

## Introduction

Never in its history has Scottish literature enjoyed so much attention from the public, critics and publishers than in the last three decades of the twentieth century. It is proved by the rise of Scottish literary studies, the increasing number of new editions, and the emergence of the impressive ‘tide’ of a ‘polyphonic’ generation: Never in its history has Scotland spoken with so many voices.

When I was given the possibility of editing an *RCEI* volume on “Contemporary Scottish Literature (1970-2000),” I did not quite envisage what signals would finally transpire out of it. Despite the limitations imposed by a publication of this kind and the two-year span from the first call-for-paper to their final submission at this University Press, the *RCEI/41* Monographic Section, consisting of twelve full-length articles (*Articulos*) and two shorter essays (*Notas*), happened to naturally maintain a balance between Scottish and non-Scottish scholarly participants, as well as the variety of authors and subjects discussed, though the contributions on fiction outnumber the rest.

This volume does not attempt by any means to survey the creative abundance in contemporary Scottish letters. It was not its original aim. However, it seems to me that the collection foregrounds some of the most prominent cultural, ideological and aesthetic landscapes prevailing in the last three decades of the twentieth century, as well as the current critical approaches.

Both the nature of the literary topics and the date of publication of the works examined have determined the sequence of the contributions. The opening essay analyses the evolution of the dramaturgical variety during the past three decades taking into account the specificity of the Scottish context and applying a gendered approach. Brown, Ramage and Horvat widely survey the interests and fruitfulness of contemporary theatre, its aesthetics and performances, as well as its ideological and institutional factors. It is followed by Katja Lenz’s study of the regional variations of Scots in drama. Lenz analyses the strategies of authors that set their plays in the periphery (of the Central-Belt linguistic area) creating the illusion of authentic speech, and emphasizing the multiplicity of Scottish cultural areas. Freelance critic and poet Robert

Calder, and Professor Silvia Mergenthal examine the thematic concerns and the dramatic vocabulary in three plays of C.P. Taylor in connection with his Marxist beliefs, his Jewish background and his Glaswegian Scottishness.

Jim McGonigal analyses the variety of religious elements and spiritual exploration in contemporary Scottish poetry. By concentrating on the poles consolation-desolation, his thought-provoking study underlines the need of “a recognition of the heteroglossic and multidimensional nature of the spiritual life of the [Scottish] culture.” Andrew Monnickendam’s contribution discusses class, gender and national identity in Kathleen Jamie’s poetry and travel book to northern Pakistan, from where she contemplates Scotland as a different country. The rest of the monographic section is devoted to fiction.

The novels of both W. McIlvanney and R. Jenkins are informed by class conflicts and social violence. Craig McLuckie analyses the themes and the narrative technique of McIlvanney’s ‘Laidlaw’ trilogy, and describes his enactment of the “role of the writer as *agent provocateur*,” suggesting its centrality for the new generation of Scottish novelists. Moral chaos, class segregation and religious fanaticism are some of the ingredients at work in Jenkins’ fiction. Inga Ágústsdóttir concentrates on *Just Duffy* and *Matthew and Sheila* to analyse how the novelist “deconstructs the idea of a society based on a set fixed of values and moral codes.” Internationally acclaimed for his postmodern experimentation and representations of Glasgow, Alasdair Gray is, like McIlvanney and Jenkins, another mature and prolific author concerned with social and political morality. Mario Díaz examines Gray’s *Poor Things* as a medical romance and Victorian pastiche, and concentrates on the cultural and political discourses rather than on the narrative experimentation.

The essays on the “younger generation of novelists” is heralded by Beth Dickson’s illuminating discussion of A.L. Kennedy’s highly-regarded portraits of the complexities of interpersonal relationships. Dickson analyses the most remarkable production of Kennedy so far, and focuses on her characters’ frustrated happiness and psychic conflicts, on their shift from intimacy to violence and sado-masochism, and on the darkest aspects of human nature. John LeBlanc’s contribution on much-acclaimed Alan Warner’s first novel *Morvern Callar*, one of the greatest landmarks in recent fiction, establishes extraordinary connections between the Celtic mythology and raver Morvern Callar’s own selection of music for her walkman. LeBlanc challengingly argues that the renewed interest in things Celtic represent a significant force in the shaping of a new world order.

