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GAELIC SCOTLAND AND POST-COLONIAL READINGS

Stroh, Silke. *Gaelic Scotland in the Colonial Imagination: Anglophone Writing from 1600 to 1900*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2017. Pp. viii + 331. Cloth, \$99.95; ISBN 978-0-8101-3403-4. Paper, \$39.95; ISBN 978-0-8101-3405-8.

The past ten years or so have witnessed a growing interest in the rewardingly complex historical and theoretical intersections between (post)colonialism and Scottish studies. On the whole, this is a field of investigation that is by now firmly on the map, even though, as Silke Stroh admits, the interest is still stronger on the Scottish side than in the “international ‘mainstream’ of postcolonial studies” (p. 4). In short, there is still some way to go in terms of interdisciplinary dialogue, and Stroh’s study no doubt gives a meaningful contribution in the direction of (further) structuring it.

Continuing the path undertaken in *Uneasy Subjects* (Rodopi, 2011), Stroh develops her investigation of the “Celtic question” as central to postcolonial Scottish studies by shifting her focus from Celtophone to Anglophone writing, and by narrowing the span of her inquiry from the all-embracing overview of her previous study to the three centuries of modern Britain’s imperial history. This nuanced and detailed study, conceived as a compass for both groups of field practitioners, is indeed very accessible, and does cater for a Scottish studies audience that has never engaged with postcolonial themes and concepts, as much as for a (certainly much larger) community of postcolonialists who are not acquainted with the history of the Gàidhealtachd. Structured in six chapters, the volume opens with a succinct introduction to postcolonial theory (“Introduction”, pp. 6-15), followed by a thorough survey of constructions of Celtic culture in relation to the pre- and post-Union complex negotiations of national/regional/ethnic identity, and in the context of developing imperial ideas and practices (Chapter 1). The

volume charts a number of “case studies” and offers attentive readings of canonical textual representations of Celticity, from Martin Martin’s travel writings (Chapter 2), to James Macpherson’s Ossianic works, Tobias Smollet’s novels (Chapter 3), and Walter Scott’s *Waverley* (Chapter 4), but also interrogates numerous “minor” as well as non-literary texts. It is through such attentive engagement with texts that Stroh maps out the fluctuating role of the Celt as a (noble) savage and as “the Other within” (or, as she puts it, “the intra-British Barbarian,” p. 48) across the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and inquires into racial constructions of ethnic and cultural difference in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Stroh’s style is characterised by a punctilious clarity, and by an earnest quest for “objective” knowledge. Her strengths lie no doubt in her extremely rare competence in and long-standing engagement with both Gaelic literature and culture and postcolonial theory. The limitations of the volume mirror very much the “in-the-making” status of this field of studies. By purposing to address a wider reading public she does have at times to engage with issues and information that may alternatively appear as redundant or simplistic to one or the other group of specialists. The outcome, however, is a serious and extremely useful survey, that tackles with rigour some of the thorniest and most interesting issues of postcolonial Scottish studies. *Gaelic Scotland in the Colonial Imagination* represents no doubt a step forward in the field, with much more to be unearthed, both empirically and conceptually, ahead of us.

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