“MANY DIFFERENT VOICES AND ACCENTS”—
COSMOPOLITAN TIME-TRAVEL IN CATHERINE FORDE’S
THINK ME BACK

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Catherine Forde’s Think Me Back (2001) is a children’s novel that
explores the links between the historical past and the shaping of
identity, both individual and national, within twenty-first century
Scotland. As part of the so-called “democratisation of history,”
Tony Watkins refers to the move away from history as grand
narrative “to focus on personal, cultural and national identity.”
This postmodern popularization of history into a series of
subjective mini-narratives is further explored by Richard J. Evans,
who writes that “history . . . at the beginning of the twenty-first
century, is about identity, about who we are and where we came
from.” Exploring individual and national selfhood becomes ever
more crucial “at a time when other sources of identity such as class
and region have declined” since “history is stepping in to fill the
gap.” For Evans, the role of history in “constructing national
identity” is “nowhere more” vital “than in England, where the
decline of the idea of British unity in the face of resurgent Welsh
and Scottish nationalism on the one hand and growing integration
into Europe on the other, have left the English wondering who on
earth they are.” Apart from Evans’s overly pessimistic view of
devolution in Britain and the anxiety surrounding the undermining

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of Englishness, the point about history’s importance in the underpinning of national identity is certainly helpful in a consideration of post-devolution Scotland. As a female writer of children’s fiction, Forde’s work, then, forms part of a wider dialogue that helps to shape Scotland’s future citizens by offering them alternatives to monophonic grand narratives. Significantly, women’s writing in post-devolution Scotland is considered to be a contributing factor to the “democratisation of history,” since it is regarded as response to “a culture previously more accessible to male Scottish writers.” Instead of mimicking a traditional Caledonia, contemporary writers like Forde are responding to a dynamically reconfigured nation of pluralistic cosmopolitan intention which, according to Gerrard Carruthers rejects “any attempt to forge a coherent, unitary national identity.” As such, Forde’s narrative voices a reconfigured alternative Scotland of polyphonic potential.

Forde’s text traces the psychogeographical journey of its eleven-year-old protagonist Pete Smeaton from his familiar London home to the unfamiliar relocation of Clydebank, on the peripheries of Glasgow. As a new arrival, his voice becomes part of this new homeland, symbolizing post-devolution Scotland’s diversity and cosmopolitan citizenship that strives to accommodate all of those residing within it. In her discussion of children’s fiction, Adrienne Gavin considers how “an ostensibly realist past is introduced into a realist present. Links to the past occur through quirks of fantasy or possible fantasy, by means of the supernatural, time-slips, dreams, or the power of the imagination.” She continues to argue that,

The child protagonists, as ‘writers’, re-create through their imaginations a history they have never experienced while in turn their creators . . . necessarily rely on textualized narrativizations of history in order to create their own imagined version of the past.

Similarly, Forde makes use of time-slips, dreams and supernatural happenings in order to bring Pete closer to his relocated home, cope with and accept his resultant shifting identity, and learn about the history of this as yet unfamiliar space. The
chronotopic time-slip functions as a threshold at the moment of crisis for Pete, spiralling him toward a bildung journey. Think Me Back parallels different time periods in the same Scottish setting—contemporary and during the Second World War—with a view to educating the protagonist about himself and others which, in turn, pedagogically affects its intended reader to identify with the characters. Similarly, Arthea J. S. Reed notes that “one of the exciting aspects of young adult fiction is its ability to make history come to life,” since “adolescents need to read books with adolescent characters from different times and cultures with whom they can empathize.”

Within the narrative, Pete represents that struggle to move out of one’s comfort zone and reach an understanding of difference, gained through his geographical relocation to a different culture and, intermittently, through a historical time shift. As Gavin has already indicated, time-slip fiction foregrounds history as textual narrativization and, as such, Forde’s characters link history to fiction, conscious of “stories” about the Blitz.

When his father, an unemployed architect, is offered a job in Clydebank, Pete experiences the childhood trauma of losing best friends and the reassurance of familiar surroundings. We are introduced to him just as he moves there “from London. That was just yesterday.” Freud’s term for the uncanny, the unheimlich, is that which is unhomely or unfamiliar, which describes Pete’s sense of unease at being relocated. It is symbolic that Pete’s father is an architect because Forde’s entire narrative pivots around psychological concepts of home’s familiarity offset by its uncanny double of home as unfamiliar threat. The uncanny is unsettling, as Nicholas Royle reminds us because it “is not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation” but “is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar” which “can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home.” Pete’s recently relocated Scottish family home is haunted by its Victorian ghostly other half, which was destroyed in the Second World War Blitz. The home’s Victorian shadow is undoubtedly dogged by such gothic narratives as Robert Louis Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886), existing as a palimpsest beneath its twenty-first
century façade and serving to indicate the disturbances at the heart of the contemporary home. The loss of home haunts Forde’s text: the loss that Pete initially feels at losing his familiar London home parallels the historical loss to a wartime community that “suffered a ferocious night blitz which damaged all but seven of Clydebank’s houses and left 35,000 of its 47,000 inhabitants homeless.”

