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Scotland in European Perspective: the Mainz-Germersheim Conference Before the Referendum

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**SCOTLAND IN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE:
THE MAINZ-GERMERSHEIM CONFERENCE
BEFORE THE REFERENDUM**

Müller, Klaus Peter, ed. *Scotland 2014 and Beyond—Coming of Age and Loss of Innocence?* Scottish Studies International, Vol. 39. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015. Pp. 457. Hardcover, £66/\$106.95. ISBN 978-3-631-65571-9.

In October 2013, a year ahead of the Scottish independence referendum, the Scottish Studies Centre at Johannes Gutenberg University-Mainz at GERMERSHEIM bravely hosted a major interdisciplinary conference focused not only on the historical roots of the modern independence movement, but also on questions of cultural identity and political narrative. This very substantial volume, number 39 in a series that has now been running for over thirty years, gathers twenty-two papers, all written well before the voting in 2014, though some have been edited or updated. Much that was published on the independence issue has been overtaken by events, but this volume retains interest even after the immediate occasion is past. In particular, because of its underlying editorial premise it retains relevance with this year's debate over Britain's, and Scotland's, membership in the European Union.

Understandably, but in some ways disappointingly, the distinguished list of contributors includes only six writing from outside Scotland (two from GERMERSHEIM, and one each from the Hague, Berkeley, Göttingen, and Erlangen): understandably, because Scotland is where the experts are, disappointingly, because it limits the volume's potential for dialogue between internal and external perspectives. Nonetheless, the volume contains a good range of important and distinctive contributions, on literature and on broader questions of culture.

The volume is divided into five sections. The editor, Klaus Peter Müller, puts the essays that follow in a comparative and multidisciplinary perspective; his prefatory summary and his substantial introductory essay have a breadth of reference, intellectual openness, and liveliness of style

that is sometimes less evident in later contributions. While inviting readers to examine the Indyref debate in terms of mental schemata and underlying narrative expectations, he contrasts backward-looking and forward-looking ideas of Scotland and nationality, casting the Indyref debate in terms of political innocence and maturity: “is this now the time,” he asks, “for Scotland to eventually grow up and finally leave Neverland?” (p. 3).

People today tend to think that nations have been there forever. Which is evidently not true. And what have nations given us? ... two world wars. Full stop. ... Regionalism has come forward as a much more sensible and direct source of one’s identity formation.... Nationalism is still used as an easy means of avoiding the difficulties of an open society.... Europe can and indeed already has served as an important counterforce to nationalism ... Even though I am basically against nations and the creation of new nation-states, because history has shown that this has not really been a good idea, I would make a temporary exception for Scotland, ... to potentially become a better society ... a) within a free, democratic Europe, and b) unhampered by a conservative England (pp. 25, 29).

The essays that follow, though overwhelmingly pro-Independence, generally negotiate with aplomb or at least good will the political minefield thus prepared for them. The opening section, on the historical identity of Scotland, with authoritative talks by Dauvit Broun, Catriona MacDonald, and Murray Pittock, sets the stage. The second section, on Scotland and the media, contains one of the most revealing essays, by David Hutchison, with Scottish circulation data for Scottish- and London-based newspapers for 2013, showing significant erosion of an independent Scottish press since the 1970s, from a 64% market share to 44% in 2013, by contrast with an increasing availability of Scottish-originated radio and television content (pp. 120-123).¹ Teachers of Scottish studies outside Scotland will wish to note the essay on Scotland in recent film, by David Martin-Jones (also from Glasgow). The third section of the book, on constitutional developments in Scotland, and the fifth, on social and political change within Scotland, are perhaps the most likely to date, but I was particularly struck by Eberhard Bort’s argument

¹ Cf. also Peter Geoghegan, “The End of the Scottish Press?,” *London Review of Books* (April 21, 2016), 20-21, on precipitate circulation declines for the *Glasgow Herald*, now largely subedited in Newport, South Wales. from 60,000 in 2009 to less than 35,000 in 2016, .

about the tensions between local democracy and centralized Holyrood government, and by the report on Scottish welfare policy by Gill Scott and Gerry Mooney.

The longest section of the volume, and the most relevant to *Studies in Scottish Literature*, is, of course, the fourth, on literature. Valentina Bold writes on local and regional identity in Hogg's *Brownie of Bodsbeck*. Ian Campbell discusses a range of novelists, from John Galt to Alasdair Gray, as having a dual or stereoscopic vision of Scotland, both as seen by their characters and from their own or a more external perspective. Gerard Carruthers presents a case-study in the nationalist origins, popular support, and ultimate achievement of the pioneering Glasgow chair in Scottish history and literature (1913), noting the positive influence (and major fundraising) of the generally-conservative Burns Federation, and arguing that modern Scottish literary studies is weakened by politicized misprision of its disciplinary genesis. Ian Duncan takes on the fairly-thorny topic of Walter Scott's undoubted importance in constructing and reinforcing international recognition of Scottish identity while being a strong supporter of the Union, looking back to Ossian and Herder, but also bringing into the discussion Scott's *Ivanhoe* in constructing English identity, and Scott's historical determinism in its influence on Darwin. Margery Palmer McCulloch, after beginning with Stevenson, discusses the way writers of the modern Scottish renaissance, notably MacDiarmid, the Muirs, and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, and such successors as Morgan, Leonard, and Lochhead, have talked and written about Scottish identity and independence, concluding with a brief review of the 2012 collection, *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence*, to suggest that a "yes" vote could be a vote for self-determination rather than for nationalism.² The final contribution to the section, by Kirsten Sandrock of Gottingen, reviews the impact, and critiques the misuse, of post-colonial criticism and terminology in Scottish literary studies since the mid-1970s, before reviewing instances of anti-colonialist comment in pre-referendum debate, most notably in media reaction to Alasdair Gray's *Unstated* essay on "Settlers and Colonists."

Unlike the Referendum question itself, this volume is not limited to a single "yes-no" resolution, but raises a broad spectrum of issues about cultural and national identity. Partly because of Scott's fiction, partly

² Scott Hames, ed., *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence* (Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2012). Cf. also Müller's comment: "Many Scottish creative writers ... emphasize their opposition to any nationalistic tendencies" (p. 28).

from the binary that underpins Scottish literary studies as a distinct discipline, partly perhaps for pedagogic simplicity, those teaching Scottish literature outside Scotland often propagate a much simpler idea of Scotland than most recent Scottish critics. This volume provides a valuable introduction by setting its distinguished cast of largely-Scottish contributors to discuss Scotland in more complex terms.

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