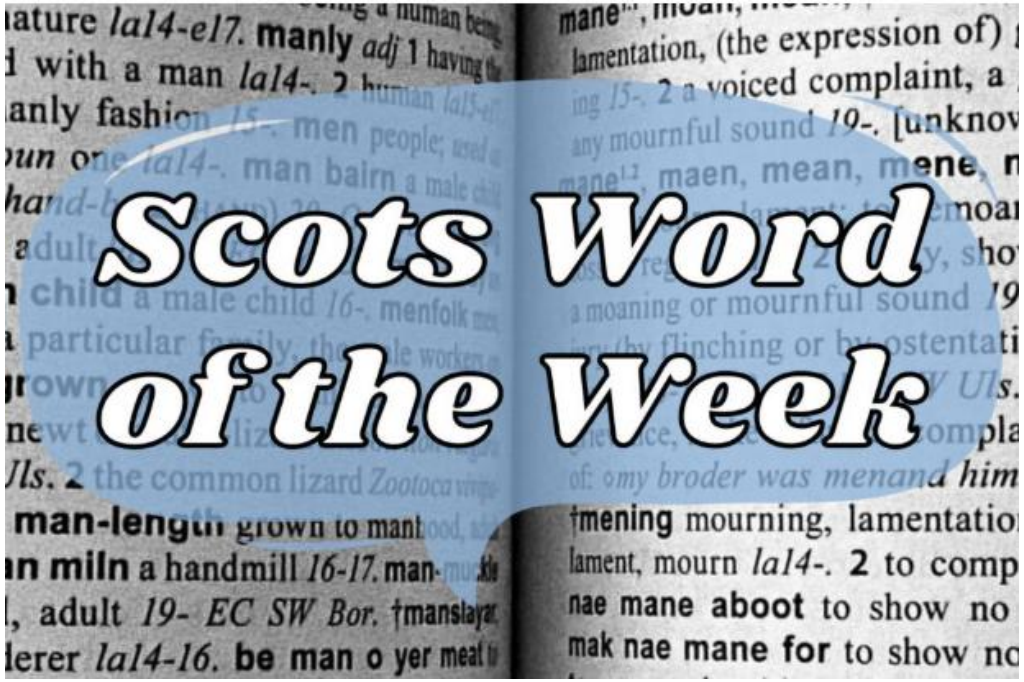
‘attempts at journalism in Scots, such as in the recent pages of *The National* and *The Herald*, have […] been met by opposition and derision: the understanding is not there, so the register does not exist, so the understanding is prevented’

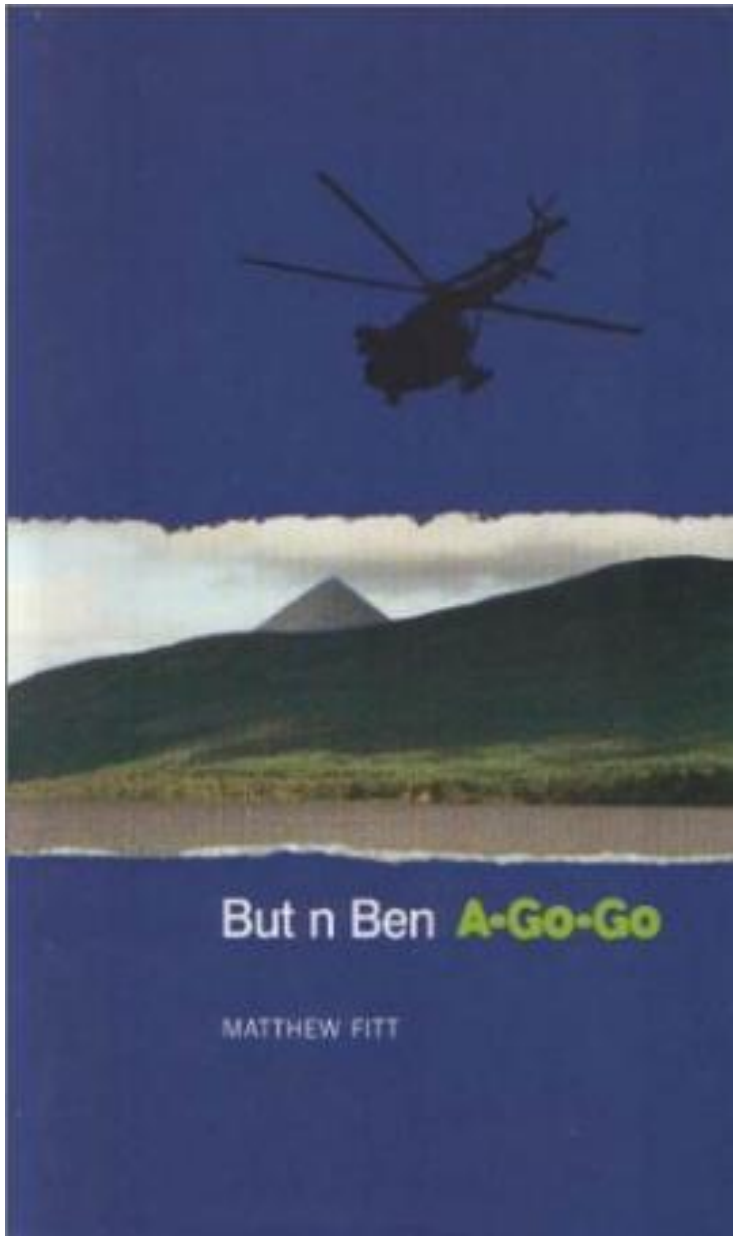
‘if you want to write in a language without the appropriate register, you have no option but to continuously invent it’