When Pete time-travels back to the wartime childhood of Beth Winters (an 11-year-old girl existing in 1940s Clydebank during the Blitz), he witnesses the destruction raging within society, much like the crumbling decay central to Dr Jekyll’s home, for “as far as his eyes could see were jagged buildings, ruined, burning.” Not unlike rotten teeth, these razed buildings depict the vulnerability of the home: it symbolizes the wider threat to the nation’s hearth when it fails to provide shelter to external forces beyond its control. The devastation caused by bombings of civilian areas during the Second World War leaves its epochal mark on the new twenty-first century, causing unsettlement: “Pete stood in the ruins of the bombed house and looked up at what had once been the internal walls of a house that joined on to his own new house” and he “shivered” for “the room markings on the jagged exposed walls stood out vividly despite the attempts of sprouting weeds to hide the evidence of an existence torn down by the giant hand of war.”

At the close of Forde’s novel the wreck of the destroyed half of Pete’s house is finally smoothed over so that his family home stands firmly on its own: “The jagged ruins of Beth’s former home had finally been cleared . . . they had filled the bomb crater with new soil and laid the seeds to a garden which would burst into flower in time for summer.” Clearing the foundations of past destruction and planting the seeds of new growth allows this contemporary family to move forward and recognize the importance of the home as a space in which to journey forwards into a more settled future. Notably, Pete’s newfound friend is called Dunny, and we learn that “it means a cellar, but in Australian it means toilet:” the cellar, of course, is a key aspect of the unheimlech in its representation of the psyche, since basements are common literary tropes that represent homely disturbances, such as Angela Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber” or the cellar housing Miranda in John Fowles’s The Collector. Making use of “the
supernatural, time-slips, dreams, or the power of the imagination," Forde relocates Pete to a place steeped in narrative, for “there’s a bit of a story about this house. I don’t know all the details yet, but it’s to do with history; what happened to Clydebank during the Second World War.” Just as Pete and Beth are linked in space and time, so too is Pete’s house haunted by its historical doppelganger insofar as it is the remaining half of a semi-detached Victorian villa, a period steeped in gothic literature. The traumatic scarring of the Blitz has left a palimpsest of the bombed part of the semi-detached, in a similar way to an amputee feeling their lost phantom limb. The chronotopic link between these time jumps, characters and houses is “a small door in the wall of the cupboard” within which exists “a narrow brick tunnel.” Pete has discovered a spatio-temporal tunnel in which he overcomes his fear of dark places with cobwebs and becomes Beth’s heroic saviour by helping her to find her lost box of treasured keepsakes, linking her to her lost mother who “had packed a box of things to remind Beth of home.”

Pete’s rich imagination and creativity (“he planned where he would put his books and lean his guitar,”) combined with Forde’s use of time-slips and supernatural happenings, leads him to encounter Beth. As Gavin asserts, “the child protagonists, as ‘writers’” recreate a historical event, just as Forde recreates her version of the past. Thus present and past collide in a historiographic metafiction that seeks to decentralize London’s dominant role in British histories of World War Two and to reposition it within unwritten accounts. History becomes fundamental in the shaping of perceptions of the Scottish nation and Pete’s new relocated position within it: Pete confirms his hitherto southern ignorance to his new-found friend Dunny that “all I knew about the war, till now . . . was that London was bombed and kids got sent away from the cities.” As a marginalized subject within the United Kingdom, Dunny confirms the hegemony at play in Pete’s lack of knowledge, by observing that “all the history books just talk about London, London, London . . . Haven’t you heard about the Blitz in Coventry either?” Forde, then, is not forcing a solely Scottish perspective here but, on the contrary, is alluding to the centralized stranglehold that London has on shaping
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reality, leaving others, such as Clydebank and Coventry on the periphery of historical accounts. Crucially, Pete’s relocation occurs at the beginning of the twenty-first century, just as Scotland’s transition towards a devolved nation is underway: as the boy is moved away from London by Forde in a bid to decentralize the capital as a central authority, so too is devolution an attempt to redistribute power from Westminster to Holyrood. The *bildungsroman* of the individual, then, is mirrored in the nation’s development and self-formation in a new post-devolutionary space. Forde parallels historical narrative with contemporary events in her time-slip text as a means of educating her protagonist about the past, but also so that he can draw comparisons with his own life, which is a common trait in historical fiction. Evans alludes to contemporary fiction’s main intention being, not to “re-create a past world,” but “to address present-day concerns by putting them in a past context.”

