

The depiction of the urban landscape as an uncanny or supernatural space is a clear theme in a range of Scottish writing. James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) provides a detailed depiction of

works. The text that this study focuses on is *Robert Falconer* (1868). *Robert Falconer* is a coming of age tale recounting the titular Robert's early years, university education, and maturation into a responsible adult. The scenes of Robert's childhood depict him being brought up by a devoutly Calvinist Grannie in the town of Rotheden. Robert is introduced rescuing a homeless schoolmate, Shergar, from the snow and hiding him in his rooms and this moral mischief-making becomes a recurrent theme for his childhood. One of the most troublesome of these is Robert's love of music and his attempts to secretly teach himself the fiddle, having found an instrument in the attic of his house. However, when his Grannie discovers this, she takes the fiddle and burns it, claiming that it will lead him to sinful ways. *Robert Falconer* is acknowledged by MacDonald's biographers to contain a wealth of autobiographical details.<sup>1</sup> The figure of Robert's fiddle-burning Grannie bears similarities to MacDonald's grandmother, who also allegedly burnt a fiddle due to her strongly Calvinist beliefs. Another scene where Robert and Shergar let a kite lose from their garret window holds parallels with a real-life moment shared between MacDonald and his brother. Not only is the tale biographical, but the town of Huntly is, at best, thinly veiled by MacDonald's decision to call the town Rotheden as the map of MacDonald's Huntly and the map of key sites in Rotheden show:

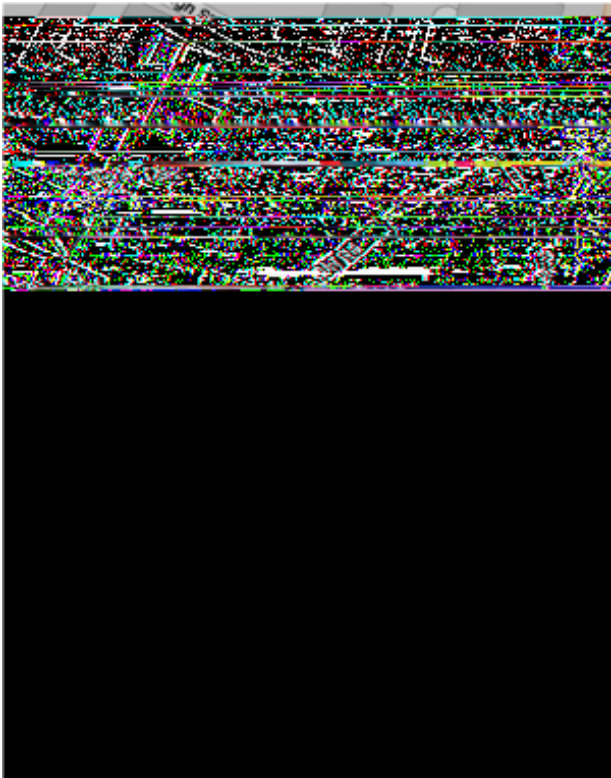


Figure 1: MacDonald's Huntly

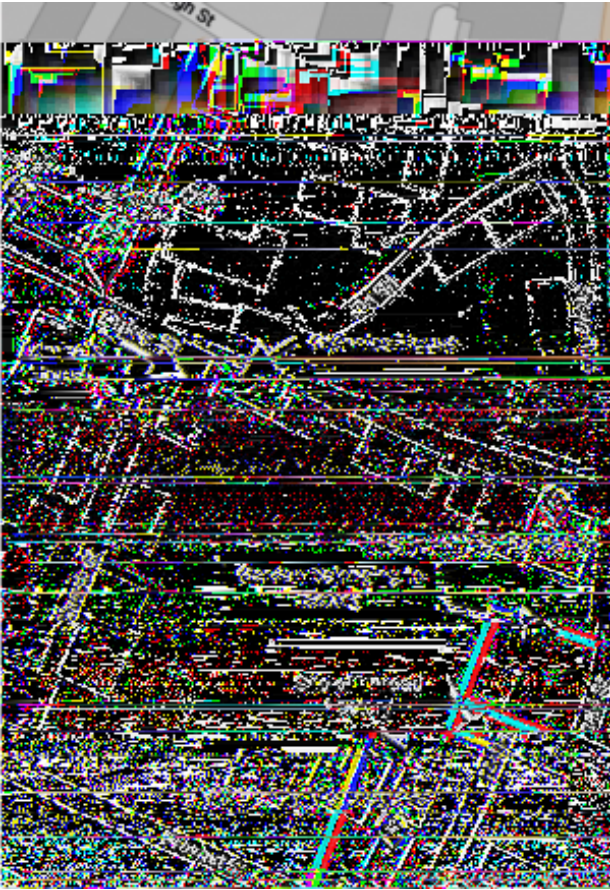


Figure 2: Rotheden

This paper focuses on the textual projections and hauntings encountered on one block of the town of Huntly – one which includes MacDonald's birthplace, a village pub named the Royal Oak (which is still open in the present day), and the land which MacDonald's family owned, as well as the family thread mill. The link between MacDonald and Huntly has developed into a literary haunting of the town, with many members of the community being vaguely aware of MacDonald. Those who begin to explore the connection between the town and MacDonald's literary works have discovered direct topographical parallels which function as a hybrid-overlaying of the modern town with the literary representations of Huntly.

Ingo Berensmeyer suggests that reality is saturated with fiction and that fiction extends to the literary: What we call reality is in fact saturated with fiction(s), necessary or other; and what we like to refer to as fiction often contains more reality than we care to admit. <sup>2</sup> The influence of text on a space is not inherently physical. For example, growing up in Edinburgh, I vividly recall walking up Arthur's Seat having read *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and being deeply unsettled by the bank of mist that appeared in front of me. Now any walk up the hill includes for me an awareness of Hogg's work. The interdependence of reality and fiction in these moments changes the nature of our experience of our environment. It does not cause an immediate change to behaviour, especially when this happens in or is associated with an area, city or town which we feel is our home. It also appears that the emergence of local awareness of literary predecessors is resulting in some variant forms of literary intrusion. It is in moments of literary projection that the subconscious memory of a novel intrudes into our perceptions, not just of a semi-familiar urban space but into the parts of the urban geography with which we are most at ease: our town, our home, our garden. Unlike the fleeting encounter of the psychogeographer, this literary projection becomes part of the day-to-day lived experience of these most familiar urban spaces.

To understand how the textual representation of Huntly in *Robert Falconer* interacts with the real town, Andrew Green's three ways in which a reader will relate to literary space are useful:

*the factual realities of the space/place represented / place as it exists and /or existed in the real world*

*the space/place as it functions within the textual narrative place as it reproduced by the author; and  
the space/place as it exists or does not exist within the known world of the reader place as lived experience.*<sup>3</sup>

Green suggests that the place as it physically exists, the area as constructed in fiction, and the lived experience of the location form the key levels of meaning through textual interaction. It is the third of these, the lived experience of place, that is the focus of this paper. However, that experience in the case of Huntly is specifically the projection of aspects of a previously experienced text into the real world. Projection does not come from a direct textual engagement but from the vague haunting of text in the individual subconsciousness which comes to the fore in a specific location. The reader projects the text onto a space, from the premise that the literary past of a place can haunt the present interactions of a readership with that space. Literary projection in this context is the intrusion of a moment, incident, or location on our understanding of a real physical place such as the moment I experienced on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh.

Catharina Löffler highlights the disjunction between the lived experience of a location and the access to that environment via literature: As opposed to psychogeographical practices, where only the practitioner himself is temporarily affected, literary psychogeography grants all readers access to psychogeographical experiences.<sup>4</sup>

By focusing not upon the tourist's perspective but the literary resident, the Huntly case study offers new insight. While it is a form of psychogeography, residents of Huntly have access to a distinct type of literary experience stemming from the fact that they live in and interact with the location on a daily basis. A closer examination of the textual projection of *Robert Falconer* onto the town of Huntly will demonstrate the centrality of lived experience.

