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ARTICLE

The Poetry of Civic Nationalism: Jackie Kay's 'Bronze Head From Ife'

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This article examines the work of the newly-minted Scots makar, Jackie Kay, charting her development as a black Scottish writer committed to the interrogation of identity categories. McFarlane focuses in particular on 'Bronze Head from Ife', a poem in Kay's most recent collection *Fiere* (2012), and elucidates the synthesis this poem offers of Kay's Nigerian and Scottish roots, invoking both Burns and Nigerian artwork to offer a form of civic nationalism that embraces difference and multiplicity.

Keywords: Scottish Literature; Jackie Kay; Robert Burns; civic nationalism; Scottish nationalism; independence referendum; race

Scottish Literature has been the field of discussion for nationalism and for political engagement more generally in a country that has found itself distanced from the seat of power. Christopher Whyte has noted that before devolution and the opening of the Scottish parliament in 1997, 'in the absence of an elected political authority, the task of representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers' (1998, 284). These writers often equated Scottish identity with working class, white masculinity as in important novels such as Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981) and Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) which both take a working class perspective as a means of discussing the Scottish national character and its relationship with power and powerlessness. Whyte expected the pressure on Scottish writers to ease after the creation of the Scottish parliament, as power resumed its rightful place in the political realm and national identity no longer needed to be confined to cultural expression. However, Scottish Literature has continued to be a keystone of Scottish cultural identity and the primary discourse for exploring the relationship between the personal and the political, the individual and the national. Writers such as James

Robertson and Alan Bissett continue to discuss Scottish nationality primarily in terms of working class masculinity in novels like Robertson's *And the Land Lay Still* (2010) or Bissett's *Pack Men* (2012) which brings in sectarian issues through setting the novel among Rangers football fans.

The importance of literature has been particularly marked during the lengthy referendum campaign and the aftermath of the vote on 18 September 2014. This was made clear by the visibility of literary and artistic voices in the debate through the loose organisation 'National Collective', which acted as an umbrella group giving artists an opportunity to communicate their thoughts on independence and to campaign together.¹ National Collective, like many of the pro-independence groups, was broadly left-leaning and, in the hope of separating Scottish nationalism from the 'blood and soil' connotations that the term can carry, repeatedly emphasised the importance of 'civic nationalism' to the Scottish situation: this is nationalism based not on blood or heritage, but on the contribution made by the individual to the wider community. In the most recent study of its kind, *Political Discourse and National Identity in Scotland* (2011), Murray Stewart Leith and Daniel P. J. Soule describe Scottish nationalism as based in institutions rather than ethnicity, writing that 'civic nationalism must be the dominant conception of Scottish nationalism' (79) based on the testimonials of the Scottish people. Under this rubric, foreign nationals or those of foreign origin living in Scotland were designated 'New Scots' during the referendum campaign in an effort to invite those from outside or with mixed heritage to identify with Scotland and, ultimately, to vote 'Yes' as a sign of that inclusion. However, this admirable urge to define Scottish nationalism as inclusive and anti-racist can have the unfortunate side effect of neglecting Scotland's part in British history. Berthold Schoene understands that, 'it is imperative that post-devolution Scotland cease once and for all to identify itself in opposition to all things English' (2007, 2), including the legacy of imperialism. Facing Scotland's role in the British Empire must be a priority for a progressive Scottish identity and, like so many

¹ Though National Collective have recently announced their intention to stop campaigning as a group, many blogs and articles written by their members are still archived at nationalcollective.com, as well as the post-referendum discussion about the future direction of the organisation.

of the issues in contemporary Scottish politics, it has been played out well in advance by Scottish writers and particularly in the work of Jackie Kay.