Pete’s relocation North to a hitherto only imagined landscape fills him with an alternative reality that he must grow and develop into. It is the week before his eleventh birthday, a key age for the heroes and heroines of children’s literature. For instance, Will Stanton’s eleventh birthday marks the beginnings of his time-travelling in Susan Cooper’s *The Dark is Rising* (1965-77), while Harry Potter journeys north to the fantasy realm of Hogwarts. Lisa Damour points out that Rowling’s series concerns itself predominantly with “the challenges he faces as a preadolescent, a developmental period that runs roughly from ages eleven to fourteen,” for “Harry’s latency has just about come to an end. Indeed, the series kicks off with Harry’s eleventh birthday.” Likewise, the uncertainty of pubescent shape shifting, both physically and psychologically, is explored through the dislocation of Pete from everything familiar and comfortable to all that is alien and unknown. The move is largely traumatic, given the abruptness of it, for “Mr Smeaton had turned up at school two days ago to take Pete home to pack and leave for Scotland that very evening. Everything had happened as quickly as that.” Without any time to say proper farewells to his friends, “here he was, two days later, standing in his new garden in Clydebank worrying about starting yet another school—in a different country for goodness sake where
everyone spoke with a Scottish accent.” Self and other are effectively reversed, as Pete shifts from being part of the centralised established norm to becoming himself an alterity, for “nobody would understand him. And they would tease him about his London voice, even more than his dad did.” As such, his journey North is a symbolic rite of passage that affords him space to discover his emerging self and re-evaluate notions of home. He is, after all, in many ways returning home insofar as he is “only half-English” on his mother’s side, yet his father’s land is uncannily unfamiliar to him. By returning to his father’s home, Pete mirrors Scotland’s devolution in 1999, in effect a journey towards a new future that contains elements of its previous state prior to 1707. While he may be linked genealogically to the Scottish nation, it is geopolitically foreign terrain. Pete experiences a chronotopic moment of crisis and epiphany that allows him to move forward to a reconfigured selfhood. Common in ‘tweenage’ and Young Adult fiction, “these time spaces of crisis and transition readily produce fictional characters on the border between childhood and maturity.” Pete’s spatio-temporal journey enables a renegotiated identity to emerge within a bildungsroman, a type of novel that reflects an educational coming of age and self-development. It is through that maturation that Pete can participate in his relocated home and become a new citizen of a reconfigured post-devolution Scotland.

Home, then, becomes uncanny, which is further emphasised by his supernatural encounters with Beth. The dislocation brought about by military conflict is mirrored in the contemporary anxiety of familial and cultural displacement. Sharing the same age and house, though out of time with Pete, Beth is ultimately the return of his repressed double since “during the war there must have been a girl who lived in the other half of your house,” and it is no accident that Dunny’s brother “Wee Stookie” believes Beth to be Pete’s “sister.” The doppelganger effect increases when, on the anniversary of the Clydebank Blitz, Pete is transported back to that 1941 scene of devastation while he is in the air raid shelter, for “her panic became his.” Understandably,
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He could hardly believe what had just happened to him in the shelter, and felt deeply shocked. Not only because he had somehow gone back in time to the past, but also because he realised that he had probably experienced the very blast which had destroyed Beth’s home.

Later that night time converges when Beth pleads for him to come out of bed and help her and he awakes to her childhood present because “gone from Pete’s perspective were the tiers of post-war houses . . . As far as his eyes could see were jagged buildings, ruined, burning.” While experiencing his own childhood trauma, he has been introduced to the trauma faced by Beth, his historical peer, and by helping her he enables himself to work through and conquer his own fears and uncertainties. Joe Layburn’s *Ghostscape* (2008) is comparable as a time-slip ‘tweenage’ novel, as it also links contemporary society with the Second World War. Lay parallels the relocation of Aisha, a working-class Somalian girl to London’s East End with the plight of Richard, a boy living during the London Blitz, and attempts to offer a cosmopolitan conciliation between cultures and nations. While grieving the loss of her father, who “was just another statistic in Somalia’s civil war,” Aisha recognizes her affinity with Richard and his suffering during the Blitz, and “felt overcome with anger for the people who start wars: the powerful people whose thirst for still more power is never satisfied.” Like Pete, Aisha realizes that history tends to exclude the ordinary person: her father’s “death wasn’t written up in any newspaper or announced on television. But he had been my heart’s joy” and resolves to counter this with her own narrative, for “I would keep my father’s memory alive and Richard’s memory too.” There are obvious comparisons too with Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (1958) in which the title’s protagonist experiences a similar time-slip that leads him to encounter a girl called Hatty. Discussing this text, Matthew Grenby points out that “the relationship between childhood and adulthood is a related theme, often central to fantasy fiction and particularly time-slip novels,” adding that Pearce’s “eponymous hero is a lonely child on the verge of adulthood who has been sent away” from the
familiarity of the parental home. Having built a friendship with the Victorian Hatty, it is later disclosed to him that she is in fact an elderly neighbour. Initially “devastated”, “slowly he learns to reconcile himself to the loss” of his female companion which, in turn, shifts him away from an “unhappiness [that] was the result of an unwillingness to accept change in his own life.” Finally, Grenby concludes, “as well as showing that the old were once young, Pearce teaches young readers that they cannot hold onto childhood forever.”

Forde’s narrative is directly comparable in her intertextuality of Pearce’s novel, with the traumatized and displaced Pete befriending Beth only to discover that she is an old woman in the present of the text’s events. But Grenby’s assessment of the time-slip device can be developed by arguing that Forde is not merely considering Pete’s childhood psychological development but, rather, is utilizing this fertile space for the exploration of cosmopolitical ethics within post-devolution Scotland. Grenby anyway incorrectly assumes that the young/old dichotomy is rigidly established yet when Tom talks with the elderly Mrs Bartholomew he notes “a gesture, a tone of the voice, a way of laughing that reminded him of the little girl in the garden.”