(Giles, 2022, p. 176)

THE HERALD'S SCOTS WORD OF THE WEEK (2005-2025) A SCOTTISH STANDARD ENGLISH JOURNEY

- Instigated 2005 by Maggie Scott via a personal meeting with novelist Mark Douglas-Home, then Editor of *The Herald*
- A popular feature – later joined by *The Scotsman's* 'Scottish Word of the Week'
- Outreach and publicity for Scottish Language Dictionaries, with spin-off books
- Now in its 20th year, still written by the staff of the same organisation, the Dictionary of the Scots Language http://www.dsl.ac.uk



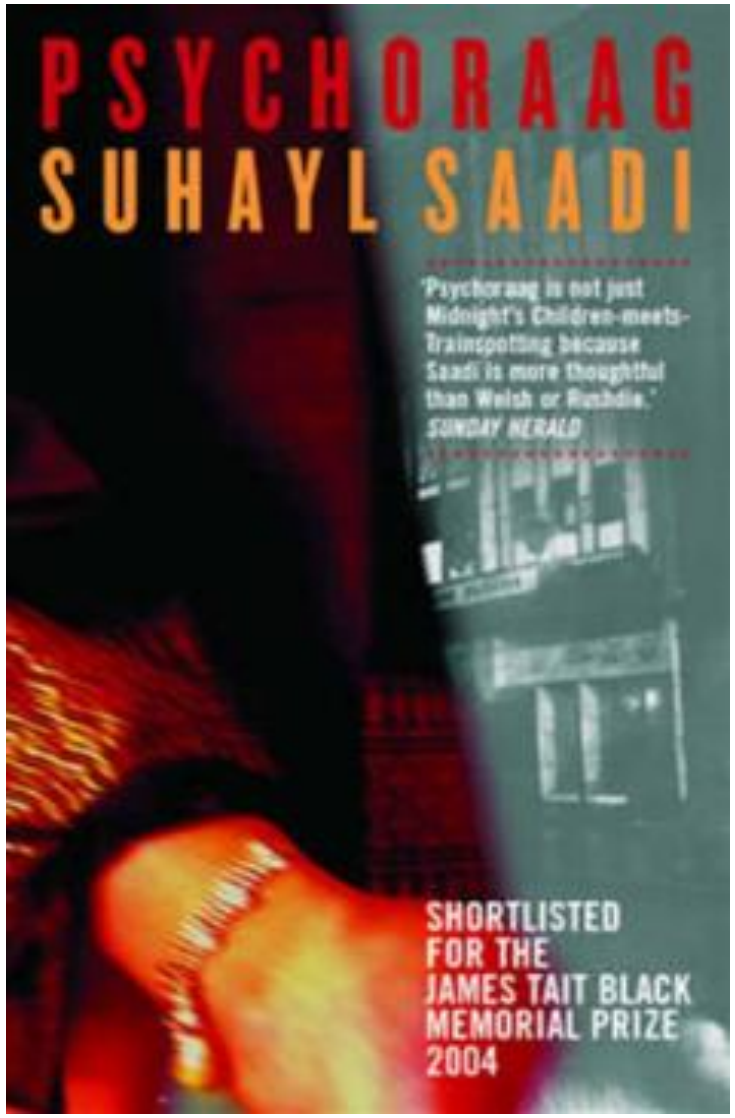


‘The Rigo Imbeki Medical Center wisna alloued windaes. Peerie portholes covered the twa-thoosan-storey muckle-structure, admittin peen stobs o licht intae the tichtly regimented galleries. Port couldna dree *Sangue de Verde* tae skail accidentally fae its purpose-biggit hame. Aw o its citizens carried the dormant Mowdy smit in their breists an yin micro-guff o Senga wid ignite a Green Bluid pandemic that wid chow its wey throu Port in less than hauf a day. The Imbeki Medical Center had tae be completely blooter-resistant tae the region’s rauchle hurricanes and typhoons.’

(Fitt, 2000, p. 9)

‘While many Scots recognise the importance of Scots language as a creative and intellectual resource for their communities, it is surely important to find means of articulating that language and its cultural significance that avoids any hangdog, chip-on-the-shoulder, martyred attitudes. […] we need not create a Scots versus English divide, but can […] welcome the vitality allowed not only by bilinguality, but also the capacity many Scots, not just Scottish writers, have to operate interlingually between and beyond Scots, English and Gaelic, and into Polish and Urdu.”

(Brown, 2013, pp. 59-60)



'Don't worry aboot themorra – jist live, breathe – that's whit Ah think. *Shayad* that's kind ae what aw these soangs are aboot, isn't it? Whether it's LA California, Austin Texas, Mumbai India or Karachi Pakistan. Or even Glesgae Scoatland. Scoatland, in Urdu, is a wee man in a coracle, croassin the ocean. Ahoy there! Aye. But that's a dangerous philosophy. Mibbee that's whit we need – a wee bit o danger? Ony real risks huv tae be big or they're no risks at aw. Ye know whit Ah'm talking aboot. Some o ye came fae the *gao* an made it here in Glasgae. And thur's nuhin wrong wi that. All power tae you! But some ae you didnae make it an that's life and it's hard and ye're bleedin an thur's nuhin you or anyone else can do aboot it . . . [*sic*]'