Kay is one of the most significant writers working, not just in Scotland, but in Britain today. Her novel, *Trumpet* (1998) won the 1998 Guardian Fiction Prize and the 1999 Lambda Literary Award which celebrates the best Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) literature of the year. Her poetry has also been recognised as her first collection was the winner of the Scottish First Book of the Year 1992 and her collection *Other Lovers* (1994) won the Somerset Maugham Award. Kay's poetry is included on the curriculum of Scottish schools and she has been recognised by the British establishment through the title of Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) which she received in 2006. She has more recently been recognised by the Scottish parliament as she was given the title of Scots Makar (the Scottish poet laureate) in March 2016, a post previously held by Liz Lochhead and Edwin Morgan. Kay's work has shown an ongoing negotiation as she seeks to reconcile her various identities as an adopted child and a Black Scot. This personal journey has wider political resonances, particularly in the aftermath of the 2014 Scottish Referendum. During the referendum campaign, nationalism and what (if anything) it means to be Scottish were behind many of the arguments made by campaigners on both sides. While the 'No' campaign pointed to the dangers of ethnic nationalism the supporters of a 'Yes' vote argued that an independent Scotland could create a civic nationalism, one not based on ethnicity but on participation in local communities. Jackie Kay's negotiation of these issues therefore offers a crucial intervention in the debate about Scottish identity as such issues, highlighted by the referendum campaign, have yet to be resolved satisfactorily in its aftermath.²

Kay's relationship with Scottish nationalism has been complicated by her black identity which she explores in her work through an interest in the relationship

² While Kay's work speaks to this debate she herself did not get involved in the referendum campaign, describing herself as 'undecided' when interviewed by Susanna Rustin in 2012. Voting eligibility in the Scottish referendum was restricted to Scottish residents so Kay, who is primarily resident in England, would not have had a vote.

between identity and difference and by looking to African-American writers for inspiration, as Susanna Rustin writes in a newspaper profile of Kay for the *Guardian*:

Unsurprisingly, it was to African-American writers – Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Maya Angelou – that Kay turned as a young woman, and the poet Audre Lorde, who told her she didn't have to deny her Scottishness in order to be black. 'It's a strength! You can be both!' Kay says in a hearty approximation of Lorde's accent. 'That was an amazing thing to hear. So I stopped feeling like a sore thumb and realised that complexity could bring something, that there are advantages as well as disadvantages.' (2012)

Kay says that she did not fully recognise the possibility of being both black and Scottish until the encounter with Audre Lorde and even afterwards has said that the difficulty of being a black Scottish person has contributed to her decision to live in England saying:

I love Scotland and I feel it belongs to me, but do I belong to Scotland? [. . .]
Being black and Scottish is a battle because you constantly have to assert your right to say, 'I'm here too, I have been for years and actually, I was born here'. (quoted in Ramaswamy, 2007)

This tension has played out in her poetry since her first collection, *Adoption Papers* (1991) in which Kay characterises identity as a form of difference. 'Photo in the Locket' describes the process of a couple negotiating their life together and their distinction from each other, 'We change not like amoebas/more like plants keeping the same stem' (1991, 49). The association between identity and origin through the image of the stem, a common origin connecting plants, allows for similarity while making space for a future of change and difference.

This complicated relationship between origin and change is also invested in the character of Joss Moody in Kay's only novel so far, *Trumpet* (1998). Moody, while born female, lives his life as a man and (like Kay) has a black, African father and a white, Scottish mother. His background and his decision to live as a man lead Moody to talk about identity as the interplay of similarity and difference. Moody tells his son, 'every story runs into the same river and the same river runs into the sea' (271), emphasising

the identity shared by all people, while also noticing 'we've changed names. You, me, my father. All for different reasons' (270). For Moody, the fluidity of identity and of heritage privileges change and difference, as much as similarity.

While problems of identity and difference have always been at the heart of Kay's work her more recent collection *Fiere* (2012) confidently claims Scottishness as the right of any individual; it is not here encoded as male, white or straight. Kay explores what a black, Scottish identity might look like by claiming Scotland's bard, Robert Burns, as her own and inhabiting his language. This allusion to a literary forebear was a strategy employed by Burns himself, who paid tribute to Allan Ramsey and Robert Fergusson in his poetry. Douglas Dunn explains that Burns's:

awareness of the past, his erudition in verse, was what gave Burns his confidence [. . .] He might even have used others by enlisting them into a self-identifying strategy to strengthen a vulnerable 'local poetry' in the face of the sneers from the metropolises of Edinburgh and London. There are moments in literary history when local poetry is the best on offer and when it serves the cause of a national literature. (2007, 70)

In employing Burns's poetry, Kay performs a similar strategy by drawing on her literary forebears and her Nigerian ancestry to let her poetry act as a link between them. This is particularly apparent in a poem from *Fiere*, 'Bronze Head From Ife' which combines the ekphrastic description of a Nigerian artefact with the Scots language. This combination of a Nigerian artefact, Scots, and lines that echo the poetry of Burns finally allows Kay to synthesise identity from difference. The tradition of ekphrasis is central to another tradition – that of Romantic poetry – and Kay also situates herself as a voice in that tradition through the description of the bronze head. By bringing an object of the visual arts into poetry Kay finds an authenticity that allows her to create a true identity.