Forde’s text similarly examines the crossover between generations, so that Pete contains heroic elements more associated with grown-ups while the aged Beth is nevertheless still very much young at heart: “Young Beth? Oh, deep down somewhere I still am. Everybody’s young inside.” Pete has the vision to recognize this, as “in his dreamy state of mind he found the tones of the young Beth in the voice of the old woman” and “when he opened his eyes Beth’s softly wrinkled face was overlaid with his mind’s image of the blue eyed girl.” It is particularly in the eyes as “the window to the soul” that Pete recognizes Beth’s inner youthfulness and the girl who kissed him on the cheek for rescuing her box of memories. Simultaneously child and adult in the text, Beth signifies the duality at our core, the tension between one’s nascent potential and mortal limitations. Again emphasizing their doppelganger position, as with Pete’s father, the grown-up Beth’s now retired “husband was an architect, like your dad,” accentuating the links between them both and the significance of home. Both children’s lives are
redesigned and planned by being relocated to new homes with their fathers—Beth moves to New Zealand and Pete to Scotland which, in turn, affects their accents and identities. Beth’s previous neighbour was Jamie Milligan, Mr Smeaton’s new boss, who concedes that “There is a way through here into the house next door. At least there was when I was a lad, and before the Winters’ side was bombed,” but “I’ve never actually been through it. Too frightened” since “Beth, the girl who lived next door, had me convinced that a goblin lived in there. Said it would eat me up if I crawled through.”\textsuperscript{44} Even when older, Milligan continued to be afraid to assist Beth, haunted by his childhood impotence, as his mother attests: “Mind you do what my Jamie didn’ae manage. Help that wee lassie so her poor mother can rest.”\textsuperscript{45} Milligan himself concedes, “Pete, you’re some lad . . . only here one day and you did what I could have done if I hadn’t been such a feartie.”\textsuperscript{46} By stepping out of time, Pete and Beth assist in healing each other of the trauma caused by loss and displacement in their rapidly changing young lives. So Pete explains that “I’m not an evacuee at all. Like what you mean. I’ve moved in more than sixty years after you were here. I’m for the 21st century,”\textsuperscript{47} while Beth says, “You’ve just come, and I’m about to leave” because “I’m being evacuated tomorrow evening. Just me and nobody else.”\textsuperscript{48} Pete’s arrival could imply that Scotland can only solve its problems with the help of an English hybrid figure. But Beth’s saviour is Pete rather than Milligan because it then connects him to her, just as it connects him to his new home. Previously regarding London as the centre of his world, he has to shift his Anglocentric focus to accept his geographical neighbour, Scotland, as his new home and learn to empathize with others. Only by seeing through Beth’s eyes does he learn to put his own problems into perspective: she is evacuated, loses her mother in the Blitz, and ultimately relocates to New Zealand afterwards with her father, while Pete and both of his parents move to a new Scottish home. Beth, meaning house in Hebrew, is key to his resettlement—experiencing her childhood trauma enables him to open the door and fully inhabit his new home.

Further, Pete demonstrates a mature cosmopolitan outlook in his distaste for conflict and his desire for humanitarian
cooperation regardless of one’s national identity. Transported to a period in which civilization is tearing itself apart, including the events of the Holocaust, Pete draws attention to humankind’s capacity for cruelty and avarice through its power over non-human as well as human others. According to Jonathan Sterne, discussing Nietzsche, history is a spatiotemporal dialogic exchange and, as such, “The voices of the dead had their cultural converse in the ears of the not yet born,” resulting in “transgenerational speech, where any ‘present’ could address itself to an almost infinite range of possible futures.”

The adult Beth is not deceased, but her past life coincides with a historical event that she relates to Pete through her ghostly childhood imprint. By speaking through her past child self rather than adult frame, this allows a levelling of understanding between two different generations while benefitting equally from each other’s knowledge. For Rosi Braidotti, “the de-Oedipalization of the inter-generational bond of the young to those who preceded them” allows both to “join forces across the generational divide by working together towards sustainable futures” and sharing information. For Linda Hall, the house in children’s time-slip fiction serves as a trope for intergenerational dialogue, since “the houses in these novels enclose layers of past lives that are accessible to us if we are sufficiently attuned” because “the living nature of the building itself seems to have the power to put the imaginative child in touch with its peopled past.”

Forde’s text, however, subsumes this figurative Anglo-centric emblem to reconfigure cultural identity within post-devolution Scotland as Pete’s new home.

Although based on gothic elements like ghostly apparitions of deceased family members, Forde’s historical child is not a ghoul but is, rather, an impression of the past living cheek by jowl with the present, since “you don’t seem very ghostly just now. I mean you’re totally real.” Through sharing her childhood trauma, Pete is able to see beyond ideological notions of war as well as its remoteness and to read the immediacy of its effect on human faces. Thus, “Pete had seen pictures on the news, of towns torn open by war: Bosnia, Beirut, Kosovo, but he had never experienced the
Reliving the Blitz with Beth allows him to adopt a cosmopolitan empathy concerning the humanitarian cost of war upon global citizens and to recognize that conflicts are not always confined to far-off places and history but can also occur on the very doorstep of one’s home. Beth’s adult artwork brings home the message of war’s immediacy: rather than focusing particularly on battle fronts, her work tends to depict “the aftermath of a bomb or a raid,” showing “ruined houses, ruined gardens, ruined streets and buildings.” Instead of depicting military scenes, she paints domestic scenes shattered by conflict, while “the people in Beth’s paintings were often children.” She focuses on carefree childhood interrupted by the harrowing knowledge of suffering: “The same faces appeared in all the different paintings on display. Those faces were those of Beth herself and of Pete.” The gap between her childhood and Pete’s is diminished as the artist looks out from the canvas warning against the danger of history repeating itself in perpetual scenes of devastation. Forde, then, is directly commenting upon the atrocities of contemporaneous conflicts and the need for conciliation by engaging these two children in a conversation that allows the convergence of their respective timelines. Think Me Back not only permeates national borders but also overcomes a gap between centuries through an inter-generational dialogue that enables historical events to be viewed through contemporary circumstances. In turn, this enables him to recognize that all war affects civilians and its arena is somebody’s doorstep, no matter how far the distance between here and there. In response to Dunny’s heroic masculinist wrongheadedness—“Pretty exciting, eh, all that fightin’ . . . Wish we could have a war”—Pete offers an alternative cosmopolitical perspective, saying