Over the past four years, I have given some talks introducing aspects of MacDonald's life and work within the Huntly community. It is through this interaction and other visits with the residents of the town that the full significance of *Robert Falconer*'s depiction of Rotheden became clear – not through my research but that of the Huntly residents. One of the significant adventures the young Robert Falconer embarks upon is attending the Hairst, a harvest festival:

*The period of the hairst-play, that is, of the harvest holiday time, drew near, and over the north of Scotland thousands of half-grown hearts were beating with glad anticipation.*<sup>5</sup>

not only the past but also by the literary representations of place found in *Robert Falconer*. With that, fictionalisation proved to be historical fact, and the intrusion of text into an area which was well-known continued. The following passage was identified by the householder and placed on to the urban landscape of their garden:

*But the factory lay at the opposite corner of a quadrangle of gardens, the largest of which belonged to itself; and the corner of this garden touched the corner of Captain Forsyth's, which had formerly belonged to Andrew Falconer: he had had a door made in the walls at the point of junction, so that he could go from his house to his business across his own property: if this door were not locked, and Robert could pass without offence, what a north-west passage it would be for him! The little garden belonging to his grandmother's house had only a slight wooden fence to divide it from the other, and even in this fence there was a little gate: he would only have to run along Captain Forsyth's top walk to reach the door.*<sup>7</sup>

The remains of this doorway between the MacDonald and Captain's house has been identified. A map of the fictional gardens is traceable on the real locations (see Figure 3 below):

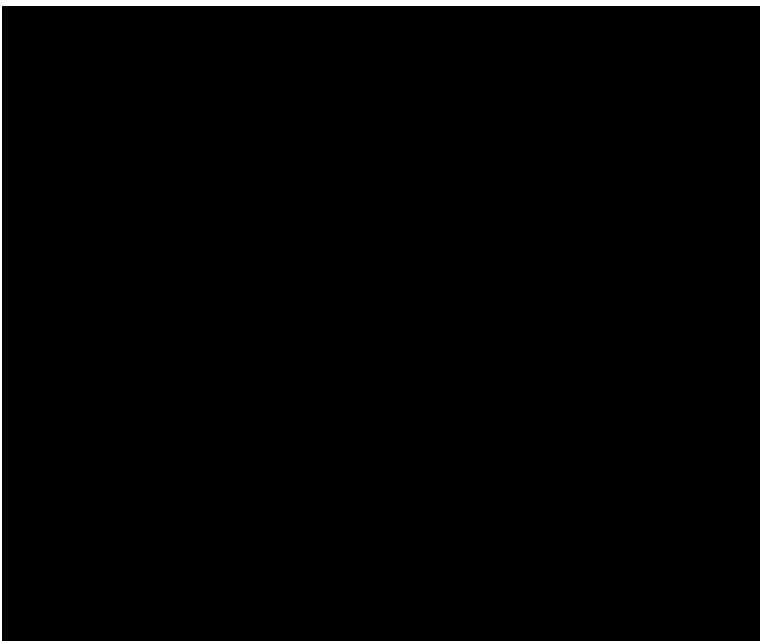


Figure 3: Robert's garden route

While this reveals just how closely MacDonald was mapping his fictional villages

to Huntly, of greater significance is that it came to light through an unusual interaction with the text. What emerges is a topographical hybrid of the historical,



the historical context of his lightly fictionalised versions of Huntly. This initial work within Huntly demonstrates the extent to which MacDonald's writings haunt the town, and in turn, how MacDonald's novels are haunted by the topography of Huntly. Recent discoveries and textual interactions form a hybrid landscape of text and space at the heart of what should be most familiar – our homes.

This study is, I hope, an initial investigation into a broader trend of research which is currently developing within Scotland. There has been a very recent spate of literary societies focusing on Scottish Victorian novelists: the J.M. Barrie Society, founded in 2017, and the Samuel Rutherford Crockett Literary Society, launched in 2018 as part of the Galloway Raiders group. These organisations are based in the author's hometowns (Kirriemuir for Barrie and Galloway for Crockett). Both societies have active membership bases in their local areas. Barrie, Crockett, and MacDonald are all associated with the Kailyard school: a literary movement often critiqued for its sentimental representations of rural Scottish life. The re-engagement of the towns with these texts provides us with new insight into the relationship between readers and their developing identities within the temporal and spatial entity which is these rural communities.

follows from a mingled yearning and terror for a set of simpler verities, an

belonging to the Kailyard school. Small rural communities are rediscovering these novels. Their interaction with the text is very much an uncovering of the past culture and history of their communities. My case study of Huntly illustrating this engagement with the novels set in their communities leads to an engagement with the temporal topography of their landscape in addition to the spatial topography of the town. The process of recovering their communities and their knowledge of the urban environment allows the text to project beyond its pages and its historical setting onto the modern-day locations. The nostalgic recovery of the past is undoubtedly a factor in members of the Huntly community s