While Kay's biography inevitably influences the reading of her work, especially since the release of her memoir *Red Dust Road* (2010), this article recognises Kay's biography as the raw material of her poetry, but does not define her poetry as purely autobiographical. Kay has said that when drawing on her life, 'what matters is the poem, and the poem has its own memories and its own set of circumstances, so

when you do write about your own life you've got to be able to transcend those local details and find a way back into the memory that isn't too specific but is detailed enough to make it moving' (Dyer 2004, 241). This article aims to suggest that while Kay's concerns are often rooted in her biography and experiences, the final product transcends that specificity and takes part in a national conversation, as well as the international conversation of poetic practice, and the universal themes of history, slavery and identity.

Scottish identity in Kay's poetry before *Fiere*

Kay has an unusual background as a child born to a Highlander (her mother) and a Nigerian student (her father) before being adopted by two white, socialist Glaswegians. This situation inspired her first collection *The Adoption Papers* (1991) and to this poetic account of her past Kay added her memoir, 2010's *Red Dust Road*. *The Adoption Papers* interweaves three voices, differentiated by their typography: the voices of the birth mother, the adopted child and the adopting mother. By laying these voices alongside each other, Kay achieves a stereoscopic picture of womanhood while exploring the roles of nature, nurture and nation in shaping one's identity. Both *The Adoption Papers* and *Red Dust Road* recount Kay's mother's attempts to tidy her house before being assessed as a potential adoptive parent. Her mother puts away anything that might give away the household's radical, Communist politics but leaves out 'a bust of Burns' (1991, 15) along with detective stories and the works of Percy Bysshe Shelley as a way of 'trying to look ordinary – a lovely home for the baby' (1991, 15) while the birth mother sings Burns's 'Ye Banks and Braes' as she mourns the loss of her child (1991, 18).³ Through these details, Kay shows that the child (the fictionalised version of herself) has Burns, and by extension Scottishness, woven into her identity through both nature (her birth mother) and nurture (her adoptive mother). She wonders:

³ Kay uses the title 'Ye Banks and Braes' for the song which is also known as 'The Banks o' Doon' and is published under that title in Robert Crawford and Christopher Machlachlan's *The Best Laid Schemes: Selected Poetry and Prose of Robert Burns* (2009, 143).

who were my grandmothers
 what were the days like passed
 in Scotland the land I come
 from the soil in my blood.
 (1991, 29)

However, these feelings of connection with the land are at odds with the often racist experiences of the young child as fellow children call her 'Sambo' (24) and teachers make racist comments about her dancing, saying 'I thought/you people had it in your blood' (1991, 25). The child feels she has Scotland 'in her blood', but is not allowed to inhabit it because of the colour of her skin which marks her as different.

This struggle to reconcile identity and difference is also a key theme in *Life Mask* (2005), a collection written as Kay met her birth father and visited Nigeria for the first time. In *Life Mask* the image of the mask is used to explore the conflict between Nigerian heritage and colonialism, as well as Kay's changing relationship to her own identity as her past is rewritten through her father's attitude towards his lost child. This is primarily explored in 'Things Fall Apart' (2005, 33) and a suite of four poems entitled 'African Masks' (2005, 37–40). 'Things Fall Apart' takes its title from Chinua Achebe's classic novel which tells the story of the destruction of traditional tribal society and religious structures in Africa as colonialism disrupts the old ways of life and the African people begin to internalize the values of the colonisers.⁴ Kay takes this theme to talk about her father, who is a zealous Christian as she writes:

My birth father lifted his hands above his head and
 put the white mask of God on his handsome face.