Nah . . . Look at what happens to people like us in wars. Supposing we became refugees kicked out of our houses, having to leave everything behind and walk all the way to another country. And being bombed, and tortured, and shot. That’s what happens in wars these days. I think it must have
been pretty scary in Beth’s time too, especially during the Blitz.⁵⁹

Ordinary “people like us” are dispossessed by historical and contemporary conflict, evicted from their familial and geographical homes and subject to the shifting power structures of national discourse. Amidst such traumatic hegemony, one’s country may no longer allow a feeling of belonging for certain citizens.

Forde effectively undermines glorified heroism with an altogether more humanitarian cosmopolitan ethic that seeks to demonstrate, not the difference between us and them, but the similarity. Citizens caught up in war, according to Pete, will always be “people like us,” regardless of their race or ethnicity, as he learns first-hand the personal story of loss and devastation. That is precisely why “new entries suddenly appear”⁶⁰ in “Beth’s notebook,”⁶¹ in order that the lessons of history be learned to prevent a continual repetition of its events down the ages: “it was as if Beth was drawing attention to what happened.”⁶² As well as gaining a fuller understanding of his new Scottish home, Pete’s time-travel allows him to renegotiate his evolving self within a spatiotemporal framework that reflects Grenby’s confirmation that “fantasy is extremely well suited to consideration of questions of identity” since “the journey to another world, or another time, decontextualizes the protagonists, removing them from the structures that locate and bind them into a particular role within the family, the school, or the larger society.”⁶³ Although existing in a realist space, Pete’s journey does transport him to “another world” insofar as Scotland is completely alien to all he has previously known, while the fantasy element of “another time” returns him to 1941. This dislocation from the familiar to the unfamiliar or uncanny is in keeping with children’s fiction: “they then have to discover afresh who they are, and, usually, can return to their reality at the end of the novel with a stronger sense of themselves.”⁶⁴ Pete’s dislocation from a sense of familiar home and self leads, in turn, to a relocated identity that is happier and wiser, and the bildung of his development certainly strengthens his character. The stronger sense of self, though, is not a unified Cartesian cogito that depends upon rigid ontological self/other
dichotomies; rather, Pete’s newfound identity remains fluidly open to negotiation, dependent upon his encounters and relationships with others. Though “he had been afraid that people would make fun of his accent,” when he starts school with Dunny after Easter, “he settled in immediately.”

Instead, “it must have been more Scottish than he thought. After a few weeks his mum was asking him to repeat things because she couldn’t make out what he was saying to her.” Part of his evolved identity includes an accentual shift that Pete had previously considered utterly alien to himself, since he is now speaking in a different voice from the one his mother previously knew. As such, “the point is not to know who we are, but rather what, at last, we want to become . . . rather than Being in its classical modes.”

This endless nomadic process of mobilized becoming rather than a trajectory towards fixed a destination signals a poststructuralist “permanent process of transition, hybridization and nomadization” that is ideally suited to pre-adolescent fiction’s concern with the imminent metamorphosis of adolescence. Moreover, Scotland’s post-devolutionary identity is itself in flux, a cartographical movement towards multiple possibilities that allow for “de-territorializing” beyond “fixed notions of one’s territory” that are prescriptively “deterministic, and also exclusive and intrinsically xenophobic” in order to consider cosmopolitical alternatives to be heard.

A significant factor in Pete’s unhappiness is his mother’s post-natal depression and the uncertainty of his father’s employment success, all of which lead to constant parental rows that generate further dislocation within their son. Looking at “his mum’s pinched face and tired, shaky voice,” he realized that “she looked as though she was going to start crying again. He really hated that. Never could get used to it, even though she cried all the time these days. Her tears made Pete feel panicky and scared,” and later, “Pete heard tears in his mother’s voice. He didn’t want her to cry.”

Already enduring the displacement of a new unfamiliar home, his anchored certainties, including the safety of his mother’s strength, have all become unpredictable and dislodged, leaving Pete feeling completely at sea without knowing how to navigate such vastness. Unlike traditional children’s literature, contemporary transitional ‘tweenage’ texts probe social issues, such
as dysfunctional families, war, or teenage pregnancy. The position of women is at best precarious in Forde’s depiction of gender roles; internalizing his father’s perspective, Dunny informs Pete that “my mum hates toys lying around . . . M’dad says it’s because she’s a New Rotic and he says he likes to keep out of her road and Wee Stookie and I should do the same if we’re smart.”

Dunny’s mother is trapped within a Scottish heteropatriarchal definition of Woman as Scotland’s hysterical simulacra in order to compensate for its own psychological shortcomings as the feminized other of England’s centralized norm. In turn, Pete applies this phallocratic script to his own mother. Just as Beth in her time entered the air raid shelter to escape the Blitz, Pete shelters from the storm raging within his parents’ embattled marriage, “his mother’s shrill angriness punctuated by his father’s deeper tones.”