A fresh interest has been given in the nineteen-nineties to the reconstruction of the Scottish past. Amanda McLeod analyses the “ideological borders” in two novels set in twelfth-century Scotland. Taylor’s *Mortimer’s Deep* and Elphinstone’s *Islanders* attempt to articulate the voices of respectively homosexuals and women, largely silenced in the patriarchal historical discourse. With the intention of offering a broader perspective of recent fiction, I chose to discuss Jackie Kay’s deliberate reflection of her own identity through the characters of her first novel *Trumpet*. Being a black lesbian poet, Kay challenges a patriarchal (colonial, heterosexual) notion of identity and suggests a redefinition of Scottishness from a lesbian outlook.

Two shorter essays (due to necessary page limitation) complete the monographic section. Ellen-Raïsa Jackson and Willy Malley discuss Irvine Welsh’s attempt to con-

nect black South-African experience with that of the Scottish working-class in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, a novel informed by gender, sexuality and violence. These are also subjects of great interest for Iain (M.) Banks, a successful writer of both mainstream and science-fiction novels. Sara Martín devotes her essay to a comparative analysis between the first volume in each sequence, respectively *The Wasp Factory* and *Consider Phlebas*.

Correspondingly, participants have made use of adequate critical approaches and theories, which cannot be commented in an introduction of this kind. After considering the whole set of contributions, it could be argued that both writers and scholars struggle between the security of a received Scottish textuality and the challenge of a narcissistic Caledonia.

Traditional, recurrent themes in Scottish letters are healthy enough, both for writers and critics. For example, lower, marginal, unheroic social classes are preferred; unmanly masculinities (i.e. unsuitable male lovers in Kennedy's fiction; and homosexuality is dealt with in at least five essays) give a wider perspective to the characteristically oppressive/unsatisfactory gender/sexual politics; the subjects of violence and identity are almost paradigmatically explored; and the influence of Hogg's *Justified Sinner* is asserted in several essays.

Recurrent as well in Scottish literature—but strikingly emphasised in this collection—is the excessive literary use of “foreign parts” (paraphrasing J. Galloway), to confront present-day Scottish issues. They range from Pakistan, ravers' Ibiza, and the outer space, to twelfth-century monk communities, Celtic mythology and Cyrano de Bergerac. Apart from the well-known principle that culture progresses by hybrid fusion, it seems that authors are both examining their experiences from fresh perspectives and voicing a distinctive sensibility in world culture.

Brown, Ramage and Horvat assert that “Scotland is still the strong European culture it was and its links are as much with the rest of the world as within the post-imperial British state.” This overt emphasis on the universal vocation of the works studied is another remarkable aspect underlined in the present collection. It is noticeable for example in “the conflicts between man's ideals and his limitations” explored by C. P. Taylor, in McIlvanney's and Jenkins's depiction of social violence, in Gray's millennial anxieties, in Kay's hybrid construction of identity, and in Kennedy's treatment of intimate relations, violence and sadomasochism. Indeed, according to Dickson, Kennedy “is one of the foremost writers of our generation because she so clearly articulates the spirit of the age.” Scotland's utterance of the “spirit of the age,” its celebration of the plurality of the Scottish experience, its hybrid marriages with overseas/repressed partners may be symptomatic of an epoch of creative brilliancy and cosmopolitan maturity fostered by the liberating issues associated with postmodern literary theory. Attempting to modulate speech, overcoming ideological oppressions, admitting to an actively urban, post-industrial environment, alienated Caledonia dares to regard herself on the mirror and considers her charms.

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