⁴ Achebe's title *Things Fall Apart* came, in turn, from W.B. Yeats's poem 'The Second Coming' (1920) which sees the First World War and the post-colonial difficulties of Ireland as signs of Armageddon. The journey of this phrase from postcolonial Ireland and the British Isles to Achebe's postcolonial Africa and then to Kay's poetry, which expresses a fusion of the two, shows how the situations of these different countries echo each other and can be productively viewed alongside each other.

The image of the mask evokes Franz Fanon's seminal postcolonial text *Black Skin/White Masks* (1952) in which Fanon argues that colonisation forces black subjects to adopt the values of the coloniser in order to survive under the colonial regime. As well as being an important part of postcolonial theory, the symbol of the mask has been used by black writers, particularly African-American writers such as Maya Angelou, who have influenced Kay over the years. Angelou uses the symbolism of the mask to critique the ways in which subalterns, particularly African-Americans and specifically African-American women have felt it necessary to modify their behaviour and appearances in order to survive in a white supremacist, sexist society. Inspired by Paul Lawrence Dunbar's 'We Wear the Mask' (1896), Angelou's 'When I Think About Myself' (1995, 29) describes this mask as faked laughter:

They laugh to conceal their crying,
 They shuffle through their dreams
 They stepped 'n fetched a country
 And wrote the blues in screams.
 I understand their meaning,
 It could an did derive
 From living on the edge of death
 They kept my race alive
 By wearing the mask! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Angelou's use of the mask expresses the impossibility of authentic life for those who are oppressed in society, with their survival often dependent on their ability to perform, and is part of a long-standing tradition of mask images in African-American literature.⁵ Kay has expressed similar sentiments, for example in the short poem 'Somebody Else':

If I was not myself, I would be somebody else.
 But actually I am somebody else.
 I have been somebody else all my life.

⁵ For more on the tradition of the mask in African-American poetry, particularly in the time of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, see Rafia Zafar's *We Wear The Mask: African Americans Write American Literature, 1760–1870* (1997).

It's no laughing matter going about the place
 all the time being somebody else:
 people mistake you; you mistake yourself. (1998, 27)

The fear of internal colonization is present here when Kay writes 'you mistake yourself', a fear that putting on an act can alienate a person from their own identity. In *Life Mask* (2005) Kay sees the same process as Fanon described present in her father as he adopts Christianity at the expense of tribal culture. 'African Masks' describes the different roles that her father adopts as different masks, before thinking about her own identity. The disruption she has experienced to her concept of herself as a result of meeting her father is expressed, once again, using the imagery of the mask as she writes:

In the mirror, one face is lying
 on top of the other, loose,
 slightly unhinged. . . (39)

The double meaning of the word 'lying' shows that Kay equates an unstable identity with inauthenticity, as one identity must be false if it does not match up with the other, while the term 'unhinged' has the dual meaning of a faulty hinge and an unstable mental state, one that may result from a performance that does not fit the actor. For Kay, establishing and accepting one's identity is essential if one is to live an 'authentic' life; a life in which inner identity, one's presentation to the outside world, and one's relationship to culturally-constructed aspects of identity such as nationality, are experienced as coherent and honest.

***Fiere*, and 'Bronze Head From Ife'**

While these themes of identity and difference have occupied Kay's work from the beginning, it is in *Fiere* (2012) that Kay explores Scottish identity most directly. The intentions of the collection in placing the language of Burns alongside postcolonial and Nigerian concerns are clear from its opening epigraphs. The two epigraphs come from Robert Burns and Chinua Achebe and stand alongside a definition of the word 'fiere': 'a companion, a mate, a spouse, an equal' (vii). The Burns lines are

taken from 'Auld Lang Syne' (1788): 'And there's a hand, my trusty fiere/And gie's a hand o' thine', while the Achebe quote is, 'Wherever someone stands, something else will stand beside it' (vii). *Fiere* takes its name from a Scots word featured in 'Auld Lang Syne', and the song returns as a refrain throughout the collection. The title poem is the most notable example as Kay uses the sentiments of 'Auld Lang Syne' to construct a hymn to friendship. Through her adoption of the Scots language, and particularly of Scotland's best known poet, Kay places herself in the Scots tradition, in some ways comparing herself with Burns. This comparison is fitting, given Burns's status as an outsider from the metropolitan, anglicised nature of eighteenth-century literary culture in Scotland. In his biography of Burns, *The Bard* (2009), Robert Crawford writes that:

his strategies of coping and engaging with metropolitan culture as an incomer while asserting and in sophisticated ways maintaining the culture he came from make him a precursor not just of modern writers from Seamus Heaney to Toni Morrison but of most people in today's world. (2009, 247–8)