(Saadi, 2004, p. 189)

Ash Amin describes conviviality as a 'vernacular' of being 'at ease with difference' (2013, 5). Paul Gilroy describes conviviality as a pattern of mixing where differences 'do not … add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication' (2006b, 40). And Les Back and Shamser Sinha describe conviviality as a situation where 'racial differences become ordinary, banal, unremarkable and sometimes mundane to the point of boredom' (2016, 522). They also identify the 'capacity to listen to, read and be surprised by [a] complex cultural landscape' (523) as a crucial convivial 'tool'. These approaches acknowledge that fixed notions of identity, feelings of discomfort, processes of closure, and moments of disfluency form part of convivial landscapes. However, they identify the *political potential* of convivial relations – the thing that gives conviviality its connective or transformative force – as particularly associated with the cultivated capacity to step beyond given and bounded identities.

(Samanani, 2023, p. 2112)

CULTURAL EMPATHY: HABITS AND PERSPECTIVES

‘the totality of human beings, including their life ways, customs, and habits of mind, all fall within the purview of empathy and can be used to further human understanding […] a Beethoven symphony as well as the myths and stories of African griots can be used to construct empathy.’

‘“imaginative placement” is critical. One must be able to “see” through the eyes of others, creating both a subject and an object-oriented focus that can shift, depending on whether the lens of cultural empathy is reflecting one as subject or object’

(Calloway-Thomas, 2009, p. 13)

CONVIVIAL EMPATHIC LITERARY ONOMASTICS

- Onomastic Meaning: may reflect elements of the 'real' and constructed world
- Etymological Meaning: not always immediately transparent or accessible, but may be woven into the narrative through intertextual connections, or either ludic or literal interpretations
- Associative Meaning: open to a wide range of creative potential (by reader and writer)

- Inverdisney Timeshare Penitentary (*But n Ben A-Go-Go*)
- The Mod, a.k.a the Whisky Olympics (*The Stornoway Way*)
- The Junnune Show (*Psychoraag*); Urdu *junnune* 'madness; a trance-like state'

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