Falling asleep in a space embedded within conflict and trauma to escape the reality of the present, he dreams “that his mum said he wasn’t to bring any toys to Clydebank because she was a New Rotic and wanted everything to be tidy from now on.” But note that, in relation to Dunny’s so-called neurotic mother, “Dad’s never around when she needs him. Well, he’s just never around,” as Forde paints a bleak picture of the nuclear family with the woman coping with the brunt of its fallout. This is a vehement criticism of Scottish heteropatriarchy and is clearly not what Forde envisages for a successful family or nation; instead, she offers cosmopolitical empathy and harmony between individuals as the only way forward. Written in the early days of Scotland’s newfound autonomy, it is clear that she is challenging post-devolution Scotland to deliver a nation based on understanding and respect for others rather than the perpetual divisions caused by phallocratic binaries.

As well as offering a new life for Pete in Scotland, his parents’ marriage is resurrected and family harmony is restored to countermand the conflict that had hitherto broken out. He discovers the importance of family and home from Beth who lost her mother and house in the Blitz and from Dunny who explains why her shoebox of trinkets is so important:
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See all the stuff in here, Pete, how can you say it’s not treasure? It’s real treasure. Imagine your mum died. Just imagine that. And you lost everything. Not only her but everything that she used to have, things you remembered about her.79

This is another facet of cosmopolitan empathy insofar as Dunny is asking Pete to use his imagination in order to place himself in another’s shoes and, by doing so, recognize not only their suffering but also comprehend that real value lies not in monetary gain but within love and its treasures. His journey of self-development allows him, then, to see the true value of life because “he understood what Dunny had said about the things in the box, and he felt ashamed at his previous outburst.”80 Existing in the rapidly globalized twenty-first century, Pete is equipped with a cosmopolitical ethics that will enable him to see beyond the façade of society to the heart of what really matters in terms of communitarian and familial love. Beth’s despair at globalization—“Clydebank has changed so much. All these new houses springing up, and shopping centres everywhere. So busy. So much traffic. Nothing seems the same any more”81—points out the alienation of such rapid advancement but Pete’s progress indicates that there will be continued human endeavour to create cosmopolitan community as a point of relocation between citizens.

Rather than becoming a soulless automaton within globalization’s mechanization, Pete’s cosmopolitanism nurtures human creativity and imagination as a way of connecting different cultures and age groups. Imagination is crucial to young Beth too, who writes in her notebook and on the air raid shelter wall that is then read by Pete. She adds “new lines” to the walls that are also discovered by Pete; she writes to her parents on the eve of her evacuation that “When you are here and I am far away Think me back and I will make my thoughts fly To be with you and hold your hands.”82 Forde’s imaginative writing emphasizes the capabilities of the mind as a connective force, where these child characters are able to transcend the prison house of conflict and achieve social conciliation. Similarly, the adult Beth pursues her childhood creativity and becomes a celebrated artist in her New Zealand
home, signifying that she has not repressed that imagination in order to conform to adult society’s rat race, but has instead nurtured and developed it. Spiritually wealthy, Beth has also successfully eked out a comfortable lifestyle as a woman artist, able to exist within society on her own terms rather than bend to its will. Utilizing the power of the imagination, both Beth and Pete cosmopolitically dismantle the binaries between global and personal conflicts in their pursuit of unfettered and, as such, nomadic thought. "Nomadic subjects,” they “are capable of freeing the activity of thinking from the hold of phallocentric dogmatism, returning thought to its freedom, its liveliness, its beauty,” thus resisting hegemonic narratives in favour of charting a different route of self-development.

Beth’s relocation to New Zealand furthers the cosmopolitical emphasis in Forde’s writing because it focuses upon the importance of nomadic dislocation from one’s homeland in order to be truly at home with oneself and others. In her discussion of philosophical nomadism, Braidotti considers the fallacy of “people comfortably established in the illusion of familiarity their ‘mother tongue’ gives them.” It is illusory because upon entering the symbolic order, we are uncannily divided from ourselves and duped into a fictive subjectivity. To shatter that illusion and journey away from territorial nationalism offers a nomadic challenge: “Lacanian psychoanalysis shows us that there is no such a thing as a mother tongue, that all tongues carry the name of the father and are stamped by its register.” Only by decentring fixed territorial nationalism and recognizing our other selves across borders and tongues in the broadened horizon of nomadic thought, can the false consciousness of cultural hegemony be avoided. The scene in the family home towards the end of the narrative is crucial in depicting this:

The kitchen was warm and cheerful. It smelt of bolognese and coffee and resounded with many different voices and accents: Mrs Smeaton’s London twang and Beth’s Kiwi inflections . . . There were the Scottish accents: Mr Milligan and his mother whose accents were distinctly Scottish,
and then the tones of Pete’s father and Hugh Winters who had had the edges of their Scottishness rubbed away by years in England.  

Central to the family home, the kitchen is full of odours and voices that present warmth, love and connectedness, offering shelter and security against the alienation of globalization. Also, this is clearly signalling a shift in the nation’s psychological development: rather than an insular Caledonia of absent fathers and New Rotic mothers, this is a healthy home that abounds with a cacophony of cosmopolitan unity. Interestingly, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, rhotic describes a dialect or variant of English: thus, in Forde’s text, a New Rotic indicates a new post-devolution Scottish cosmopolitan citizen, just as the kitchen “resounded with many different voices and accents,” including Pete’s newly evolved accent. The New Rotic is not a negatively construed simulacrum of Scotland, then, but a positive challenge to the stereotypical association of Scottishness with masculinity.