Crawford's nod to one of Kay's direct influences, Toni Morrison, hints at the way that race can act as a barrier to full integration, an outsider status that Kay has expressed in the past as a black Scot. In taking Burns's poem as a template for her own poetry in *Fiere* and particularly in 'Bronze Head From Ife', she, like Burns, finds a way to claim her role in Scottish culture while refusing to give up her claim to her Nigerian heritage and her own specific individuality. For Scottish nationality on the whole, the effect of the poem is to show that a nation must face up to its past to celebrate its traditions while taking responsibility for shameful actions, such as collusion in slavery, in order to create an inclusive state built on transparency and honesty, rather than by turning a blind eye to inconvenient truths.

The word 'fiere' is an Old Scots word for 'friend' and Kay shows her comfort with the language and some ownership over it as she alters the pronunciation of the word so that it fulfils her own poetic needs in 'Fiere' (Kay 2011, 1), the poem that gives its

name to her collection. She explains in an article, 'I pronounced fiere – feeree, not fear; the latter is the correct pronunciation but I liked the ee ending since it afforded me more rhymes, and also sounds more like friend to me, dearie fiere' (Kay 2012). Hence in 'Fiere' we find Kay rhyming fiere with 'weary' in the lines, 'And noo we're suddenly auld, fiere,/oor friendship's never been weary'. At the end of the poem Kay uses the rhyme mentioned in her article with, 'C'mon, c'mon my dearie – tak my hand my fiere!'.

This ownership over the language is evident once again in 'Bronze Head From Ife', a poem that explicitly brings together Kay's Nigerian heritage with her Scottish identity and explores what it means to incorporate more than one tradition into an identity for the speaker. In the poem, the speaker addresses the titular bronze head of Ife, a Nigerian artefact currently held at the British Museum. The bronze head captures connotations of colonisation, given its appropriation by the British – its removal from Nigeria in the 1930s prompted a change in legislation to prevent the plunder of Nigeria's natural and historical resources by foreign bodies.⁶ The speaker addresses this artefact and describes it in the Scots language. As in 'Fiere', Kay riffs on Burns's poem 'Auld Lang Syne', a famous song associated with Scotland throughout the world.⁷ In doing so she adopts the Scots language as her own – but her adoption of the language is contrasted with Britain's appropriation of the bronze head. While the removal of historical and valuable items is a mark of colonisation, Kay's use of Scots is a means of recognising the

⁶ In 'The Nigerian and African Experience on Looting and Trafficking in Cultural Objects' (2005), Folarin Shyllon explains that the case of the bronze heads of Ife provoked legislation to ban the exportation of antiquities. An editorial from *Nigeria Magazine* in 1940 opined, 'the case of the Ife bronze heads, several of which have unfortunately been allowed to leave the country, furnishes one of the strongest arguments in favour of museum facilities and the preservation within Nigeria of objects illustrating the indigenous culture of the country' (quoted in Shyllon, 138).

⁷ Kay's earliest use of Scottish folk songs is in 'Where it Hurts' from the collection *Off Colour* (1998, 9–12) in which she takes some lines from 'The Skye Boat Song' in order to describe the deteriorating body of an ailing woman, but she does not predominantly use the Scots language in the poem. 'Bed' (1998, 43–4) is in Scots, as is 'Virus ***' (1998, 45), 'Maw Broon Visits a Therapist' (1998, 46–7), and 'Christian Sanderson' (1998, 28–9) which tells the story of a mixed race woman sent to Australia for stealing sixteen shillings. Kay says of the character, 'writing about her is in a way writing about myself only it's a different time-period' (Dyer, 243).

past, while building an identity that allows the speaker to approach the future. Just as 'Auld Lang Syne' is used at Hogmanay to remember old times in order to move on and look forward into the new year, so Kay's use of the language performs a similar function in negotiating the connections between black history and Scottish identity.

