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Preface to SSL 41

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PREFACE TO *SSL* 41

This year's volume of *Studies in Scottish Literature* differs in some ways from the past three in the new series. First, the volume has more full-length articles than in previous years, and we are pleased that once again that these treat topics from a variety of periods, from medieval to contemporary, and that contributors come from both sides of the Atlantic and from several academic generations. As in the previous volumes, we have been able to include several shorter notes and illustrated documents. While the review section is truncated, we expect to make that up in our next issue, as we try out producing two shorter issues a year.

Secondly, this year's symposium, "The View from Elsewhere," introduced more fully by Tony Jarrells, approaches Scottish literature from a deliberately non-Scottish perspective. Scottish literary studies are now a worldwide phenomenon. The world map at the foot of the journal's home page lights up with small blue dots marking each of the sites that have downloaded *SSL* articles in the past twenty-four hours. On a good day, the patient observer will find dots on every continent except, so far, Antarctica.



If the symposium perspective is more global than usual, it also takes on a topic with more direct political relevance than *Studies in Scottish Literature* would normally address. An annual volume is not well-positioned to provide timely comment on political events such as the Scottish Referendum of September 2014, but equally its significance could hardly be ignored. Following a very useful round of consultation with our advisory board, we decided, instead of treating the Referendum directly and being instantly out of date, we would focus on the implications of the referendum for those teaching Scottish literature outside Scotland. Seen in this perspective, some of the occasional tensions in the discipline, between growing disciplinary distinctiveness and wider critical developments inimical to essentialisms, perhaps seem less urgent. Andrew Hook, who provides a Scottish-based response to this year's symposium, has recently commented in another venue that, while Scottish Studies for Hamish Henderson's generation meant rescuing the Scottish folk heritage, it should now be something closer to the interdisciplinary American Studies of the 1950s and 1960s: "When the Scottish Government finally establishes Scottish Studies as a compulsory part of the school curriculum I'm sure that the American Studies model will be the more relevant."¹ The symposium suggests that teaching Scottish literature abroad is already interdisciplinary, and that it often also puts a primary focus on contemporary writing.

This year, the politics of literature has seemed hard to avoid. Later in the volume, Leith Davis provides an historical perspective on the Referendum, in her essay on parallel rhetorical patterns in the debates of 2014 and 1707. Rhona Brown's article discusses Scottish attitudes to the "rebellious Highlanders" of Corsica. The Burns articles by Robert Irvine and Corey Andrews focus on Burns's politics. William Donaldson's essay on John Byrne's *Slab Boys* tetralogy explores the social, as well as dramatic and linguistic, impact of the plays. The review of Michael Morris's *Scotland and the Caribbean* draws attention to its recurrent comment on contemporary Scottish issues. Our next issue will include reviews of two books on Adam Smith from different ideological perspectives and of a major European symposium on the politics and culture of current Scottish national identity.

Is this a trend, for the journal or the discipline? and if so, is it a trend to be encouraged? Yes and no. We value contributions that understand

¹ Andrew Hook, "Anent Hamish Henderson," *Scottish Review* (August 2015), at: <http://www.scottishreview.net/AndrewHook9a.html>.

Scottish literature of all periods as relevant to current thinking and debates. The early volumes of *Studies in Scottish Literature* included fierce debate about the political implications of, for example, David Craig's pioneering study *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830*.² Such relevance need not be explicit or political; two of the articles in this volume explore Scottish religious writing, as two articles did in the last volume. Sometimes alertness to the contemporary relevance of older literature is condemned as "presentism."³ In much scholarly writing, of course, the relevance or significance of the literature is implicit rather than overt, allowing the specific case, and so perhaps the wider understanding, to be more easily appreciated by those who do not share the scholar's particular commitments. Literary study, like history generally, may be philosophy teaching by examples, but it is not usually best seen as politics preaching by ventriloquism. Every essay would not be improved by lengthy explication of its writer's political beliefs; indeed few literary scholars are more than amateurs in discussing political questions. But, yes, literary scholarship, in Scottish literature as in other fields, is, necessarily, and for the good, part of the wider realm of contemporary discourse.

Yet *Studies in Scottish Literature* has a specific job to do. As a scholarly journal, its primary function is to make available new scholarship that contributes to the understanding of Scottish writers and writing. Other scholarly journals may provide better publishing opportunities for essays that are *primarily* theoretical or methodological or political. We hope also that at least some of what *SSL* publishes will prove useful in the longer term, as well as having short-term interest. As an annual or twice-yearly publication, *SSL* is not the best venue for intervention in contemporary debates, even literary debates: a number of Scottish-based reviews and magazines provide more immediate outlets. We welcome interdisciplinary and comparative scholarship, but we

² David Craig, "A National Literature? Recent Scottish Writing," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 1:3 (1964): 151-169; Sydney Goodsir Smith, "Trahison des Clercs: the Anti-Scottish Lobby in Scottish Letters," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 2:2 (1965): 71-76; available at: <http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/>.

³ Willy Maley has recently recounted the stifling effects that charges of presentism can have on innovative work; see his "The Worst Piece of Peer Review I've Ever Received," *Times Higher Education Supplement* (August 6 2015): <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/the-worst-piece-of-peer-review-ive-ever-received?nopaging=1>.

normally look for specific Scottish literary works to form one of the terms of comparison.

We believe that the apparent emphasis in this volume of *Studies in Scottish Literature* on political issues, past and present, is fully in keeping with the traditions of the journal. So is the emphasis on Scottish literature in an international context. The community of those who study and teach Scottish literature, both in Scotland and elsewhere, is larger, more diverse, and geographically more dispersed than in any previous generation. Where we would like to see *SSL* develop is in publishing, alongside the specialized scholarship that is the journal's traditional strength, well-researched and well-written articles with more varied scholarly approaches—not dogged applications of this theory or that, but the flexible application of a wider range of critical and scholarly methods to a wider range of scholarly questions relevant to a larger segment of those who study Scottish literature. The annual symposiums have been intended as a beginning in this direction, seeking topics that might be of interest across the disciplinary community. The extent of further development depends on continuing to broaden the pool of submissions and contributors.

Once again, we need to acknowledge the helpful participation of *SSL*'s editorial advisory board. Both of us were at the Congress in Glasgow last summer, and both us have been in Scotland again this past spring, and we realize our board members are not only distinguished but busy. We value the advice they have contributed, and also the help they and other scholars have given in reviewing submissions. We can publish eight to ten articles a year, perhaps twelve, across all periods. The final stages in producing this volume were delayed by the Columbia flood in early October, and in the meantime the first of the new two-a-year issues, *SSL* 42:1, has already filled up; we look forward to seeing what is submitted over the coming months for *SSL* 42:2.

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