For Gilles Deleuze, the simulacrum is not a copy, but a reminder that there is no fixed original and, as such, it poses a formidable challenge to grand narratives of identity. Nomadically shifting the boundaries of home beyond its geophysical borders, these Scots benefit from a broader outlook and bring back the benefits of understanding other cultures whenever they return home. By travelling to London and the other side of the globe, diasporic planetary conviviality ensures a cultural fusion that intertwines alternative with indigenous Scots. Scott Hames posits that, despite postmodern fluidity, Scottish vernacular is symptomatic of devolution’s limitation and containment by Anglocentric hegemony rather than a counter-resistant voice, since “tropes of vocal plenitude help to mask the constitutive separation of action from authority in all democratic assemblies, the apparent ‘immediacy’ of vernacular speech countering Holyrood’s particularly complex attenuation of sovereignty.” Voice, like devolution, according to Hames, is a fetishized spin spectacle rather than democratic agency. Pete could certainly be read alongside Hames’s essay, as an Anglo-Scot whose vernacular inflections are part of neo-colonial containment. But, while devolution may have
initially served as a UK political safety valve, it has nevertheless enabled the Scottish National Party to secure a majority of votes in 2011 that, in turn, has paved the way for an Independence Referendum in 2014. The democratic voices of its citizens now have an opportunity to vote against Anglocentricity. Meanwhile, to reiterate Braidotti’s silencing of the phallocratic mother tongue, Forde’s text envisions the possibility of amplifying national identity to hear the “many different voices and accents” of cosmopolitan conviviality.

Maintaining a cosmopolitan ethics of mobility allows Forde’s characters to forego debilitating notions of nationhood and instead relocate their citizenship within the interstices of multiple belongings. It is a deterritorialization of psychogeographical borders “being introduced as a way of defamiliarizing home and territory, in order to facilitate the movement between discourses of nationalism and cosmopolitanism.” Forde’s portrayal of Scottish home life opens-outswards ideas of home and nation in a “glocalized” blending of local and global influences fluidly enriching the new possibilities of post-devolution Scotland. Instead of being weighed down by the dour Scot psyche and its Caledonian antisyzygy, Forde’s characters epitomize a cosmopolitical community that is tangible in this regenerated home, for “Pete felt there was a lightness about the visitors, a sense of relief, of completeness.”

Home, then, is not a matter of geopolitical fixity but, rather, a heartfelt outward motion of transnational cosmopolitan endeavour to reach across boundaries, dismantling territorial differences with an ethics of understanding and appreciation of the relations rather than restrictions between others. In keeping with philosophical nomadism, home is fluidly mobile because it is carried within; it is where the heart is: “nomadism consists not so much in being homeless, as in being capable of recreating your home everywhere.” In his reading of contemporary fictional and theoretical texts, including Derrida and, specifically, Jean-Luc Nancy’s The Inoperative Community, as “cardiogrammatology,” Royle perceives “it is a love letter of sorts, about the strangeness of the heart but also about the heart as what dictates the love of thinking, the love of writing, the very possibility of literature or philosophy.” Writing to reach you,
then, such works as Forde’s shoot from the heart rather than the gun in an attempt to redress the imbalance of global power with cosmopolitical community. The heart itself is uncanny, both familiar and unfamiliar because it housed within the self but offered up to the other in a bid to find similarity in difference and to connect with humanity. So, “to feel and think the heart today, in one’s heart, from the heart, is to engage with the matter of the heart as other, as the workings and the passion of a foreign body, as what is not and cannot be reduced to a subject.” Each heart is only complete in the “you” that “I” love, and we remain divided from ourselves until we unite with others.

The shift is from claustrophobic inertia and fear to a breath of fresh air swept in by nomadism’s wind of change that reconfigures the home as a liminal space between inside and outside, self and other, epitomized by “the woman in the strange floaty clothes.” Beth’s airy clothing is both a release from the heavy woollen attire of her war-time existence and symbolic of a lighter altogether more cosmopolitan Scotland, since “behind the exotic inflection of English spoken with a soft New Zealand accent, Pete heard Scottish tones too.” Benefiting from communitarian ethics, “there was a similar lightness in Pete’s parents’ behaviour” as “Mr Smeaton was full of energy” while “Mrs Smeaton seemed more cheerful and energetic than she had been for months.” The relocation to a reconfigured Scotland has had a restorative effect on this flagging family unit, generating more stable economic, cultural and familial ties and impetus. Initially, “everything about this woman seemed out of place, not least her flowing, colourful clothes, so light and so different, Pete realised, from the dull tracksuits he had seen on the canal path and drab, anoraked shoppers in the supermarket,” and learning her story helps to bring some of that exotic colour into the drab greyness of the west of Scotland climate. Berthold Schoene points out a similar mobility in James Kelman’s novels in their tendency to marginalize Scotland as a location, focusing instead on more transnational geopolitical spaces. However, in discussing You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free (2004), he insists that “while one may be able to take the man out of Scotland, one cannot take Scotland out of the man” because the protagonist’s “attitudes fail to shift, and his vociferous
dismissal of Scotland leaves his actual Scottishness undiminished and all the country’s nationalist myths intact.”