The form of the poem evokes Burns from the beginning through the use of iambic tetrameter in the first three lines. The stanza that has come to be associated with Robert Burns, Standard Habbie, begins in the same way. Kay's poem is not divided into stanzas and does not follow a formal pattern, but the rhythm of this beginning evokes the Burnsian tradition. The speaker asks the bronze head to 'forget the auld days o' disgrace/Locked in the lang gone since'. This echoes the sentiment and the lyrics of 'Auld Lang Syne' which begins by asking 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot,/and never brought to mind?' The speaker asks the head to forget the past and to look forward, both metaphorically and literally, so that the head can be viewed by the speaker. Later in the poem, however, the speaker recognises the head's experience of the past and the importance of remembering that past when she says:

you'll clock the shocking past, the sadnesses
the ships, the human clearances.

These references in the Nigerian context could be read as slave ships and the removal of African people from their native lands. However, the choice of words and the context of Scots language that surrounds them draw connections between the Nigerian bronze head and the Scottish speaker. 'The ships' can also be read as the forced emigration of many Scots due to the economic situation in Scotland over the course of the twentieth century, and to the 'clearances' of Highlanders from their homes. The poem does not explicitly compare the two, but shows that the language itself creates resonances between the Nigerian and the Scottish experience. American English is used to create a pun on the term 'clock' as it is used as a slang term meaning 'to see' while Kay also makes use of its English meaning

as a timepiece.⁸ Through this play on words, Kay ties together the importance of perception and understanding with the importance of time itself. In order to understand the present, Kay suggests, it is necessary to remember the past while at the same time looking to the future, just as 'Auld Lang Syne' describes. The importance of time returns in the final line as the speaker toasts the bronze head saying 'Here's tae that timeless look in yer eyes'.

The spectre of colonialism and racism also appears as the speaker addresses the head and considers its history. When the first bronze head was found by German explorer Leo Frobenius he theorised that it must have been produced by a settlement of Greeks, provoking the speculation that the heads could be evidence of the lost Atlantis, a mythic Ancient Greek settlement.⁹ This theory was inspired by the assumption that Africans did not have the skill to create such a complex piece of art. The speaker reflects on these origins as a sign of the colonialist mind set of those who discovered the head while rejoicing in the power of the artwork in front of her. This is conveyed through the use of a full rhyme within one line between 'heart' and 'art', a rare example in the poem:

Miracle that ye are, yer brow face
 Lifts my heart; naeboddy can doot yer art.
 I would hae loved tae ken yer maister;
 I wid hae liked tae ken his name.
 Mind hoo at first they thought ye were
 frae the lost Atlantis. They couldnie
 credit ye. . .

The speaker recognises the head as originating from a human creator, someone who is a master of their craft and of their materials, rather than attributing the head to

⁸ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the use of 'clock' meaning 'to see' originated in America (clock v.1, *OED Online Version* June 2012).

⁹ See Neil MacGregor's article on the Ife head in *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2011, 404–9).

a mythic origin. Once again, Kay uses a pun to emphasise this as 'credit' here means to believe, but also to 'give credit' to the maker of the head. In imagining the head's creator as a named individual the speaker gives credit to him for his creation and, by extension, to the Nigerian culture which produced such a fine piece of art. Through this act of recognition, the poem moves towards healing the past by recognising the value of Nigerian culture within the language of Scots culture.

Full rhymes are not often used in 'Bronze Head From Ife', despite the fact that full rhymes were standard in Robert Burns's day.¹⁰ However, there are many examples of pararhymes and assonance which allow the lines to resonate with each other, for example where the speaker describes the head's composition:

. . . made fray
zinc and brass and loss.
Inside the granite gneiss

The pararhyme between 'loss' and 'gneiss' and the assonance of the letter 's' in these words as well as 'brass' and 'inside' allow the sound of the words to connect the lines through their similarity but without allowing the satisfaction and the closer identity of a full rhyme. It is only in the final couplet that Kay allows a full rhyme to emerge from the suggestive echoes and subtle connections of the pararhymes and assonance which have characterised the poem until this point. In an evocation of the collection's epigraph from Achebe, an identity has emerged from things standing alongside one another. The final two lines return to the iambic tetrameter used at the poem's opening and are connected by a powerful full rhyme, the only such rhyme in the poem and an echo of the full rhymes used by Burns:

Yer no a mask; yer no a disguise.
Here's tae that timeless look in yer eyes.