For Schoene, “actual Scottishness” maintains and perpetuates the traditional heteropatriarchal confines of Caledonia, though it is problematic to impose such an essentialist and singular national identity as “actual Scottishness,” which silences any other Scottish identity. He seems to simply equate the nation’s heritage with psychological impairment and nothing less than cultural evacuation will do for there to be any hope for Scotland’s apparently damaged populace. On the contrary, this is a malaise of Caledonian hegemonic discourse and not the nation per se. As a Scottish woman writer of children’s fiction, Forde’s novel imagines alternative Scotlands that wholeheartedly bypass such mindsets by focusing instead upon a cosmopolitan child who unites both England and Scotland through his genealogical heritage and makes transnational as well as transhistorical links through the power of his imagination. Pete’s biggest influence in his relocated home is a female child who furthers his growth towards an adulthood that is thoroughly pluralistic and communitarian rather than divisive and patriarchal. But, far from leaving Scotland behind as some kind of lost cause, Forde is intent on voicing its many positive community dimensions (particularly as Scotland is historically more socialist than England) and its “glocal” international relationships. To return to and refocus Evans’s comments at the start of this essay, it is clear that history is engaging with national identity in post-devolutionary Britain, allowing those hitherto subsumed by Anglo-centric history a democratic voice that resists grand narratives of nation and depicts a simulacrum of New Rotic accents. Forde’s fictional liaison between contemporary Scotland and the Clydebank Blitz imubes her protagonist with an ethical cosmopolitanism that, in turn, gives utterance to a bildung of polyphonic becoming.
Notes

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
23. Forde, *Think Me Back*.
26 Forde, Think Me Back, 20.
27 Forde, Think Me Back, 21.
28 Forde, Think Me Back, 25.
30 Forde, Think Me Back, 30.
31 Forde, Think Me Back, 50.
32 Forde, Think Me Back, 94.
33 Forde, Think Me Back.
34 Forde, Think Me Back, 114.
35 Joe Layburn, Ghostscape (Frances Lincoln: London, 2008), 59 ; 89.
36 Forde, Think Me Back, 59 ; 90.
38 Forde, Think Me Back.
39 Forde, Think Me Back.
41 Forde, Think Me Back, 148.
42 Forde, Think Me Back.
43 Forde, Think Me Back, 135.
44 Forde, Think Me Back, 69.
45 Forde, Think Me Back, 105
46 Forde, Think Me Back, 134.
47 Forde, Think Me Back, 61.
48 Forde, Think Me Back, 62-3.
Many Different Voices and Accents

52 Forde, Think Me Back, 153.
53 Forde, Think Me Back, 61.
55 Forde, Think Me Back, 159.
56 Forde, Think Me Back.
57 Forde, Think Me Back.
58 Forde, Think Me Back, 58.
59 Forde, Think Me Back.
60 Forde, Think Me Back, 87.
61 Forde, Think Me Back, 80.
62 Forde, Think Me Back, 87.
63 Grenby, 164.
64 Forde, Think Me Back.
66 Forde, Think Me Back.
68 Forde, Think Me Back.
69 Braidotti, Metamorphoses, 8.
70 Forde, Think Me Back, 4.
71 Forde, Think Me Back, 8.
72 Forde, Think Me Back, 35.
73 Forde, Think Me Back, 28.
74 According to Zoe Strachan, “There exist many androcentric places in literature where women still appear as simulacra for Scotland and bear the brunt of masculine frustration at its own intransigent Scottishness . . . I thought that, as a feminist, I should write about women, and particularly to claw back some of the experiential potential which seemed to have been packaged up and labelled ‘male’”. See, Zoe Strachan, “Is that a Scot or am a wrang?,” in The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 52. For a wider discussion of Scottish women as simulacra see

75 Forde, *Think Me Back*, 47.
76 Forde, *Think Me Back*.
78 Part of Forde’s regenerative vision is imparted by setting the narrative when “the Easter holidays were just about to begin,” Forde, *Think Me Back*, 23. March signals both the horror of the Clydebank Blitz and its onslaught of devastation, with the community ripped apart, but it also symbolises the hope of a new life. As such, Pete is messianic in his capacity to save Beth and himself which, in turn, has a curative affect both on the house and his family inhabited within it. He is reborn in this new space, maturing toward a young-adult selfhood that is reminiscent of the tunnel through which he pushes that connects his present home to Beth’s past home. This is further cemented with Beth, noted in the essay to translate as house in Hebrew, which can be extended to Bethel, meaning house of God.

79 Forde, *Think Me Back*, 144.
81 Forde, *Think Me Back*, 137.
82 Forde, *Think Me Back*, 49.
85 Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*.
86 Forde, *Think Me Back*, 147.
91 Forde, *Think Me Back*, 146.
93 Royle, *The Uncanny*, 192.
95 Forde, *Think Me Back*, 137.
96 Forde, *Think Me Back*.
97 Forde, *Think Me Back*, 146.
98 Forde, *Think Me Back*, 43.
100 For instance, the Red Clydesiders or Devine’s argument that “Scottish opposition to Thatcherism went much deeper than simple hostility to an unpopular government. While the Scots remained loyal to the idea of state and community, the Conservatives made a virtue out of promoting [British] nationalism, competition and privatization.” See Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 606.