¹⁰ For a full discussion of Burns and his technical poetic skills see Douglas Dunn's "A Very Scottish Kind of Dash": Burns's Native Metric' (1997).

Once again, the imagery of the mask that Kay had used previously in *Life Mask* comes to the fore: but this time, there is no artifice, no internalization of alien values, a past that is emphatically denied by the stressed and repeated 'no' in the line. The 'timeess' look appeals to a common humanity and an authenticity of experience that is also found in Kay's use of Scots and of the poetry of Robert Burns. This is not an adoption, or a voice that she chooses to use and can take off as easily as a mask – it has become an authentic reflection of black Scottishness.

While the poem's engagement with Scottish identity is clear, it also engages with a wider poetic tradition. The poem is certainly ekphrastic, describing the head in some detail, down to 'the hole in yer chin, the caved-in bit o' yer face' while reflecting on the head's wider significance. This use of ekphrasis reminds the reader of the most famous of all ekphrastic poems, John Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1819). This connection once more draws a genealogy between Burns and Kay's own poetic practice: Keats was a great admirer of Burns and travelled to Scotland to visit the places he frequented (Crawford 2009, 404). This intertextuality offers another claim to authenticity as Keats's lines, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know', sit well alongside the address to the bronze head of Ife and the statement that the head is 'no a mask[. . .] no a disguise'. These lines lay claim to the authenticity of the work of art and its expression of true experience, and Kay's use is particularly significant given that the bronze head was first presumed to be the product of a displaced Grecian culture, a 'Lost Atlantis'. Her tribute gives the bronze head the credit it deserves as an artefact comparable to Keats's Grecian urn while, at the same time, recognizing its true origins in African culture and thereby removing any artifice employed to placate the white supremacist. The art of the mask, its beauty, makes it authentic. Kay's poem places her own practice in the tradition of Romanticism and, in turn, emphasises Burns's role in influencing those poets. This claims a space for both her own writing and that of the Bard as central, not just to Scottish Literature, but to the wider field of world literature.

How To Be Both

While Kay has expressed uncertainty in the past as she tries to discover what it means to be a black Scot, *Fiere* and particularly 'Bronze Head From Ife' represent a new assertiveness in this personal and political journey. The combination of the Scots language with Nigerian culture and the historical relations between the two identities express Kay's struggle while, at the same time, bringing together the two concepts. This poem enacts a kind of civic nationalism, a nationalism that does not ask its citizens to surrender their differences, but allows differences to flourish, 'like plants keeping the same stem' (1991, 49).

When explaining the origins of *Fiere*, Kay credits her friend and fellow writer Ali Smith with giving her the idea as Smith sang 'Auld Lang Syne' to her over the phone one Hogmanay (Kay 2012). This led Kay to use the word 'fiere' to describe close friendships between women, rather than simply the heterosexual romantic relationship it connotes in Burns. Given the inspiration that Ali Smith provided for Kay's use of Burns's poetry in *Fiere* it is interesting to note that one of Smith's recent novels is entitled *How To Be Both* (2014).¹¹ In a sense Kay's writing is also about 'how to be both': both Scottish and black. Addressing the issue of diversity and of occupying multiple identities has been at the core of recent political discussion in Scotland, and continues to be at the forefront of contemporary Scottish Literature. In many ways Kay's work offers a model for civic national identity. It is not an identity that can be set in stone as it is based only on the process of citizenship and engagement, but it is from this fluidity that individuals and communities can flourish in a process of becoming: through living alongside each other and facing the past together.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

¹¹ *How To Be Both* is a novel in two parts with some copies printed in one order, other copies reversing that order so that the experience of the novel is different for different readers. Smith's novel invites readers to approach her writing as a palimpsest, seeing one story in light of another and finding new meaning through their parallel positioning.

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